



A Diary of my overland journey from England to Australia

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Afghanistan

Afghanistan currency:
£1 = 174 Afghanis (Afs)



2nd November 1968

Once past the chain we then came on to a tarmac road. Robert was delighted with this and promptly celebrated by putting his foot down accelerating up to over 60 MPH. All of a sudden the border loomed out of the darkness and he was able to demonstrate to us all what we had missed on the Iranian side. This time it was the turn of the Afghan border guard to nearly become part of the road. The poor man stood there fixed to the spot as the van barrelled along towards him with all four wheels locked in an emergency stop. He didn't know whether to stand, run or pray, (and I dare say after we had gone he probably had to run, but to the toilet.) The van halted only inches in front of him.

He checked our passports with amazing calmness, then let us through. A few miles down the road there was a building with a compound outside. This was the Islam Qala frontier station. There was a sign outside the office in a number of languages advising us that the frontier would be closing at 2100. We thought our luck was in because it was just before 2100 as we all trooped into the office. The officer started the long process of writing everything down in the ledger. He was just about to stamp my passport when he stopped with his arm in mid-air and put the rubber stamp down. It had just turned 2100 and the border post was now closed for an hour. Nothing we could say would persuade him to stamp the passport and finish the job, so we went across to the hotel that was part of the complex hoping to get something to eat. Although the hotel served meals, the prices were so high we decided to just have a cup of tea, which tasted horrible. It had a somewhat perfumed flavour about it which is apparently the way they make it in Afghanistan.

While we all sat in the hotel and waited for the frontier to open, another car arrived. It was a rather old

[border to Raxaul](#)

black Mercedes being driven by two Pakistani men. They had two Americans as passengers who were only going as far as Herat even though the Pakistanis were going all the way to Kabul. They agreed to give us a lift from Herat to Kabul and we arranged to meet at 7am next day.

• [Nepal](#)

At 2200 we all went back to the frontier post but it had not yet opened, so we all started singing "why are we waiting". They probably didn't understand what we were singing but they still managed to get the hint and soon opened up. The passport control officer carefully wrote all our details down in a large ledger. One of the questions he asked was, "what is your father's name". Louis, who was feeling in a mischievous mood replied, "Aristotle". Deciding to continue with the joke when I was asked I replied, "Daddy". The officer carefully wrote these names down in the Farsi script, and after stamping our passports we moved on to the customs officer. He entered the details of my camera into my passport just to make sure I didn't sell it while I was in Afghanistan.

• [India 2 - from Raxaul to Calcutta, via Goa](#)

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With all the formalities over and done with, we were now officially in Afghanistan. We got back into the van and headed off along the tarmac road at a fair speed. After travelling through Eastern Iran along the dirt roads it was a pleasure to be back on tarmac roads again. When we had gone about 10 miles from the frontier a police car stopped us. We hadn't seen any other car on the road since the frontier, so just where this police car came from was a mystery. William and Sandra quickly gathered up their hashish, and fearing arrest, threw it out of the window before the car had come to a stop.

• [Thailand 1 - from Bangkok to Nongkai](#)

The policemen walked over to the van and stood one on each side and looked into the van. After what seemed like an eternity one of the policeman started to talk in broken English and asked Robert if he had any hashish. The look of innocence on their faces when all four of them said "no" just had to be seen to be believed. The policeman looked at them sternly, shone their torches into the back of the van and said, "you want to buy some? Cheap!" All four of them then bought some hashish from the police, paying with Iranian rials. I don't know if it was because they wanted some, or if it was out of sheer relief at not being arrested. Hashish is quite legal in Afghanistan and can be bought freely throughout the country. They obviously panicked at being stopped, and I suppose that in their panic some doubt must have crept into their minds as to whether they had got their facts right. I wouldn't be surprised if these two policemen had a good business going and they probably went back down the road afterwards to recover the stuff that was thrown out so that they could sell it to the next tourist car.

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• [Thailand 2 - from Aranyaprathet to Had-Yai](#)

There was a story going around at the time about the road system in Afghanistan. What little traffic there is consists mainly of trucks and buses with only an occasional car. During the mid 60s the American and Soviet Union foreign aid departments fought a pitched battle along the roads of Afghanistan. Each country built good quality roads between various cities and towns to gain favour. This road building war left Afghanistan with one of the best road systems in the Middle East, to cope with the lowest volume of traffic. About once every 100 km or so there is a toll gate. The tolls collected presumably go towards the maintenance of the road. The total cost of the tolls payable between the Iran and Pakistan borders amount to less than £1 sterling.

• [Malaysia](#)

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The American sections were designed for trucks, buses and cars, and were very smooth to drive along. By contrast, the Soviet built sections were not quite as smooth to travel along and were obviously built for heavier things like tanks and troop carriers. No doubt this was a bit of long term planning from the Soviets in preparation for their "invasion" during the 70s

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Half an hour after being stopped by the police we came across some Germans who had run out of petrol. Robert carried a spare can and sold some of the petrol to them to get them going, charging them well over the odds for the amount he let them have. Approximately 50 km further on they had to pay a toll of 30 Afs. Not having changed any money yet they had to pay in rials. Forty-five minutes later and we arrived in Herat. It was well after midnight and everything was closed for the night. We had trouble finding a hotel and spent over an hour before getting a room in the Hotel Jami for 33 Afs each. It was a lovely room although we were too tired to really appreciate it. The hotel owner agreed to wake us up at 6am in time for our lift. It was freezing cold and we were glad to finally get into bed at 1.30am.

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Right on time at 6am the hotel staff banged on the door. We both turned over and went back to sleep again for another half an hour before Louis suddenly woke up. He threw on some clothes and dashed out of the hotel to get to the meeting place to claim our lift from the Pakistanis while I packed the bags. He returned at 7.15 to tell me that they hadn't turned up.

Not having changed any money yet we tried to pay the hotel bill in US dollars without any success. Fortunately there was an English traveller who was headed for Iran who was also checking out at the same time. He sold us his last 174 Afs for £1, enabling us to pay the bill.

We then walked to the meeting place and arrived there at the same time as the Pakistanis, who had overslept. We all went to a tea house for a bit of breakfast and while they sat and waited for us, I went to find somewhere to change some more money. On the way back I had the pleasure of wishing a good morning to Bluey, the Sundowners driver. He was in the process of jacking up the bus to change a flat tyre and for some reason or other he wasn't in a very happy mood. I decided not to stop and talk to him.

Back at the car we had to rearrange the contents of the boot to get our packs to fit in. It was a difficult job but we did it in the end. Despite our plans for an early start, it was after 9.30 before we eventually set out. Our destination for the day was to be the city of Kandahar. The route was through the desert and there was very little to be seen except the monotonous flat scrub as far as we could see. The road was straight, with an occasional bit of tumbleweed blowing across our path. Occasionally we would see a truck or a bus



travelling in the opposite direction, but nothing else going the same way as us. We could see small whirlwinds forming in the desert, occasionally blowing across the road ahead of us. On one occasion one of them blew across the road in front of the car and we passed right through it. It was not very powerful and it only buffeted the car a little as we drove along.

For lunch we stopped at a rest house with a swimming pool. The swimming pool is worth commenting about because it was the last thing that we would have expected in this part of the world. Despite all the mod-cons of the rest house, it was a very inexpensive lunch.

Later in the month was the road race from London to Sydney passing through Afghanistan the same route as we were travelling. During the day we saw the occasional rally cars going the other way heading back to London ready for the start after having practised for their forthcoming race.

As the journey progressed the driver noticed that he was running very low on diesel so he left the road to find a small village where we were lucky enough to find a diesel fuel pump. There was no electricity in the village so the diesel had to be pumped by hand. There was a large handle on the front of the pump that we took turns to rock back and forth. Eventually the tank was filled at a cost of just 100 afs, and the driver made it plain that we had to pay for.

When we arrived in Kandahar at 6pm it was already dark. The Pakistanis helped us to find a hotel for the night, but before they would let us take our packs out of the boot they demanded that we pay them for the lift. We pointed out that they hadn't told us they expected payment before we got in, and that we had already paid a lot more than half of the fuel cost for the journey. They refused to give us our bags until we had paid them and so we threatened to go to the police. Eventually after some arguing they threw our bags out into the road and drove off at speed.

We decided that it would be wise not to check into the hotel where we had been dropped off in case

they decided to come looking for us. They had been in quite a temper and we decided to err on the side of caution and look elsewhere. We didn't have much luck in finding a hotel room because most of them had been filled before it got dark. Eventually we managed to get two beds without blankets in a partitioned section of the Hotel Pashtunian for 18 afs each.

For supper we found a typical Afghan restaurant where everybody sat with crossed legs on the floor. We had to eat our meals from a tray placed in front of us. The meal consisted of a plate of rice with a piece of fatty meat in the middle of it costing just 10 afs each. Somebody came around and offered us some special Afghan sauce for an extra 2 afs, and we decided to give it a try. It was a black watery substance and I didn't like the taste too much. When we had finished eating and started to walk back to the hotel we felt a bit strange. It wasn't until we mentioned it to somebody else that we found out that the special Afghan sauce was made from cannabis resin (hashish).

Back at the hotel we spoke to 2 Afghans who were going to Kabul the next day in a jeep. We asked them for a lift and they agreed if we could be ready to leave at 7am. Unfortunately the next morning when they knocked on our door at 7am we were still in bed. Even though we managed to get dressed and be downstairs within 5 minutes, they had gone without us.

We decided to catch the bus to Kabul and after making enquiries at the bus company office we found that the last bus was due to leave at 7.50am. We decided to go and have some breakfast in the same restaurant that we had eaten in the night before. This time we decided not to have the special sauce, but to restrict ourselves to some tea and a bit of bread.

Ten minutes later we walked back to the office to find that the bus was ready to go. We only just had time to buy our tickets and get on board before it left at 7.20. At the edge of the city the driver filled up the tanks. Most unusually for a bus it ran on petrol and not diesel. When we had been travelling for about two hours the bus stopped in the middle of nowhere. Everybody got off and all the men went to the toilet at the side of the road. The Afghan women dressed in their tent like clothes were not able to go, and presumably had to wait until lunchtime for an opportunity to relieve themselves.

It wasn't until after 1 o'clock before we stopped for lunch. The bus turned off the main road and drove for a few miles until we reached a small village. The driver dropped everybody off and drove the empty bus away. We bought some bread and fruit and ate it as we walked around looking at the village. We came across our bus driver who was draining petrol out of the fuel tank and selling it to somebody.



The bus came back and picked everybody up again at 2 o'clock. No sooner had we got back on to the main road when we had a puncture and everybody had to get off again. All the male passengers helped to jack up the bus, and then scramble up onto the roof for to get down one of the spare wheels. They tried to pass the wheel down to me but it was too heavy and I fell over as soon as it was handed to me. The Afghans, who were all much stronger, laughed at me as I lay in the road.

One of them then picked up the tyre and carried it over to the driver to put on the bus. When they inspected the punctured tyre they found that the cause of the puncture was a horse-shoe that had become embedded in the tread. Another Afghan passed the punctured tyre up to the roof and within a few minutes we were all back on the bus and heading for Kabul.

We arrived at the bus station in Kabul at 4.30pm and then had to get another bus to the centre of the city where we started to look for a hotel. While walking around we met the Pakistanis and not surprisingly

weren't very friendly when we asked them if they could recommend a hotel. They told us that they didn't know of any and walked off. We looked around for an hour and a half more before eventually finding a room in Hotel Benazir only to discover that they were staying in the same hotel.

The hotel room had 3 beds and we agreed a price of 220 afs between us for 4 nights. Just down the corridor was a clean toilet, (rarity in these parts) and showers. The beds were comfortable so we decided to have a rest before going out to eat at about 8pm. What we didn't know was that everything closes down at 8 in Kabul, and everywhere we went was either closed or just closing. Because we were not able to get anything to eat we had to return to the hotel where the owner offered to make us some tea. With the tea we had the remains



of the bread we had bought for lunch, and the last of our processed cheese. We used our blackboard to block off a hole in the window and settled down to bed at 9pm. I could feel a cold coming on and was glad to be getting into bed.



It had taken us exactly one month since leaving England to get to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan having covered 6620 miles including the diversion to Isfahan and Shiraz.

The next morning after a late start we decided to look for a bank to change some more money. Our first stop was the tourist office, where we bought a map of Kabul. We came across the English people we had met in Isfahan and they showed us the way to the post office where the Post Restante facility was. I'm glad they did because we would have had a hell of a job finding it without their help. There was a long queue for the poste

restante counter and it was made up entirely of backpackers. Some of them were dressed like real hippies complete with flowers, long hair and of course - Afghan coats. I had one letter and Louis had five more from Michelle, his girl friend.

Also bought some stamps, and sent home my completed rolls of film. I was using Kodachrome slide film and posted directly to the processing laboratory in Hemel Hempstead. After processing they would send the slides to my parents address, so it would be a few years before I would be able to see them.

The AA had advised us that although we didn't need visas for Pakistan or India, we still needed



to get a permit to cross the frontier by road. The AA also advised us to get our road permits at the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul because they would issue them straight away. If we applied for



them in Pakistan we would have to wait a few days for them to be approved. Unfortunately before they could be issued we had to supply an exact date for crossing the frontier. At this stage we couldn't give them a date and so we couldn't get the permits.

After the Pakistan Embassy we tried to find a bank that would allow us to change some sterling travellers cheques into sterling cash. We had been told that it was possible to do so

in Kabul and with sterling cash we would be able to buy money on the black market in Pakistan and India at substantially better rates than the bank. Over the next day or two we tried a number of banks but it was starting to look like we were on a wild goose chase. We were eventually pointed in the direction of a bank that would and headed around there to arrive just in time to see it close for the day.

While walking back we came across one of the London to Sydney rally cars that was parked in the square in the centre of the city. An Australian called Jack Murray was driving it. We later found out that he was quite famous in Australia, having once thrown firecrackers out of his car at a checkpoint he had gained the nickname of 'Gellignite' Jack Murray. He was



going to partner Paddy Hopkirk in the race but for the moment he was driving along the route to acquaint himself with it. He was also making a film of the race in advance because it wouldn't be possible to do so during the race. In 1968 satellite communication was only in its infancy

and the instant world-wide news television technology that we now take for granted just did not exist, so some of the "news" footage had to be prepared in advance. He invited us to join him for a drink if we were in Bombay on the 29th.



We spent the next few days looking around Kabul. We hadn't expected it to be much more than a shanty town in the middle of the desert but the reality was a pleasant surprise to both of us. It was not quite up to the standards

of European cities, but it was still quite modern and clean on one side of the Kabul River. On the other side of the river was the older part containing a typical souk market. It was in the souk that we bought some fruit for our lunch. Having finished all the cheese we brought from England

we tried to find some more. We managed to buy some white hard cheese that tasted awful. It seems that cheese of any kind is not very common in Afghanistan.

On November 5th, which was bonfire night at home, by some coincidence they were also letting fireworks off in Kabul that night. Though we never found out the exact reason, in later years I found out about the Indian festival of Diwali which is around this time of the year.

Diwali is the festival of light and they always set off lots of fireworks at night, so I can only presume that it must have been the Indian community celebrating.

On another night we decided to take advantage of the clean bathroom to have a shower. We had to pay extra for the hot water and decided to be smart by just paying for one of us to have



a shower and swapping over half way through. The hotel porter was obviously wise to us and after Loius handed the bathroom over to me I started to shower. Just as I was covered head to foot in soap the hot water was switched off leaving me no option but to rinse myself down in cold water. It was coming on to winter and Kabul was high in the mountains so the cold water was really icy. This didn't help my cold!

On our last day in Kabul we went with some Americans to the U.S. Embassy to find out the

results of the presidential elections and were told that Richard Nixon had won. Outside we met some English people who had driven out to visit friend who was working in Kabul. We were sitting in their car talking to them when hundreds of students from Kabul University descended on us from nowhere. They were carrying banners and shouting slogans, presumably directed at the U.S. Embassy and some of them were even fighting with the police. I don't know what it was about but thankfully they left us alone. I'm glad they were not anti-British because sitting in a car bearing GB plates and British number plates we would have found it difficult to hide.

By now my cold was starting to effect me, so I decided to head back to the hotel for a sleep. Louis came in a few hours later with some tea and bread. The Afghan cheese we had bought in the market tasted awful, so we tried to improve it by mixing it with some margarine before spreading it on the bread. It still tasted vile and so we threw it away. Rather than going



out that night we decided to have our evening meals sent up from the restaurant downstairs. For just 20 afs they sent up a delicious meal consisting of 8 kebabs with rice, raisins, potato, meatballs and bread. (No special sauce tonight thanks). After we had finished eating we spent the rest of the evening in the room writing letters. I fell asleep early although Louis carried on writing until well after midnight.

Friday 8th November 1968 we got up early, in fact 6.30 am. We had some tea sent up to the room and drank it while we packed our bags. On our way out we paid the hotel bill at the agreed price (220 Afs) before heading out to make our way to Pakistan. We had intended to catch a bus to the Jalalabad and we were on our way to the bus station when we came across the Sundowners bus being given a tow to get it started. Once again Bluey started to tell us how



we wouldn't stand a chance getting through to Pakistan, while we pointed out to him how wrong he had been so far. We had even managed to reach Kabul before he did. This time we offered him the equivalent of the bus fare to give us a lift to Jalalabad and after a bit of haggling we agreed to pay him \$2 US for a lift to Peshawar in Pakistan. The first instalment was a payment of 62 Afs that he asked us to pay to the lorry driver who had just given him a tow start. The other dollar we paid to him. We

then climbed on board the Sundowners bus, settled back into the comfort of the soft seats, and introduced ourselves to the other passengers. They were mostly Australians heading home but there were also a few Brits, Americans, Canadians and Kiwis. Everybody was very friendly and they all welcomed us on board and made us feel at home. We heard some stories about their trip so far, including how Bluey had managed to reverse the bus into the Anzac memorial statue at Gallipoli when all the Aussies went to pay their respects to those who lost their lives in the first world war battle.

The road from Kabul to the border was winding with many hairpin bends. There were some spectacular sights as the road twisted its way through the Khurd Kabul and



the Jagdalak mountain passes and on down to Jalalabad, some 96 miles from Kabul. As the bus descended the climate became warmer. Kabul is almost 6000 feet above sea level and quite cool at this time of year. Jalalabad is only 1900 feet above sea level and has a much warmer climate.

We reached the border shortly after midday and Bluey took all the passports to be stamped out of Afghanistan. These took about half an hour and during this time we amused

ourselves by playing catch, using oranges picked straight from a tree as balls. This continued until we were stopped from picking any more "balls" by one of the border guards.

Pakistan

Pakistan currency:

Official rate:

£1 = 11.5 Rupees

Black market rate:

£1 = 20 Rupees

1 rupee = 100 piase



8th November 1968.

When Bluey returned with the passports we all climbed aboard the bus for the short ride to the Pakistan side of the border. Here we all had to go through the passport control individually. British passport holders didn't need a visa to enter Pakistan. In 1968 the Australian passport had "British Passport" printed on its cover, so they also didn't need a visa. It wasn't long after this that this wording was removed from the Australian passport as most Aussies used to find it offensive.

One of the girls was nearly refused entry to Pakistan because she had "editor" down as her occupation. The immigration official presumed that she was a journalist and became awkward. All journalists, regardless of nationality require a visa and she would have to return to Kabul to get one from the Pakistan Embassy. Fortunately she managed to persuade him that editor meant that she was a proof reader in a printers and had nothing to do with journalism.

While we were all being "processed" an American came into the room with a diplomatic passport and went straight to the front of the queue. The immigration officer stopped what he was doing and attended to him immediately. He inspected his passport and pointed out that the Pakistan visa had expired, but stamping the passport and handing it back with a smile he said that he would let him in this time, despite this 'minor' problem.

After about an hour and a half we had all passed through immigration and it was now time to move on to customs. This was to take another hour to clear everybody and the bus through. Louis and I had to fill out a form declaring how much money we were bringing in to the country. We made a joint declaration and it looked very impressive. The customs were not at all interested in cameras or watches but made a note of anything that was made of or looked like gold. One of the girls was amazed when the customs officer ignored a diamond ring set in platinum that was worth a fortune and made a big fuss of writing down a detailed description of a cheap imitation gold ring worth only a few dollars

As we came out of the customs shed we met the Pakistanis who had given us the lift to Kandahar. They were returning to pay the customs duty on their car, which had been impounded by the customs until it was paid. We noticed a compound full of cars of various nationalities and among the impounded cars were the two mini busses we had seen in Turkey that had been driven by the Afghans. We couldn't

understand what they were doing there

because they had told us that they were only going as far as Kabul. The Pakistanis still didn't seem too friendly and they were only interested in reclaiming their car, so we left them and got back on the bus to wait for everybody else to finish with customs.

It was nearly 4.30 pm before we eventually set off through the Kyber Pass into Pakistan, back again driving on the left side of the road. There were signs warning us that photography was prohibited and Bluey reinforced the



warning by telling us horror stories of confiscated cameras and arrests from previous trips. As we reached the top of the pass we could all see a fabulous view down behind us, just like we had all imagined it to look like. I decided to risk it and take a quick photo. As I pressed the shutter it sounded like a thunder as 40 other cameras all clicked at exactly the same moment. A few seconds later as we rounded a bend we saw a guard at the side of the road watching us, there wasn't a camera to be seen. Bluey had heard all the cameras and was yelling at us all for taking photographs and putting ourselves at risk of arrest.

An hour after leaving the border we arrived in Peshawar. It was obvious that something was going on because all the streets were lined with flags and decorations. While the bus was driving down one avenue, which was still being decorated, the skylights in the roof caught on the overhead gantries dragging them along. Bluey didn't seem to notice and despite us all shouting to him he carried on for quite a way before stopping. By this time the back half of the bus was festooned with decorations and trailed streamers and two or three hundred Pakistan flags for quite a few yards behind. Two of the gantries and a number of workmen were on top of the bus, the workmen now clinging on for dear life. They had been unfortunate enough to be decorating the gantries as we came sweeping through. Bluey, not being a person to apologise got out of the bus brandishing a large baseball bat, threatening and swearing at the workers as they clambered down from the roof. They quickly took the hint and not stopping to argue, ran off as fast as they could from this maniac foreigner. As a result of this we all had a Pakistan flag to keep and the bus acquired a framed photograph of President Ayub Khan which was proudly mounted above driver as a souvenir. We later found out that the decorations were for a presidential visit the next day.

Bluey took us all to a Dak bungalow. This was a place where everybody spent the night together in one large room, sleeping on the floor. We claimed ourselves a space and spread our sleeping bags out, then headed off with some of the Sundowners to find somewhere to eat. Being in Pakistan it was decided that a curry was definitely on the menu for an evening meal. We had no trouble finding somewhere and enjoyed the first of many curries that we would be eating over the next few months.

After the meal the crowd of us were heading back to the Dak bungalow when we met some Pakistani lads who invited us back for some tea. The girls didn't want to go back with them so we all went to a tea stand instead where we spent about an hour chatting to them before heading back to the Dak bungalow and to bed.

Quite surprisingly I found it confusing to be in a country where the traffic circulated on the left. After having travelled through countries that drove on the right for the last month, I found myself looking the wrong way before crossing the road, apart from feeling strange when travelling in a vehicle on the left side of the road.

The next morning everybody was up very early. We were all packed and ready to load our packs onto the bus shortly after 6 am. Bluey had organised breakfast for us all, but what came was definitely not

worth the money we had paid. We all had to pay 5½ rupees each for the Dak bungalow, which considering it was just a floor space was also expensive. I rather suspect that somebody was making a bit of profit out of that lot.

Bluey had agreed to take us as far as Rawalpindi, or Pindi as they called it in Pakistan. We set out at 7.15 and on the way we crossed the River Indus; the river from which the name



India was derived. He dropped outside the tourist office in Pindi just after 10 am and said our goodbyes to the Sundowners. Although we would see the bus a few more times, it was the last time we would talk to Bluey. We would miss his eternal pessimism and I wish that I'd had a bet with him when we first met back in Isfahan when he told us that we didn't stand a chance of getting to Afghanistan, let alone through it.

We went into the tourist office to find out the best place to stay, only to be told that we had better not go into the centre of Pindi because there were riots taking place and the police were shooting at the rioters. The man in the tourist office suggested that we spend a few days in the nearby Murree Hills, which had a very pleasant climate at this time of year. In view of the riots and shooting ahead, his suggestion made a lot of sense and we decided to take his advice. Rather than carry all of our luggage with us he offered to let us leave it in the tourist office for a few days until we returned. So we sorted out what we would be likely to need and packed it into one bag that we would take turns at carrying.

We walked out of town back the way we had already come. On the way we stopped for a curry for our lunch. It was so hot that we had to also buy some bananas to cool our mouths down again. We also bought some crisps, which had an unidentifiable but pleasant flavour.

We then got a series of short lifts, first one was in the back of a Dodge pick up truck, then in a lorry to Taxilla where we bought a large bag of tangerines to eat on the way. Next we got a lift on top of a truck load of cement bags, and after a half hour wait while very few vehicles went past, we got a lift to Haripur. While waiting for our next lift a local person bought us some tea and biscuits. The tea was delicious, very creamy and sweet. In Pakistan they make the tea in a pan, boiling everything up together and using raw sugar instead of the granulated white stuff that I was used to. It was while drinking the tea that a policeman called us over to check our passports. I don't think he needed to check them but I suppose it made him look important in front of his fellow villagers

After tea we got a lift in an army jeep belonging to the medical corps. I travelled in the back with the bag while Louis sat in comfort in the front. The major who was driving spoke very good English and we had a good chat while he took us all the way to Abbatobad, our destination for the day. After he dropped us we discovered that the youth hostel was about three or four miles out of town. Fortunately we managed to get a lift in a lorry to the place where it should have been, but after getting out we couldn't find it anywhere. After walking up and down for a while trying to find the hostel, a young boy who had been watching us must have realised what we were looking for. He came over and guided us across a field to the youth hostel that we would never have found without him.

The warden didn't speak any English, but nonetheless he made us welcome. The hostel was

empty and Louis and I were the only guests. It was obviously not the high season and the warden was so glad to have somebody staying that he even made our beds for us. After we had checked in we walked back towards the town to find somewhere to eat. On the way we passed of all things, a bag pipe band. They were very good, although it did seem to be a strange thing to find in Pakistan. It is a shame that they were not also dressed in kilts. Once again we found that the Pakistani idea of a mild curry was one that



needed to be eaten with a fire extinguisher nearby and a continuous supply of water to cool our mouths as we ate. With the help of a loaf of bread we managed to struggle through it. As a reward to ourselves for finishing it all up we had a pot of their delicious, creamy, sweet tea, and some equally delicious fruitcake. After that we walked back to the hostel, burping all the way back and spent the rest of the evening writing letters home.

The next morning before leaving the Youth Hostel we asked the warden to stamp our hostel cards as is the usual custom throughout the Youth Hostel movement. He obviously didn't have a rubber stamp and so he wrote the name into the card. When I asked him to stamp Louis' card he just wrote the same name into my card again. Eventually we got the message over to him and he signed Louis card too. We then returned to the same eating place where we had our meal the night before and ordered another pot of tea and more fruitcake. The bill came to just 1.75 rupees for the two of us and I fear that if we stay in Pakistan too long we could become addicted to it. When we had finished our breakfast we hitched back to Abbatobad to visit the tourist office for information about what there was to see in the area. The Army major that gave us a lift the day before picked us up again and took us into town, dropping us outside the tourist office.

There are a number of government rest houses in the area where tourists can stay so long as they have a permit. The man who was responsible for giving out the permits was taking a bath at the time, but we managed to speak to him through the closed door. He assured us that we would be able to stay without any problems and if anybody wanted to telephone him to check, he would give the OK. With that assurance we set off in the direction of Natiagali rest house.

We walked for the first 2 or 3 miles before getting a lift in the back of a truck. The scenery in this part of Pakistan is beautiful and reminded us very much of England. The truck chugged very slowly along the mountain road through a number of small villages. As we got higher it got colder and we started to notice that there were patches of snow on the ground, which is

not exactly what we had expected to find in Pakistan. The truck stopped a number of times to unload in some of the villages that we passed through and we helped the driver to carry the boxes and sacks. Around mid-day we stopped for lunch in a village called Poragali. We enjoyed a slightly milder curry before setting out again for the last part of the journey to Natiagali. The truck was only going as far as Kola Bagh and that meant we had to walk the last two miles into Natiagali where we were able to find the rest house without any difficulty.

After we had checked in at the guest house, we went into the village to buy something to cook for supper. We managed to buy some meat and vegetables to make ourselves a stew, and some bread to mop up the



gravy with. The bread had to be ordered and we returned a bit later on to collect it after it had been freshly made. When we got back to the guest house we started to cook the stew in the open fire place. It took an hour and a half to cook and was the best plate of scouse we had tasted since leaving home and the whole lot cost us less than 2 rupees to buy the ingredients. We invited the warden to join us for the meal, after all there was enough for all of us to eat and have second helpings. After the meal the warden made us some of the delicious Pakistani tea. We watched him making it. While the water was boiling add the sugar, then the tea and bring back to the boil. Add the milk, bring back to the boil again then pour. Delicious!

We spent the night sleeping on charpoys. These are beds that are made by tying ropes diagonally across a wooden frame. The closer the ropes the more comfy the charpoy. A really good quality charpoy would be made from wide



tapes instead of rope. After a good night sleep on the guest house's tape charpoys, the warden woke us up at about 9.30. It was pouring with rain so we waited for it to stop. The warden made us some tea while we waited, and eventually late in the morning the rain stopped and we set out to walk to Ghora Dakka, 12 miles away. Because we didn't have any detailed maps of the area showing footpaths we decided that the safest thing was to walk along the road.

On the way we walked through a number of small villages, stopping in Durga Gali for some tea, where we finished off our biscuits. There was snow on the ground and it was very cold, but it was not cold enough for it to snow again, and the showers that fell were rain showers. Fortunately they were not heavy and by early afternoon the weather started to brighten up again. Just outside one village we met two young boys who were shooting at targets with an air gun that had no sights. They let us have a few shots, but without the sights we couldn't hit anything and so we gave up. As we walked away they tried to ask us for 1 Rupee. A good try, but we didn't pay them anything.

By the time we had walked 8 miles all uphill, we were both dead beat, but at least the rest of the way was downhill. Somehow we managed to walk the next 4 miles into Ghora Dakka, where the International Youth Hostel book said there was a hostel. Our walk down hill was helped at one point when a loose cow took a liking to us. It came a bit too close for comfort and we both broke into a trot trying to get away as it followed us down the road for about half a mile.

When we eventually reached Ghora Dakka we were not able to find the youth hostel. The locals told us that there wasn't a hostel there, even though it was clearly marked in the Youth Hostel handbook. We decided to leave the main road and walk an extra mile to another hostel in Khanspur. While looking for the hostel in Khanspur we met somebody who spoke very good English. He gave us directions on how to find the hostel, but as we started to walk away he called us back and invited us to stay with him in his house, which we gladly accepted. His name was Mufti and his house turned out to be a former British Army billet. He had a lovely roaring log fire burning and we just sat in front of it and thawed out. He looked after us well that night, feeding us and chatting about the times when British Army personnel and their families used to flock to this area for their leave. The climate here in summer is very pleasant and they would come just to get away from the heat.

The next morning at exactly 8am, Mufti woke us up by bringing us tea in bed and a bowl of hot water each to have a wash. For breakfast he made us fried eggs on toast, which we washed down with some more tea. When it was time to leave, Mufti walked with us back to Ghora Dakka where we saw a truck heading the wrong direction. Mufti spoke to the driver and was told it would shortly be returning and we could have a lift. Mufti then said goodbye and headed back to Khanspur. We decided to sit and wait for the truck in a roadside café and have some chapati and potatoes to eat. (Well it wasn't so much a café as a shack with a Primus stove and a few boxes to sit on). While we were eating the warden from the previous night came in with a British V.S.O. worker (Voluntary Service Overseas) so we sat and talked while waiting for the truck to come.

When the truck still hadn't returned after about an hour we decided to start walking. We must have walked about 5 miles and still no truck, or any other vehicle for that matter when we had a argument about whether to stay put and wait, or to continue walking. I could see no point in walking out in to nowhere only to have to walk back again if the truck didn't show and decided to stop in a small village while Louis walked on. The truck eventually came about half an hour later and I had to jump on to it while it was still moving because although it slowed down, it didn't stop. A bit further along we came to a large tree that had fallen at the side of the road and the truck stopped to pick it up, as firewood is valuable in these parts. It took nearly an hour to load all the wood on board, and in the next village we came to it all had to be unloaded again when the truck driver sold it to the villagers.

We picked Louis up in a village called Barian. The driver told us he was going on to Pindi. We had decided to head for Islamabad and he readily agreed to take us. As we went along the truck often stopped to pick up more passengers. About an hour later when we stopped on a busy by-pass we thought it was to pick up another passenger, but everybody was pointing to a sign to Islamabad, which was about 2 miles away and indicated for us to get down. Louis and I had a quick discussion and decided that as it was now dark and we may not get another lift too easily, we would give Islamabad a miss and stay with the truck until Pindi.

At Pindi the truck dropped us in the Bazaar. One of the passengers told us the name of a hotel he recommend us to stay in and we followed him to it. At the hotel they refused to even let us in through the door. It turned out that it was a Moslem hotel and as such, non-Moslems were not allowed to come in. There were loads of cheap hotels in the area and it wasn't too difficult to find one nearby and we managed to get a room for 7 Rupees. After dumping our bags we went out to find something to eat. Although it was dark it was only about 8.30 pm and the bazaar was very busy with lots of people milling around and doing all sorts of business. We tried all sorts of different foods from various stalls, and managed to eat ourselves to a standstill for vary little money.

On the subject of money, before going to bed that night we did our accounts. (Travelling with an accountant, some things do rub off) I worked out that up to now I have spent £17-16-3 (including fares) in the last 41 days of travelling, an average of just over 8/8 per day. Our target was 10/- per day plus fares. Louis had spent a similar amount and so up to now we are both well under on our spending budget. So far we have covered 7082 miles and hitched 77 lifts.

I suppose it had to eventually happen. Early the next morning I had to dive out of bed and run for the

toilet. We hadn't yet reached India, but it was definitely the Delhi Belly (or more like the "Rawalpindi runs"). I took some of the diarrhoea tablets from the first aid kit and went back to sleep. At about 9.30 I decided to chance it and packed up and go to head for the tourist office to collect our luggage. On the way I felt ill and had to stop at a hotel to use their toilet, where I spent the next half-hour. We decided that it would be best if we went back to the hotel, but first we had to go to the tourist office to collect the bags we had left. Somehow or other I made it, but we decided to get a taxi back to the hotel and checked back in again. We even got the same room.

I decided to wander out to find something to eat, not that I wanted to eat very much. I felt like eating an apple and tried to buy one from a fruit stall in the bazaar. I must have looked really ill because the man who owned the stall wouldn't take any money from me. I spent the rest of the day sleeping, reading and running to the toilet. By late afternoon my stomach had settled down and Louis went out to get some bread. I had expected him to return with the usual flat sheet of bread, but he came back with a loaf. It was the first normal shaped bread we had been able to get hold of since we had left Europe, so he went out again and managed to get some butter and jam to go with it. I decided not to eat the butter and jam today and just had the bread with some tea which we had sent up to the room.

Later on that evening a horrible smell started to filter into the room. It was the drains. Not surprising with the amount of times I had been going to the toilet during the day. The manager moved us to another room, but after a while the smell started to come into that room too. We decided to bear with it as it wasn't as bad as the smell in the previous room. We both spent the evening writing letters home before settling down for an early night.

The next morning I felt fine. We got up at 8.30 and after having tea in the room set out to hitch to Lahore. We headed to the square at the end of the road where all the bus stops are. On the way the same stall holder that had given me the free apple the day before gave us some chapati and dahl. He seemed happy to see me looking healthy and once again, but he still wouldn't take any money.

We caught a bus to Ayub Park in Lahore Road where we started hitching. Within half an hour we got our first lift in a chauffeur driven Ford Cortina. The passenger was a businessman



who took us about 30 miles. The next lift was a bit downmarket, in the back of a truck which was carrying beds. We decided to test them and both of us managed to get a bit of sleep over the next 40 miles. While we were waiting for our next lift we decided to have some lunch at a roadside stall. No sooner had we finished eating than a truck stopped for us. The driver said he was going to Lahore and so we quickly climbed into the back. No sooner had we started than the driver

stopped for his lunch. When he had finished eating we started off again, only to stop once more for tea about ¾ hour later. Along the way we were stopped a number of times at weight checking stations for spot checks and just outside Lahore at one such checkpoint the police climbed onto the truck and checked all the sacks, looking for rice; why? I don't know. Once we got on the move again we moved up to sit on top of the cab, but it was freezing cold so we climbed back into the back of the truck again.

The driver dropped us in the bazaar where we bought something to eat before looking for the Youth Hostel. We started to walk to the hostel, but when we found out that it was almost 5 miles away, we decided to catch a bus. We checked into the Youth Hostel and noticed that there were separate staircases down to the dormitories for male and female. That was as far as segregation went, for both staircases led down to the same large dormitory. It was a large drab room with dozens of beds all laid out around the walls in military style. There was no bedding supplied and so we had to use our sleeping

bags. It was a large dormitory and a lot of the beds were occupied with a good mixture of nationalities and we chatted until the curfew time of 10pm.

The next day as usual, Louis got up before me and went out. I took the opportunity to have a lie in and didn't get up until nearly 10am. There was a French Moroccan staying in the Hostel, and by the time I got up we were the only two left, everybody else having gone out earlier. We both caught the bus into the centre of Lahore, where I headed for the State Secretariat to get my Road Permit to cross the Indian Border. Despite all the dire warnings from the AA about these permits taking ages to issue, in the end it took just 15 minutes to obtain. Also at the secretariat was the Sundowners coach and one from Pan Tours. They were also getting their road permits, but as there was so many of them, theirs were taking a bit longer to issue.

From the secretariat, the next call was to the Post Office to post some letters. In the Post Office I met one of the girls that had been on the Sundowners bus. We got chatting and she told me that she had been on holiday in England with her mother when they had seen the Sundowners trip being advertised in the Sunday papers. They thought it was a good opportunity to see some of the world and they both signed up for the trip. Unfortunately they had been robbed in Turkey and had only managed to complete the journey because the other travellers had a whip round for them. Some of the others had also lent them money. Her mother had gone to the bank to collect money that they had arranged to have transferred to them in Lahore so they could pay their debts and enable them to buy their plane ticket home from Delhi at the end of the route.

Her name was Judy and while chatting with her I found out that she was Jewish. The two of us spent the rest of the day looking around Lahore together. We came across a stall selling what from the distance appeared to be a load of round black things of different sizes. As we got nearer the owner came forward and waved his hands over the stall. Immediately a swarm of flies took off revealing a colourful and beautifully laid out fruit stall. Needless to say neither of us felt like eating any of that fruit.

We stopped to have some tea and a Pakistani who spoke very good English got into conversation with us. While talking he ordered something for us to eat and when the bill came he paid for us all. He offered to show us around some of Lahore and we accepted his offer. He took us to a large Mosque at prayer time. Judy was wearing a dress and although it was not a mini skirt, it was above her knees. At first we were not going to be allowed to go in but somebody suggested that she should wrap my jacket around her legs while walking around the Mosque and all became OK.

Late in the afternoon we both decided to head back to our hostels. Judy was staying in the YWCA, which was on the same bus route as the Youth Hostel. On the bus we met the Pakistani who earlier on had showed us around. When Judy got off at the YWCA, he also got off the bus. At first I was a bit concerned for her safety, but the YWCA was quite near and there were a lot of people around so I don't think he would have been able to try anything. As she was getting off the bus we agreed to meet at the American Express office in Delhi if we were both there at the same time.

Back at the Youth Hostel I took the opportunity to have a shower. There was a group of English boys who had just arrived that day after having driven in their own Land Rover. In the course of conversation I found out that one of them was a barber. I was by now badly in need of a haircut and offered to pay him to cut my hair. He readily agreed and did so without payment. By the time Louis arrived back I looked like a different person.

One of the Americans in the hostel had bought a load of hashish quite cheaply in Afghanistan. He hadn't had any problem bringing it across the Pakistan border because the Pakistan

officials are not concerned about drugs as they have plenty of their own. He was worried about taking it in to India and as it was still in its traditional flat slabs I suggest to him the method we had come across in Istanbul, that is to glue them to the soles of his shoes and walk across the border with it. We had our photographs taken holding the stuff before handing it back to him. The amount he had bought for just a few dollars would probably raise enough for someone to retire on if sold it in England.

That night a whole group of us went out for a meal, returning to the hostel just in time for the 10 p.m. curfew, though we all sat up and chatted until quite late.

The next morning we were up early to catch a bus into

Lahore bus depot to connect with the bus to the Indian Border. We arrived at the depot just after 9 am to find that the busses left every hour on the hour and one had just gone. Louis decided to use the time to go to Amex to check our mail, while I bought the tickets and joined the queue for the bus. In the queue there were 2 Germans, a Dane and a girl called Winnie from New Zealand. Winnie had been working in Iran and was now on her way home via the overland route. When the bus arrived we all got on, but there was no sign of Louis. So as to be able to reserve a seat for him the Dane, the Germans, Winnie and I spread ourselves out over the back of the bus taking up a bit more room than we needed. Louis eventually arrived as usual at the last moment, just as the driver was starting the engine ready to drive off. We all shuffled up to make room for him to sit down in what was an otherwise very crowded bus.

The bus headed out along the Ferozapore Road on its short journey to the border, which was right on the edge of Lahore. Had there not been a border there, I have no doubt that the city would have extended well beyond that point many years before. Most of the passengers were only going to the suburb that was close to the border and when the bus stopped right at the frontier post it was only a handful of us that headed across towards India.

The border was quite a meeting place for overland travellers. The Indiaman bus was just passing through to the Indian side as we arrived. We also met a few of the Sundowners who had left the bus to head off and do their own thing in India, after all they were only one days travel from Delhi and the end of the route. To complete the party the English Land Rover group from the Youth Hostel were also there, having got up early to allow plenty of time to clear their vehicle out of Pakistan and into India.

It took us about an hour to clear across the border - a lot quicker than we had been led to expect. It was a case of passing from table to table as in turn somebody checked our road permit, then immigration and finally customs, with each person writing all our details down in the usual large book before allowing us to eventually walk over to the Indian side.



India (Part 1)

From the Pakistan to Nepal borders

Indian currency:

Official rate:

£1 = 18 Rupees

Black market rate:

£1 = 21 to 24 Rupees

1 Rupee = 100 Paise

or

16 Anna pre decimal



16th November 1968

At the Indian frontier at Hussainiwalla there are a beautiful set of black painted iron gates placed on the actual line of the border. As we approached from the Pakistani side we could see on the white washed gatepost was the word "India". As we passed through we looked back at the other side of the gatepost and as we had suspected, it had the word "Pakistan" on it. The Pakistan border post was a permanent building, but on the Indian side there was no such sign of permanence. The only structure was a small marquee in which sat both the customs and immigration officers. After my passport was stamped I commented that the stamp did not have the country name on it. With that the immigration officer took the passports back and using an ancient looking fountain pen wrote in perfect copperplate "India" underneath the stamp.

The Indian customs officer had us fill out a form stating what valuables we had and how much money we were carrying. Once the form had been stamped it was returned to us to keep to hand to the customs officer when we would eventually leave India. Its purpose was to be presented at banks or licensed exchange bureau each time we changed money. While at the border Louis and I changed a £2 traveller's cheque between us so that we would have some money to get on with. It was to be the only money we would change officially until we left the country. We had already heard about this customs declaration form and like every other overland traveller, we lost it at the first opportunity.

After the border we started to hitch hike, but the lack of vehicles meant that after waiting a while we still had not got a lift. Eventually we approached a Bedford mini-bus with UNICEF markings that had been parked at the border to ask the driver for a lift. The Indian driver turned out to be a doctor. He was waiting for another doctor to come across the border and when he eventually came through he offered Winnie and us a lift to Ferozapore. The doctor that had come across the border was called Dr. Constable. He was English and had been working as a missionary in India for the last 16 years and was employed as a superintendent of Christian Medical Colleges.

When we arrived at Ferozapore we stopped for a bite to eat. The Indian doctor explained how we should be able to drink the Indian water just so long as it was mains water and not stored water. He also explained that if we found curries to be a bit too hot we could always ask for them to make it with less

chilli. We would find however that trying to get an Indian restaurant to make a curry without chilli was to be an impossible task. As for the drinking water, despite his assurances, we still didn't trust it.

Winnie decided to stay in Ferozapore and set off to find somewhere to spend the night. We stayed with the doctors who took us on to Ludhiana where we were dropped off just outside the town. Before leaving, the doctor arranged for us to get a lift to Chandigarh in a lorry. They suggested that we could stay in a dharamsala where we would get cheap accommodation. The lorry dropped us at the dharamsala but there was no room, so we walked into town to look for somewhere to stay. A rest house down the road was also full, as was a number of other cheaper places we tried. Eventually we found a bed in a rather posh looking Arona hotel. This was very much above our normal standard of accommodation, and so was the price, but it seems that was all that was going to be available in Chandigarh. Eventually for just 4 rupees each (4/- is the abbreviation used throughout India) we managed to get a charpoy without any blankets or bedding, in what seems to have been a meeting room. Having spent so long searching for somewhere to sleep meant that it was well after midnight before we finally got to bed.

No sooner had we got to sleep than we were woken up again by a scraping sound. I shone my torch in the direction of the noise just in time to see a large rat run away from the sudden light. It scampered into a hole in the skirting board, so we jammed a broom handle in the hole to block its escape and went back to sleep again.

The next morning we found a food store cupboard in the room. Although it was locked we found that it would open just enough for us to remove a packed of corn flakes and a bottle of ginger beer which we had for breakfast. On leaving the hotel we complained about the rat and eventually managed to get the bill reduced to just 3 Rupees each. We had a cup of tea in a pavement café which we had with some more of the corn flakes before walking back to the ring road, where we soon managed to get a lift in a lorry that took us to the main exit for the Delhi Road.

Within a few minutes we had managed to get a lift in what appeared to be a twenty year old Morris Oxford car. The car was in fact almost new and was built in India and was called an Ambassador. An Indian company had bought the old assembly plant from Morris in the mid 1950's when the model had reached the end of its English manufacturing life. They were now manufacturing the car in India where it quickly became the most popular model in the country, in fact almost the only model in the country. When I visited India again 29 years later it was still being made in the same shape, though by then it was not as popular and had plenty of other makes as competition.

The driver of the car was obviously fairly well off by Indian standards. He was on his way to Delhi, but being a Sunday he was stopping in Ambala on the way to visit his cricket club and he invited us to join him for lunch. The club was a very posh place and resembled a very well off English village cricket club. The people there spoke "frightfully" posh English, but with an Indian accent and we enjoyed sitting on the lawn and listening to the conversations while our driver plied us with plenty of food and drinks. They even played bingo and we joined on for one of the games, though we didn't win. One of the members we were talking to told us that when the British left in 1947 the thing that concerned him most of all was the fear that he would no longer be able to get toilet paper. He had stockpiled so much that he was still using it 21 years later and would probably have enough to last him for the rest of his life. I hope it was soft toilet paper.

After lunch our driver once again headed off to Delhi. Even though we had eaten at the club, he still stopped shortly after for lunch and bought us both a chicken curry. At about 3 o'clock he stopped again for afternoon tea and cakes. We eventually arrived in Delhi shortly after 5 o'clock and he dropped us near to the Old Delhi railway station.

The first hotel we tried was full, but the owner said we could leave our bags in the luggage room while we looked around for somewhere to stay. There were many hotels in that area and we looked at quite a few before deciding on one called Hotel Meva, which was costing us 4 rupees each per night. In the

next room we met a group of Sikhs who were all playing cards. Louis and I got talking to them and Louis noticed that the pack of cards was all marked. If you didn't know you would not have seen it, but the pattern on the back had a clock face design. If you looked closely you could see a small dot pointing to the "hour" representing the value of the card. For example, an ace had the dot at one o'clock, a six at six o'clock and the picture cards were at 11 & 12 o'clock. The King had no dot. When Louis pointed this out to them they all acted quite surprised, though I suspect that one of them must have known and was not letting on.

At midnight we celebrated our arrival in Delhi by having some bread and jam while discussing our route through India. We decided to head down to Agra to see the Taj Mahal, then to Benares (or Varanasi as it is also known) before going up to Nepal when we would discuss the rest of our route. It was almost 2 am before we went to sleep, probably the latest night since we left home. We had made it to Delhi, a distance covered of 7605 miles for less than £20 each. To be precise I had spent £19-41-1 which included £2-12-0 for the cross channel ferry, 10/- for the Iranian visa and about £1 spent on postage. It is 45 days since we left home of which 26 have been travelling days. Our luggage is still intact, the only things I have lost on the journey have been a nail brush and my cap comforter (a sort of woolen hat that can convert into a scarf).

The next morning we decided to finish off the corn flakes we had pilfered in Chandigarh. I went out to find a place that would supply us with cold milk. One restaurant would supply me but I had to put a deposit down on the glasses before he would let me take them to the hotel. On the way back I met Steve, who had shown us the way to the Post Office in Kabul. He was out getting something for his wife who had gone down with hepatitis.



When we had finished our breakfast we took the glasses back before catching a bus to New Delhi. The ride took us along Elgin Road and past the Red Fort and was a mini tour of Delhi all by itself. We de-bussed at Connought Place and as we got off we bumped into Winnie who pointed out the way to Amex. When we got to the front of the queue for mail at Amex, the counter clerk asked our names. We told him and without even looking he immediately told us how much mail we had and after checking

our ID he handed it over. As we were leaving Amex we bumped into William, with whom we had shared a lift from Meshad to Herat. We decided to go and have a coffee together and found an excellent café within the circle that served everything and most important of all, was very cheap. While we were talking we saw the American with the hashish from the Lahore youth hostel. He had managed to get into India without any trouble because he had chickened out at the last moment and sold all his hashish in Lahore for just US\$6 for the whole kilogram.

Next stop was the Nepalese Embassy to apply for visas so we could go to Kathmandu. We started to fill in the application forms when Louis discovered that he had left his passport photos back in the hotel. As we needed to supply 3 passport size photos with the application we were not able get our visas that day and so decided to come back again tomorrow.

From there we went to the AA of Northern India to enquire about the London - Sydney road race which was due to pass through in less than two weeks time. I think they thought we were some sort of race official. We were shown into an office and somebody brought in loads of information for us, including a telephone directory size book of the race rules. It made very interesting reading and we managed to find out not only the date when the race was passing and the route, but also the hotel the drivers were staying at in Bombay and the date of the sailing to Australia. We were told to come back again in a day or two and they would have some more information for us.

From there we went back to Amex to find out the times and fares for trains around India. Hitch hiking was all well and good, but in India the traffic moves so slowly in the countryside that it would take forever to cover the large distances involved. For the first time since leaving England we abandoned our prime method of transport and moved onto the public transport system.

In India there were 3 classes of train travel. First class was generally not too bad. Second class was bedlam, but on our budget we had to go for the cheapest and that meant third class which was like a zoo. With our fake student cards we could travel first class for the price of a 2nd class ticket. We could have travelled 2nd class for the price of a 3rd class ticket, but with a 50% discount on the price of 3rd class there was no competition. To get these discounts we had to obtain a student discount permit from the railway offices but first of all we had to get some more local currency.

As we walked around Delhi people offering to change money often approached us. After enquiring from a number of these touts we settled for one chap that was offering 220 rupees for £10 cash. This was the best we could do in Delhi, even though other cities would offer up to 24 to the pound. I did the dealing and Louis watched from a respectable distance. As was customary in such deals, the tout took me down a small alley so nobody could see us. Unbeknown to him, Louis waited at the end of the alley just in case. First of all he tried to trick me by folding one of the notes in half and counting the stack of notes down to the middle. Because one of the notes was folded it got counted twice and the stack looked normal when it was unfolded. Fortunately we had been warned of this trick and when a quick flick through the stack revealed this fraud the tout ran off only to be caught by Louis at the entrance to the alley. After Louis had threatened to kick his spine through his hat, he sheepishly paid us the 10 rupees that he had tried to cheat us out of and then disappeared as quickly as he could run.

Now we had some money we were able to have some lunch in the café at Connought Place. While sitting there we overheard two Indians at the next table who were discussing setting up a new printing business. I joined in the conversation and have no doubt that if I had wanted to stay in India they would have invited me to become a partner as I certainly knew a lot more than them about the print industry.

Later that afternoon we headed back to the hotel and on the way we bought a large bunch of bananas for just a few Piase. Back at the hotel we asked at reception for a waste paper basket for the banana skins, but they refused to give us one. So we just threw all the skins over the balcony and they landed outside the reception, but nobody seemed to care or complain.

Our hotel, which was near the railway station, was in the old part of Delhi. Old Delhi was a complete contrast to New Delhi, which although certainly not anywhere near European standards, was by comparison quite modern. All the foreign Embassies and business offices were in the new part, but the old part was more typically Indian.

We ventured out that evening for a bite to eat, looking in all the different small eating places to see what was on offer and we eventually settled for some chapati and daal. Just like most of the places in the market, the eating place consisted of an open area with a number of stools and tables for people to sit and eat. It had a canvas awning to cover everything if it should have rained; though at that time of year it was not likely to be needed.

I don't know what was in that food, but in the early hours of the morning I had to get up in a hurry to run to the toilet. What I suffered from in Lahore was nothing compared to this and I spent the rest of the night running back and forward, putting a lot of strain on the Delhi sewers. At about 7 am I was violently sick over the balcony. The banana skins had been removed by then, but now there was something else for the office to have to clean up. Whether they complained or not I wouldn't know because I spent most of the rest of the day sleeping. The only time I got up was to run along the landing to the toilet.

Louis spent the day running around collecting the visas for Nepal and Thailand. Although it would be a

month or two before we went to Thailand, we had six months to use the visa and the Thai and Nepalese Embassies were close to each other but he had to go back the next day to collect the passports from the Nepalese Embassy. The visas were also cheaper to obtain in India because we could pay in Rupees that had been purchased on the black market and the visas were priced according to the official exchange rate. He also visited the railway station to obtain the necessary certificate so that we could buy tickets at the student discount rate.

By the time he got back to the hotel it was after 7 o'clock. Although I still didn't feel too well I decided to go out. While Louis ate his evening meal, I just sipped a glass of chai (the Hindi word for tea) before heading back to the hotel for an early night. Thankfully that night I was able to sleep without running to the toilet and by the next morning I felt well enough to go sightseeing again. Even so, this was one hell of a case of Delhi belly, and although I felt a lot better, over the next ten days I still occasionally had to make a sudden dive for a toilet.

Back in the land of the living, the first stop was to visit Amex to check our mail. As we walked through the door the clerk looked up and called out that there was no mail for me so I didn't have to join the queue. Louis did have mail, so I still had to wait for him. When we looked in later that afternoon there was one letter for me, but this time he called out to Louis not to join the queue. Three years later when I passed through Delhi on my way home the same clerk remembered who I was and handed me my mail without me having to show him my passport or tell him who I was. I often wonder if he is still there and if I walked in today would he still remember who I was.

In the afternoon we went to visit the Qutb Minar which is about 7 miles south of Delhi. We had to wait a long time for the bus, but it was well worth it. Some people have described the

Qutb Minar as a candlestick with terracotta frills, but despite that description I found it to be a truly memorable monument. It is a bit like a slimmer version of the Leaning Tower of Pisa and despite having been built more than 700 years ago, it is still possible to safely climb the stairs 234 feet to the top. The walls are covered in carved Arabic quotations from the Koran and some people claim this is the reason it survived an earthquake.

Nearby to the Qutb Minar is a 24-foot high iron shaft that is inscribed with six lines of Sanskrit. Although it doesn't look very much, nobody has been able to explain how despite having been there stuck in the ground for more than 1500 years, it remains rust free.



While taking a photograph of the Qutb Minar I had to change the film in my camera. A young boy seeing me removing the exposed film offered to buy it from me. Needless to say it was not for sale, though I suspect that had he got his hands on it, the film end would have



been pulled out of the cassette. It would then have been sold as a new roll of film to some unsuspecting tourist who would be gullible enough to buy it.

We then returned to the Nepalese Embassy to collect our passports that were now ready, complete with visas. Walking back to Connought Place we passed the A.A. office and decided to call in to see what more information they could possibly have. Apart from an updated list of competitors there was no new information, but while we were there they gave us a drink of tea and some food. I don't know who they thought we were, but it was all gratefully accepted.

We went back to Amex to see if we could change a

traveller's cheque for English money. We didn't have a lot of cash pounds to change on the black market, so we thought we could get some more by changing a traveller's cheque. Although the bank at Amex was now closed we were told that it was not possible to do such transactions. Obviously the Indian Government were one step ahead of us. We still had some English cash remaining, so we wandered around Connought Place looking for somewhere to change another £10 on the black market. Although we could only get 215 rupees this time, it was still 25% better than the official rate.

It was now evening time and we headed back to the hotel. My stomach was not completely better and although I felt better, I had still been almost caught short a number of times. Back at the hotel I took the opportunity to wash and change and also to wash my now quite dirty underpants. Hanging them out afterwards in the dry Indian heat they dried in no time at all. We had decided to head off to Agra on the overnight train and while Louis went out to buy some food to eat on the way, I got busy packing.

We left the hotel at 10 o'clock that night and walked the short distance to the railway station. Using our student concession permit we bought a third class ticket to Agra, Benares, Raxaul and Bombay. Despite the long distance, the ticket cost just 66 rupees and after deducting our student discount we only had to pay 33 rupees each.

The train left at 11 o'clock. We had a compartment all to ourselves and started to spread out. Our luggage on the rack above and a sleeping bag on the bench seat, we settled down for the night. Five minutes later the train pulled in to New Delhi station and all hell broke loose. There seemed to be hundreds of people all fighting to get through the door at the same time, all shouting at the tops of their voices. People were also climbing in through the windows - it was pandemonium. We had to roll up our sleeping bags quickly to avoid them being sat on as the hoards swarmed all over the carriage. Our bags were passed down from the luggage racks and were replaced by people who would sleep up there while we got more and more squashed as ten people crowded onto a bench designed to seat six.

This was our first taste of Indian trains. It did not get better. Had we realised that the luggage rack was a prize to be valued we would not have wasted it by putting our bags up there. In third class carriages in India, seats are for sitting, floors are for luggage and luggage racks are for sleeping on. We later perfected the art of standing the bags at the end of the luggage rack by our heads, while we spread out and slept on what remained. They were usually about 8 feet long, so when we were able to get a luggage rack there was room for us and our bags in comfort.

Thursday 21st November 1968.

We arrived in Agra the next morning after a very uncomfortable night. To compound our agony, the train was an hour late. Considering the distance covered was only 124 miles the train had taken nearly 9 hours to get there. We decided to leave our bags in the left luggage office and started to walk to the Taj Mahal.

Although it wasn't too far to walk, the heat of

the day, the lack of sleep the previous night and my still not too healthy state started to take its toll. Before we had got half way we both decided to take a cycle rickshaw the rest of the way. In India and for that matter all over South East Asia there must be millions of these cycle



rickshaws and every country has its own distinctive design. The ones in India consisted of a double seat mounted on the back of a large tricycle with the driver sitting in front of the passengers pedalling away as fast as his legs would work. With his hands he steered the rickshaw, but more importantly he continually sounded his bell. The bell system was a cable operated affair consisting of a group of bells attached to the axle of one of the wheels. When the driver operates the lever the bells are pulled against

the wheel spokes and make a very loud and not unpleasant ringing sound. In Agra rickshaws far outnumbered other vehicles on the road and the sound of their bells were always in the air.

Urban traffic in India is a miasma of vehicular and non-vehicular traffic. It includes such diverse things as cars, trucks, motor-rickshaws (three-wheeled taxis), cycle-rickshaws, motor scooters, elephants, goats, dogs, children, chickens, bearers, push-carts, camels, buses, etc. These things are all moving. If you want to pass anything, you just have to honk your horn and everyone else will start honking too. If you don't have a horn, then shout. The one who is loudest gets the right-of-way and everybody else moves over to the left (unless they are in a hurry and everyone in India is in a hurry). If the other vehicles and livestock don't yield to the loudest horn, that vehicle with the right-of-way then enters the lane of oncoming traffic and passes those ahead. This is especially so on a busy street at rush hour and can be good fun when you are on the wrong side of the road in a flimsy motor-rickshaw, with a truck bearing down on you.

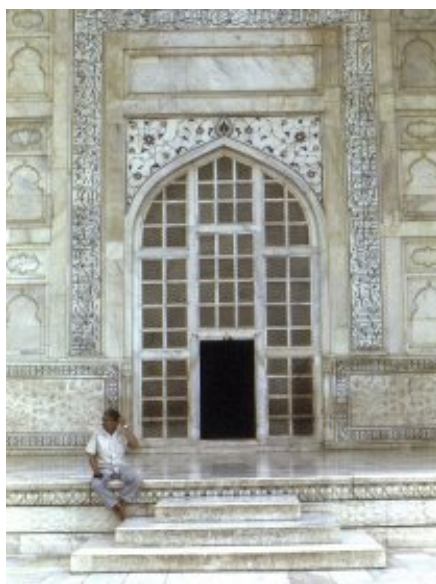
If moving traffic isn't enough to keep you occupied, you also have a number of stationary targets, (err, obstacles), including cows, beggars, street repair crews, double-parked cars and trucks and elephants. Because the pavements are being used by the shopkeepers to store and display their stock and what space remains is used for parking various motorised and non motorised contraptions, the road is also the main walking area for pedestrians. Whatever else happens, you are always in the right just as long as you don't hit the cows. The cows can be ANYWHERE in the street and often just wander out in front of the traffic without any warning, almost as if they are challenging you to 'run-me-over-if-you-dare'. It is not uncommon to find them sitting in the middle of the road while all the traffic just flows around them. Other animals or people are not so lucky.

A taxi ride in India can at the same time be one of the most thrilling and terrifying rides of your life. At least twice per minute you will be convinced that you are staring death in the face. Your driver has just pulled out into the oncoming traffic at the same time as a vehicle going the other way has just done the

same thus blocking off your escape route. At the last moment everything seems to move out of the way and it is time to head for the next crisis. Drivers seem to know their clearance to within half of a coat of paint and anybody considering starting a dodgem car ride in India would be doomed to financial failure, as people would find it too much like real life to be bothered to go on them.

After a short ride the rickshaw approached the Taj Mahal. It can be seen from a long way off and I have to say it was a breathtaking sight. There are many guidebooks that will

describe the Taj in great detail, but none of them can



possibly describe the feeling of seeing it for the first time. To quote one guide book "It is truly a white marble jewel resting on a bed of red sandstone". Shajahan built it in the 17th century as a mausoleum to his wife Mumtaz Mahal. We spent hours just walking around the gardens and then having to remove our shoes before climbing the stairs



onto the marble deck and into the Taj Mahal itself. I could write pages to describe this most beautiful building but have decided that the guidebooks already do this quite well.



When left the Taj Mahal we had to wait because the whole place was being sealed off for the arrival of the Prime Minister of Malta who was on a state visit.

From there we took a rickshaw to a bank to

try once again to attempt to cash some traveller's cheques for sterling. Unfortunately in all the banks we visited the foreign exchange counters were closed that day because the French Franc had been devalued.



Nearby was the rather posh looking Imperial Hotel and by now I was getting desperate for a toilet, so we decided to pay them a visit and use their toilets. It was also an opportunity to change my by now depleted toilet roll for an almost full one. Afterwards we decided to sit in the hotel lobby and have a cup of chai. It was a bit dearer than buying one from one of the street vendors, but the lobby was cool and the armchairs were very comfortable. So comfortable in fact that we both dozed off and slept for an hour and a half.

From the hotel we went to the post office to send some letters. Louis always wrote long letters and needed to find out how many sheets of airmail paper he could get in an envelope for the minimum air mail price. He put an envelope with eight sheets of paper on the post office's scales to check the weight. It was just over the minimum limit and so he removed one of the sheets and put the remainder back on the scales. It now weighed more. Nothing we could say could convince the clerk that the scales were wrong. He maintained that seven sheets were



heavier than eight - and that was that. Eventually after a few more tries we decided that a safe number would be six sheets.

We then headed up to the Red Fort where we met Winnie again. She had managed to latch onto a tour group that was being shown around the Fort, so we also joined in. Afterwards we both found somewhere in the shade to sit and write letters to home. We stayed there until sunset when we

enjoyed watching the beautiful view of the red setting sun shining on the Taj Mahal.



Before heading back to the station we went to the Post Office to mail our letters. Louis had written somebody a six-page letter and when it was weighed it was within the minimum limit. After sticking on the stamps the clerk weighed the envelope again and found that it was now over the limit and more postage was required. I cannot possibly write down what Louis' reply was, but suffice to say it was not complimentary to the Indian postal service. After weighing the letter another few times, each time indicating a different weight, we eventually managed to get it to produce a favourable result and the clerk accepted it and cancelled the stamps with a smile.

Our train out was not until 9.30 p.m. and so we took a slow walk back to the station, stopping for a meal on the way. By the time we got back to the station it was only 8.30 and we still had plenty of time to collect our bags from the left luggage and find the platform that our train was due to depart from. The train arrived on time and there was the usual mad rush to get on and find a seat. Only the last two carriages were going to Allahabad and they were packed out. We would not have even been able to find

any floor space to put our bags down so we decided to move to one of the other carriages where we stayed for the short journey to Tundlah Junction, when we were able to switch trains to the North India Express. Despite the usual mad rush to get on, we were able to get seats in a sleeping compartment. Although all the sleepers were occupied, by the next morning we had both managed to get into ones that were vacated when the occupants got off.

As the train trundled on through Uttar Pradesh I spent a great part of the night on the toilet and so I decided to go on a strict diet to get rid of this tummy bug once and for all. I wasn't too sure what I should or shouldn't eat and so I restricted myself to eating just chapati and drinking chai. Apart from all the visits to the toilet during the night, I managed to sleep well. It was early in the afternoon when both Louis and I had to be woken up by other passengers to tell us that the train was arriving at Benares.

As the train pulled into the station we noticed 3 of the Sundowners on the platform. We called out to them and they came over to our carriage. They were also heading to Kathmandu and we were able to give them our sleeper places to use for their onward journey. They would only be on the train as far as Patna, but at the slow speed that Indian trains run, it would still probably take them at least six hours. The Sundowner busses were carrying on to Calcutta, but they had decided to break away to go up to Nepal. One of the girls was a nurse and she was able to give me some good advice about what foods would be best to eat while I had stomach trouble. Apparently one thing that was good to eat in India was a kind of yoghurt called lasi. Even though I could not stand the taste of yoghurt I decided that I would try anything to get better. We said our goodbyes and when the train pulled out of the station we went to the left luggage office to put our bags in for the day.

We bought some chai from a stall outside the station and then got a cycle rickshaw to take us to the River Ganges. At the square where all the tourist busses had parked we saw the Sundowners and Swagman busses. The busses were empty probably because they were all sightseeing and although we didn't realise it at the time, it was the last time we would see any of these busses. This was as far as the rickshaw could take us and we had to walk the rest of the way to the river through the market. This market was a lot different from the one in

Old Delhi and in the maze of small streets and alleyways most of the stalls were just placed out on the ground. They sell all sorts of things including all kinds of food, incense, spices and great



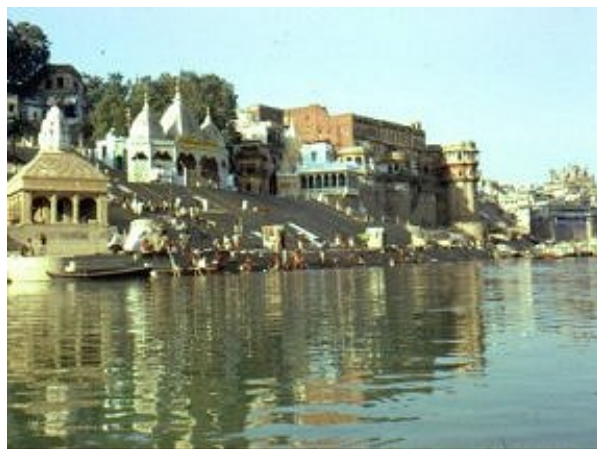
heaps of coloured powders. There was even a barber giving somebody a shave in the middle of the street. As we walked to the river there was a different smell in the air for almost every step of the way, and not all of them were unpleasant.

When we reached the river we hired a boat to take us for a ride down the Ganges. Benares is a holy place for Hindus, being one of the oldest places of pilgrimage in the world. It is the ambition of every devout Hindu to make a

pilgrimage to Benares at least once in their life and if possible, to even die there. Along more than three-miles of the riverbank we could see people washing and swimming on the concrete

steps that lead down to the river. These steps are called Ghats and from what we could see from the boat there seemed to be complete families living at the side of the river while they are on their pilgrimage. At the eastern end of the Ghats there is a large bonfire where dead bodies were being cremated and their ashes thrown into the fast flowing river to flow past all the pilgrims. Although we didn't see any, we were told that holy men and children are just wrapped up in white silk and are thrown into the river without being cremated. Despite

all this the river seemed to be quite clean probably due to the speed that the water was flowing.



At the western most end of the Ghats there were dozens of washer women cleaning what must have been the entire washing of the population of Benares, probably a local laundry business. It was here that the boat turned around to head back. The poor oarsman took ages to row back again after making swift progress with the tide behind us I am amazed that he was able to make any headway against such a strong flow, but we eventually made it back to our starting point.

Once our "river cruise" was over my first and most urgent priority was to find a toilet - quickly. I was lucky enough to find a small shop that had a toilet and would allow me to use it. We then

decided to find somewhere to have some tea and looked for a place that also sold lasi. So while Louis had some chai, I tucked into a plate of yoghurt which thankfully didn't taste as bad as I thought it would.

After our afternoon tea we went to the Golden Temple, but not being Hindus we weren't allowed to go in. We had to be content with looking through a small window at the back of the temple from where we could see the worshipers inside making their



flower offerings. From there we decided to find a post office to send some letters and to send off some films for processing in England. As usual we found ourselves in a battle with the staff of the post office. They also had a set of scales with similar accuracy as the ones in Agra Post Office. Due to the unreliability of the Indian postal service I decided to send the film by registered post to make sure it arrived. The whole episode took more than an hour to sort out and when we had finished we found a nearby restaurant to have supper.

After we had eaten we went back to the station where we were able to get a good place on the train. We managed to get two luggage racks and settled down for a good night's sleep - or so we thought. When the trains pulled out the door of the carriage swung open and try as we might it just would not stay closed. Despite the draught from the open door we were still able to get a good sleep that night and

arrived in Gorakhpur at 8.30 the next morning fully refreshed.

Before leaving the station at Gorakhpur we managed to have a good wash from a tap on the platform. In full view of everybody we both stripped down to our underpants washed and changed our clothes. The best part of it was that nobody gave us a second look, nor did anybody seem to care that two English boys were almost naked in public. (This would have been unheard of when Britain ruled India). Once we had dressed again we checked our bags into the left luggage office and headed off to have a walk around the town.

Our train connection was not until the evening so we had a lot of time to kill and there was not a lot to see or do in Gorakhpur. After spending a few hours walking around the town, I bought an English language newspaper and headed off to spend a few hours sitting in Hui Park, while Louis went off to do some more sightseeing. I started to walk to the park and jokingly tried to hitch hike from some passing cyclists. Much to my surprise, one of them stopped for me and gave me a lift to the park on the back of his cycle. We didn't go straight to the park, but the cyclist rode all around the town pointing out all the places of interest. By the time Louis arrived at the park, I had seen just as much as him and spend a restful two hours reading my newspaper.

Indian newspapers are full of news about India, but nothing at all about the rest of the world. I found it quite boring and it wasn't long before I dozed off. Louis woke me up when he arrived back and then we both dozed off for another hour or so. It was late afternoon before we started to walk back to the station and on the way we came across a troupe of wild monkeys playing in the trees. I tried to photograph some of them but couldn't get close enough to get a good shot. In the end I gave up.

When we got to the station the train was already in even though it was another two hours before it was due to go. The first few carriages were packed to the roof and we were beginning to think that we would have to spend the night sitting on our luggage, when we came across a completely empty carriage. There was no explanation for it. Why should everybody else crowd into the other carriages and leave this one empty? Not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth we got a couple of luggage racks, spread our sleeping bags out and settled down to sleep. We had pulled down the window blinds in the vain hope that people wouldn't see in, thus leaving us to get a peaceful nights sleep. We needn't have worried for we must have slept like logs, even though the carriage did eventually fill up to its normal "sardine can like" capacity.

When the train arrived in Muzafapur at 2315 one of the other passengers woke us up to tell us we had arrived. We had just 10 minutes to get packed and dash across the station to catch the connecting train to Sigorli that was scheduled to depart at 2325. We only just made it, jumping on as the train was starting to pull out. Because we were the last ones on the train we didn't have a seat for this three-hour journey. We did eventually manage to get seats near the end of the journey and at 0230 when the train arrived at Sigorli we managed to be one of the first to dash across to the connecting train to Raxaul. Even though it wasn't due to depart until 0630, we managed to get luggage racks and make ourselves comfortable. I found it strange trying to get to sleep on a stationery train and so I read. Before going to sleep I finished off the book I was reading (The Thurber Carnival). The train pulled out right on time and we managed to sleep soundly until the train arrived at Raxaul at 0730.

From the station it was a 10-minute walk to the border and a Nepalese passengers we had met on the train showed us the way. Crossing the border we had to go through both immigration and customs first of all on the Indian side and again on the Nepalese side. Each of the four checkpoints were some distance apart and so we paid a cycle rickshaw to ride us across the border and stop at each of the customs and immigration desks.

Nepal

Nepalese Currency:

Official

£ = 24 Rupees

Black Market

£ = 30 Rupees



Sunday 24th November 1968

By the time we had completed all the formalities it was almost 9 am. There were a lot of trucks at the border and they were all headed to Kathmandu. We managed to get a ride on one of them for 10 rupees each. I had to walk back to the border to change some money and was able to change the Indian rupees for Nepalese. By the time I got back to the truck it was being loaded and we both thought it would soon be ready to go. It was nearly two hours before everything was on board but now the driver started to argue with the person who's owned the load. I don't know exactly what the problem was, whether they couldn't agree a price or if the load was too light or too heavy, but after about 10 minutes of arguing they unloaded it all again and the driver went off to find another customer.

All the other trucks had already gone off to Kathmandu and so we were stuck there waiting for somebody to bring a load through the border that needed driving to Kathmandu. It was mid afternoon before we finally set out with the lorry loaded with vegetables. Before we had gone very far we had to stop and wait. A broken down truck blocked the road and it was another half an hour before it was shifted and we could continue on our way.

The journey from the border to Kathmandu normally takes about 12 hours. It is uphill all the way and the road winds along as it climbs into the foothills of the Himalayas and the views are stunning. When it got dark we both huddled down in the back of the truck to keep out of the freezing cold slipstream. We even unpacked our sleeping bags and wrapped ourselves in them, but it wasn't enough to warm us up. The cold was not the only thing on our minds. The truck only had one working headlamp



and that wobbled around as we went over the many potholes. There road was unlit, it was narrow, there were lots of hairpin bends and from what we had seen before it got dark, there



was usually a sheer drop on one side of the road. I don't know how the driver was able to see where he was going and it was a great relief when he stopped for the night at 10 pm in a small place called Daman.

Daman was just a roadhouse and there didn't seem to be any other buildings around. We ordered something to eat. I had a chicken curry because that is all there was. When it came it tasted awful and I sent it back. It wasn't chicken and it didn't

taste anything like curry. They brought me another one, but it tasted the same. I didn't know what the flavour was at the time, but I have since found out that it was cardoman. Whoever cooked that curry seems to like cardoman and had put loads of it in the food. When it came to paying the bill I found that they had charged for the two meals - including the one I sent back. I was feeling so tired by then that I decided to argue about it in the morning. They gave me a blanket and we all settled down to sleep on the floor. I just couldn't get warm at all that night and didn't manage to get any sleep at all.

At 5 am, everybody got up and had some tea and chapati for breakfast. We settled the bill and they let me off with paying for the meal that I sent back. I was feeling like death warmed up and in fact not so much of the warmed up - I was freezing cold. We set out at 6 o'clock and the view was even better than the day before. Daman's one and only claim to fame is its view of Mount Everest and today was a perfect day for that view.

The truck chugged on up the hills and around the bends. We had been watching the road markers going down as the miles (or should I say kilometers) passed. When we had done nearly 20 km since leaving Daman we rounded a corner and there was Daman just across the valley just one or two kilometers away. The road had meandered around and around for all this way to cover such a short distance.

The rest of the journey to Kathmandu was just as cold and the road just as full of bends as the rest had been. After about half a dozen more tea stops the truck finally arrived in Kathmandu, where it dropped us off outside the Post Office just before 10 am and we walked the last half mile to Durbar Square which is in the centre of Kathmandu.

To one side of the square is the Royal Bank of Nepal and on the opposite side is the Government tourist office. By this time I was feeling really ill, so Louis left me sitting in the tourist office while he went off in search of a hotel. I spent the time reading the local English language newspaper called "The Rising Nepal". One wall of the office is a list of all the attempts that have been made to climb Mount Everest with the names and nationalities of all the climbers and it made fascinating reading.



Louis eventually came back for me. He had found us a hotel called the G.C. Lodge, which wasn't very far away, and at 10 rupees per night for the room was a bargain. He had left his luggage in the room and had returned to collect me and carry my luggage to the hotel for me. I went to bed straight away and slept for the rest of the day. I probably had a dose of flu and didn't even wake up when Louis brought

me some food for lunch.

That evening I felt a bit better and we decided to go out to eat. Louis has spent the day finding out where everything was and had found that the "in" place for backpackers to eat was the



Camp Hotel. The place was heaving; I hadn't met so many backpackers in one place before, including Judy, Suzanne and Stephen who had broken away from the Sundowners tour. The food was great too. It was the first time I had managed to have steak and chips since we left England. One of the main features of the Camp Hotel was the chillum (a funnel shaped pipe filled with hashish) that was passed around compliments of the management. Although Louis and I passed the chillum on when it

came to us we overlooked the fact that the fumes were in the air and within a short time I was stoned. It all helped me to feel a lot better and to forget the flu that I was now starting to shake off. Considering how ill I felt that morning, the day ended very well. I was still feeling ill but the

effects of the evening made me feel a lot better.

The next morning I managed to get up bright and early. I felt as though the flu had gone but I still didn't feel 100 percent. The infection had now moved down onto my chest and I had started to cough badly. We both went to the Camp Hotel for breakfast where we met most of the same crowd that had been there the night before. The ones that had been in Kathmandu for a few days were able to tell us the best things to see and how to get around. We were advised to hire bikes at a cost of 2 rupees each for the day. The place that hired the bikes was quite close to the hotel but we had to leave our passports as security before heading off to Patan which is only a few miles away. The bikes were quite old and didn't have any gears.



I reckoned that the waste paper value of the passports was worth more than the bike.



The ride to Patan was mostly downhill and we got there quite quickly. Most of the pictures in the brochures were of the temples in Patan and are shown as brightly coloured beautiful buildings. The reality was quite different with the paint peeling or just simply faded. It was quite disappointing to see them in this state, but the buildings were nonetheless interesting. On the way back we stopped at the post office to buy some stamps. It was at this point that my bike seized up completely. The only way I could

get it to move was to lift the back wheel up and half carry it. I told Louis to go off on his own while I

walked back to the hotel to return the bike. They didn't have another bike to give me so I got half of my money back.

Although I hadn't given Kathmandu as a mailing address I still went to the American Express office just in case. The office was set inside a local travel agent aptly called Yeti Travels, which was a good half-mile from the hotel. The morning's exercise coupled with the walk to and from

the Amex office seemed to have taken its toll. By now I was feeling exhausted and decided to go back to the hotel for a lie down. When Louis came back at 7.30 he woke me up. He had said that he was going to be back by 6 o'clock but as usual he was late.

That evening we again returned to the Camp Hotel for the evening meal and as usual we met a lot of fellow travellers. A guy called Fred offered to help us to find a



cheap ride back to the border. He was going the day after tomorrow which was just fine for us and so we agreed to meet him at our hotel before going off to find the ride. We then spent the rest of the evening chatting to various people before heading back to the hotel for an early night.

The next day I decided to spend in bed and try to shake off this flu bug. By now it had turned into a nasty cough and Louis managed to find a pharmacy where he bought me some cough mixture. At least we think it was cough mixture because the label was all printed in Hindi and



was unreadable to us, though it did relieve the cough a little bit. There was an epidemic of hepatitis going around Kathmandu at that time and I was beginning to think that maybe I was suffering from a little more than flu and by now Louis was also starting to feel a bit groggy too. Fortunately these fears proved to be unfounded.

While he was out, Louis managed to find a bakery that made fruit pies and for lunch he bought an apple pie and also an apricot pie. The pies were really delicious and were probably big enough to have each fed a family, though the pastry was a bit of a funny colour mainly due to the local flour not being the pure white that we are used to in England. We ordered some tea to be brought to the room and made pigs of ourselves.

That evening we went out to eat once again at the Camp hotel where we met Paul from Tehran. He was also suffering from a touch of flu. As we were going back to India the next day we decided to sell off our excess Nepalese rupees, though I was worried that we had sold off too many we were assured that the truck drivers would take Indian money if we didn't have enough Nepalese to pay with. Fred arranged to come to our hotel room at 6 am the next morning and wake us up. We needed the early start so as to get to the border early enough to catch the train to Patna. Louis was by now starting to feel even groggier and so he headed back to the hotel early. I followed on soon after and we were both asleep by 9 o'clock.

Thursday, 28th November 1968. We both managed to wake up at 6 the next morning, even though there was no sign of Fred. By the time we had finished packing he had arrived. We paid our bill and left the hotel at about 7 and walked down to the Post Office, which was opposite where the trucks for the border went from. Fred tried to find us a truck but Louis, ever on the lookout for a bargain managed to find one that would take all three of us for just 10 rupees. The ride back to India is much cheaper because it is all downhill and the lorries cruise with their engines off for most of the way. I don't think they have air brakes otherwise they wouldn't have been able to use them. (maybe they didn't)

There was a board nailed to the front of the truck which was obviously the passenger seating. We managed to get seated on it just in time before a hoard of Nepalese got on board and occupied every other space in the back that wasn't already filled with sacks or boxes. We soon realised that sitting on the seats was a mistake as the lorry moved off down the "Raj Path" and started going around the bends as the road twisted and turned. Before long we were all feeling a bit travel sick and decided that the floor was a better place. When we vacated our seats there

was a rush to take them over. We managed to find enough space on the floor to lie down out of the cold slipstream. An engine head started to slide across the floor and bumped into me but we managed to move it out of the way again and anchor it down to something else. The other Nepalese in the truck all squatted down and reminded me of monkeys by the way that they sat. We had a few delays while some landslides were cleared off the road and on one occasion we took a very precarious diversion around one very large rock that



just couldn't be shifted by the manpower that was available. I doubt that they had the machinery to come and shift it. They probably would get to work with chisels and break it up until it was small enough to move.

We eventually arrived at the border town of Birgunj at 4.30 in the afternoon. The lorry driver dropped us off about a mile from the border and we had to get a pony and trap to take us to the Indian side in Raxaul. The driver charged us 3 Indian rupees for the ride, though he did take us through both sets of passport control and customs, which in total took more than 2 hours. Just as we had finished with all the formalities we saw the truck we had come from Kathmandu in come through the border. The pony driver took us to the station where we paid him what he had asked. He tried to ask us for more but we told him what he could do with his pony.

India (Part 2)

From Raxaul to Calcutta, the long way around.

Indian currency:

Official rate:

£1 = 18 Rupees

Black market rate:

£1 = 21 to 24 Rupees

1 Rupee = 100 Paise

or

16 Anna pre decimal



From Raxaul to Goa

We enquired at the ticket office about train times and prices to Bombay. There were a number of alternative routes but we decided to go via Patna where we might be able to pick up a sleeper to Bombay. The first train on the 49-hour trip was due to depart to Sagauli in 20 minutes time. We dashed to get it and made it, though we didn't manage to say goodbye to Fred. We arrived in Sagauli later that night and made out connection even though we managed to get onto the wrong train at first. We were lucky enough to get a luggage rack so that we were able to sleep well that night.

The next morning at the time we were expecting the train to arrive at Patna, we arrived at a ferry terminal. One of the Indian passengers explained that because there wasn't a bridge over the river, the train didn't go all the way to Patna and we would have to finish the journey on the ferry. The ferry was an old fashioned paddle steamer and everybody from the train got on board. It took about an hour and a half to paddle down the River Ganges to Patna. As the boat was arriving at Patna we seemed to be invaded by dozens of men all wearing red turbans. These were porters and they all jumped on when the boat was still a few feet from the jetty and spread out among the passengers looking for business. From the ferry we caught one of the many busses that had been laid on to take us to the railway station where we found that we

had missed our connection to Bombay.

To try to pick up a connection to Bombay we caught a train leaving at 9 am for Allahabad. We spent the day on the train reading, sleeping, eating and just looking out of the window at the Indian countryside. It was fascinating to see the old-fashioned irrigation systems still being operated in the fields as well as watching Indian life go by. One of the passengers gave me a strange looking fruit called a guava. Not only had I never tasted one before, but also I hadn't



even heard of them before. It tasted very sweet, too sweet for my liking. It was also full of large hard seeds that were quite inedible, so that there wasn't very much fruit. I decided that I didn't like guavas.

By the time the train arrived at Allahabad we found that we had once again missed the connection to Bombay, which meant that we had to spend the night there and get the next train tomorrow morning. Before leaving the station we tried to book a sleeper on the Bombay train but there were none left.

We managed to find a hotel near the station at a reasonable price, but before taking the room we decided to look around a bit more. A rickshaw driver said he would take us to a hotel that was cheaper, but when we got to the hotel we found it was actually dearer than the other one, so we refused to pay for the rickshaw. We were feeling tired by now and decided to stay at this hotel anyway. The owner made us a meal and sat and chatted to us as we ate. He gave us each a hat, which he said was a ministerial hat, the sort that government ministers wore. He also turned out to be a fortune-teller and he read my palm. One thing he didn't tell me was that the hotel was full of bed bugs and the next morning both Louis and I had been bitten all over. We both had to turn our sleeping bags inside out to find the bugs in the seams, and we managed to successfully remove them all.

Before leaving the hotel we had breakfast served in our room. The owner must have liked us because he made us both a nice omelette. We paid our bill and walked to the station to get the train to Bombay. The train left Allahabad just after 11 o'clock and it was packed to the point that there was standing room only. The carriages were full with not a seat or luggage rack to be had and people also were sitting on roof as well as hanging off the train all over. I will never complain about British Rail again. We managed to find a space in the sleeping compartment where we could sit on the luggage for the rest of the day. The conductor in the sleeping car said that we could book seats after Jabalpur for 50 paise each, so we would at least be able to sit down through the night. At one stop we bought a stick of bananas, but they mustn't have agreed with Louis because shortly after he had eaten them he was sick as a dog and had to make a dash for the toilet.

At one point somebody came onto the train taking orders for food. Apparently he would get off at the next stop and phone the orders through to a catering unit at the next station along the line. We both ordered a meal, which as promised was brought onto the train further down the line. It tasted 'orrible and it was expensive too, what a waste of money.

As well as being able to buy the meals, every time the train stopped at a station it became surrounded by people selling all sorts of things to eat and drink. As the passengers were trying to fight their way onto the train, the windows were being besieged by hawkers of all description. Dozens of hands would thrust a wide variety of edibles into the carriage. The tea sellers calling out "chai, chai, chia" and the competing "copi, copi, copi" of the coffee sellers. Things that I could recognise like samosas, onion bajejes and chapatis as well as lots of other things that I didn't. The hot drinks were sold in clay cups that slowly dissolved in the liquid if you didn't drink it quickly enough. The taste of the drink also changed with every mouthful as more and more of the cup got dissolved. This also meant that like French wines that change their flavour according to the type of soil that the grapes grow in, the tea at every station has

a unique taste according to the type of clay that the cups were made from. When you finished the drink you just threw the cup out of the window and as it disintegrated it would become part of the track. When the monsoon came the clay would be washed back into the holes that it had originally been dug from, only to be recycled again the following season.

Although we had seats that night we were still not able to sleep. The carriage became flooded and we couldn't put our feet down in our sleeping bags because if we did we would get wet. Through the night I also had to run to the toilet a few times because although my stomach bug seemed to be better, I still occasionally found myself having to dash to the toilet more often than usual. Eventually somebody got off and I was able to stretch across the seat and get to sleep. Early the next morning the guy in the sleeper above got off and let me have his place. This was definitely luxury for unlike the luggage racks we had been sleeping in, this had a soft surface specially for sleeping and had some room to put the luggage.

Sunday, 1st December 1968. During the night the train had crossed into the Tropic of Cancer and the change in climate was really noticeable. The carriage became very warm and the combat jacket that I had been wearing all the time in Northern India and Nepal had to be packed away. From now on we would have to concentrate on keeping cool instead of having to dress up to keep warm. We had to wait until the train was at Bombay VT station before we

could re-pack our bags as the carriage was so crowded that we had no room to move around until some of the passengers had got off.

When we got out of the station the roads were packed with crowds of people who had all come out to watch the arrival of the cars in the London to Sydney road race. The first few cars to arrive passed us as we were walking along. At one point the crowd pushed out so far into the road that the police waded in and belted



them all with sticks to make them move back. Louis and I were right in the middle of that lot as the police hit everybody around us but left us alone, probably because we were foreigners.

I got talking to a guy who said that he was from Ceylon and was only visiting Bombay. He said he was in the Ceylon Air Force and would try to get us a ride to Colombo when he returned in a few days. His name was Gregory and we arranged to meet him later on after we had found a hotel.

The grapevine had recommended the Red Shield hotel, which is run by the Salvation Army. It was just behind the Taj Mahal hotel, which was the most expensive hotel in India. But even the Red Shield was to prove elusive. Apparently it is such good value that it is booked up for months in advance. We eventually found a hotel near VT station and although it was a right hole, it was the best we could find. It consisted of one large room that had been partitioned off into twin bedded cubicles by 10 foot high wooden screens. Although we had visible privacy, it was possible to hear everything that went on in all the other 'rooms'. The shower was a tiled room with a number of large oil drums full of water. An old margarine tin was supplied to scoop water out of the drums to throw over yourself. For that we had to pay 13 rupees per night, which was the most expensive hotel we had stayed in since we arrived in India. Though nothing like the probable cost of the Taj Mahal, it certainly put a dent in our 10 shillings a day living expenses budget and it was to be the first time since leaving home that we would exceed our daily budget.

We got dressed in our best clothes and went out to meet Gregory. He said he would be introducing us to his commanding officer to try to get us on board a plane. On the way we came across a BBC film crew who were covering the race. They had been following it by flying from city to city and were showing

severe signs of jet-lag, having slept on aeroplanes since leaving England only 10 days earlier when the race began. They were looking forward to the few days break they would be getting in Bombay while waiting for the ship to Freemantle.

We met Gregory and he told us that he was going to take us to the airport. He borrowed my lighter to light a cigarette but didn't return it again. We headed for the station and we all boarded a train without buying a ticket. Suddenly we were starting to suspect that Gregory was not what he said he was. We got off in some slum like high rise housing estate and went up to a flat on a high floor where we were introduced to a rather improbable commanding officer who couldn't stop giggling. Gregory and the "C.O." went into another room while his wife made us something to eat. It was obvious that he was a fake and we decided to leave. We thanked them very much for the meal and managed to get my cigarette lighter back from Gregory, who I think had hoped I would forget about it, because he had been showing it off in front of all his friends by conspicuously lighting cigarettes all the time.

We eventually found our way back to the centre of Bombay and back to the hotel. It was after midnight and a very hot and sticky night, the warmest one of the trip so far and we felt shattered. Despite the heat we fell asleep very quickly and slept through until after 11 o'clock.

We decided to look for another hotel and spent the next few hours going around looking for one, but everywhere we went was fully booked. We even went to the Indian Government Tourist Office who had always been helpful in the past, but even they couldn't help us. We also enquired about boats to Ceylon but although there was a ferry from Dhanushkodi, near Rameshwaram in South India, it wasn't running during December because it was being refitted. The only alternative was to fly, which was expensive and a bit out of our budget. It looks as though Ceylon is not going to be on the itinerary.

At American Express I received four letters, one from my brother Ian who was at university and had managed to get me a student card. Up to now we had both been using Louis' card. Now I

had one of my own.

In the afternoon we continued our search for a new hotel and eventually managed to find one near the Taj Mahal hotel called the Radio Club. It was an improvement on the other hotel, though it cost us 16 rupees for the first night and 14 rupees for subsequent nights, but it was worth it because the price also included breakfast.

We headed back to the old hotel to collect our



luggage and had intended to catch the bus, but on the way we were approached by a guy offering to change money on the black market at a rate that seemed to be better than most others. We decided to go with him and walked for miles, eventually ending up in a shop just near our old hotel. Once we arrived at the shop it turned out that the rate was not so good as we had been led to believe, so we didn't change any money.

At the hotel we had some tea before leaving with our luggage to go to the new hotel. This time we did catch a bus for most of the way. The hotel was very near to the Taj Mahal Hotel and the Gateway to India and was in a very posh area of Bombay. Once we had checked in we had a wash. We somehow couldn't bring ourselves to using the 'bathroom' in the other hotel.

That night we had a meal in a local restaurant where there was a jukebox. I don't know if it was in our honour or just a coincidence, but somebody kept playing the Beatles record Penny Lane. I had noticed

something that day when walking around Bombay, after all the illness of the last few weeks I suddenly felt well again. It seems strange but I did noticeably feel well.

The next morning we had the novelty of having breakfast in bed. That was not expected, but it turned out to be the hotel policy to bring breakfast to the room and it was a good breakfast too, consisting of cornflakes, toast and marmalade, omelette and tea.

We went to the Taj Mahal hotel where all the race drivers were staying in the hope of trying to contact Jack Murray, who we had met in Kabul, but we couldn't get into the hotel without a

room card, so we headed off to American Express. On the way we found a street called Steven's Street and had my photograph taken by the street sign. There was no more mail waiting for us and so we started visiting shipping offices to see if there were any ships sailing to Ceylon from anywhere else, but the answer was still the same, nothing until January.

We had a walk around the bazaar and bought five second hand books for 9 rupees. I took them back to the hotel while Louis went to find out about tours to Elephanta Island. We arranged to meet outside the Taj Mahal hotel and while I was waiting I met a guy who was sailing on the M.V. Chusan to Freemantle the next day. We chatted with him until 7 o'clock when we went back to the bazaar



to change some money on the black market. We had now run out of cash pounds and had to change travellers' cheques, which didn't give such a good rate. We managed to get 205 rupees for a £10 cheque, which wasn't too bad. We had some cake from one of the street stalls then caught the bus back to our hotel. That evening we both did some laundry before going to bed well after midnight.

After an early morning breakfast in bed we were up and out of the hotel in time to catch the 8.15 ferry to the Elephanta Caves. The ferry was really just a small boat that held about 40 or



50 people all sitting down. It took about 45 minutes to get to the caves and when we arrived we walked up the hill and paid to go in. The caves were quite pretty but it only took a few minutes to look around before we had seen everything we needed to. We found a place where we could buy some tea and biscuits and while sitting there we got chatting to a party of Bombay children who were on a school trip. There was also a party of Russians who were part of a ballet and folk dancing group who were on a world tour. They started

to feed the monkeys and we joined in using the biscuits that we had bought at the tea shop. The monkeys would come and take the bits of biscuit out of our hands and then scurry off quickly. At midday we decided that we had seen enough and went back to the boat. It was exactly 12.15 and as soon as we had climbed on board it sailed off immediately but it was almost 1.30 before we arrived back at the Gateway of India.

We then went back to the hotel to collect some mail that we wanted to post before catching the bus to the GPO. As well as letters we also posted some films back to the Kodak processing laboratory in

Hemel Hempsted and as usual we arranged for the finished films to be sent to our home addresses. We also had a parcel of travel leaflets that we had collected but it would have cost 17 rupees to send so we decided not to send it.

I then went to American Express to check if there were any new letters for us while Louis went down to the docks to find out what time the Chusan was going to sail. He saw Jack Murray going in and spoke to him for a few minutes. I arrived shortly afterwards and was just in time to see him heading towards the customs. He said hello but he was in too much of a hurry to talk to us. One of the officials who had seen us talking to him told us that we would be able to get a pass to visit him on the ship. But when we went to the office they would only give a pass to one of us, probably suspecting that we were trying to sneak on board to stow away. I was the one to get the pass while Louis chatted to John (from Tehran) who had just got off the ferry from Goa.

I went aboard about 20 minutes before the ship was due to sail and headed straight for the purser's office where I managed to change £20 worth of Sterling Area travellers cheques into cash pounds. This was something that was not possible to do on shore and the cash was enough to get both of us around the rest of India if we changed it on the black market. By this time they were announcing that visitors must get off and I headed for the exit but on the way I bumped into Jack Murray. He was talking to one of the other race driver at the time and he stopped and introduced me to him. He bought me a Coca-Cola, but I had to drink it up quickly because they were making the last call for visitors to leave. I made it to the gangplank just in time because when I reached the bottom they pulled it away from the ship and got ready to sail.

When I found Louis he was still talking to John and so we all went to have a meal together. John told us how wonderful Goa was and we decided that we would head off in that direction after Bombay. After eating we said goodbye to John and started to walk back into the centre of Bombay. On the way I went into a shop to buy some shampoo but when I came out again Louis was nowhere to be seen. Thinking he had maybe gone into another shop I waited around for 20 minutes or so before giving up and heading back to the hotel on my own. Louis arrived back about an hour later and we had a big row about him walking off and leaving me without saying anything.

The next morning breakfast arrived in the wrong order. The omelette and toast arrived before the corn flakes but thinking that it would take ages to get it changed to the correct order we decided to eat it as it came, it was still food after all. After the argument we had last night we

decided to go our own way that day. I started by going to the tourist office to find out some more about Goa and as we had decided to hitch hike, to find the best way to get out of Bombay. I then walked down to Marine Drive to take a photo of the Bombay sea front. On the way I came across a snake charmer and tried to take a photograph, but he immediately covered it up and asked for 2 rupees. We tried to haggle but he wouldn't come down in price because that is what the



American tourists paid all the time, so I didn't bother, or so he thought. I managed to push the shutter on the camera while it was still at my side. When I eventually got to look at the photos I found that it turned out quite well. I walked along the 3 mile length of Marine Drive and then caught a train back into the City Centre to go back to American Express to check my mail. There was one letter from home that had been posted only two days beforehand and was in fact a reply to the letter I had sent on the first day in Bombay. Presumably because at that time planes couldn't fly such long distances there were a number of flights to and from London each day and mail posted one day would be on the plane the next day and delivered the day after. Not a bad service!

By now I was starting to run out of clean clothes so I decided to spend the rest of the day back at the hotel doing some laundry, which seemed to be a never ending job. As I arrived at the hotel there was an American student checking in who had only just arrived in India. He was a medical student and he was on a 10-week placement with a hospital in Bombay. His name was Mordie and he was Jewish. We chatted for about an hour until Louis returned and then the three of us went out for a meal. It was Mordie's first night in India and we showed him some of the eating places that we had discovered as well as walking around and showing him some of Bombay. We returned to the hotel just after 9 o'clock because Mordie was feeling tired from all the travelling and somebody was picking him up early the next morning to take him to the hospital. By now the washing I had done that afternoon was well and truly dry so we both packed ready for an early start on the road the next day.

Friday 6th December 1968: Mordie woke us up just after 6.30 the next morning on his way out. We ordered our breakfast hoping to get out early, but as with all best laid plans not everything goes to plan. The breakfast took over an hour to arrive and it was almost 10 o'clock before we finally set out. We had been frequenting a tea stand near the hotel where we could get a good cup of tea with a bun, so we decided to have our last cuppa before getting the bus to VT railway station. We then caught the train to Thana and as seemed to be the custom in Bombay, we didn't pay our fare. At Thana we walked across the tracks to the bus stop and caught a bus that took us out to the main Poona road.

It was nice to be hitch hiking again and it was not long before we were given a lift in a jeep. The driver bought us both a Coca Cola when he stopped in a small village and eventually dropped us about 25 miles up the road. After waiting about an hour we were picked up by a lorry and climbed into the back where there were a number of passengers already. There was a woman in the back who started to shout and create. It seems that she objected to our company and so the driver stopped again and made us get off. While waiting for our next lift a couple stopped and offered to take us home for a meal. They were caretakers at a local sanatorium and they prepared us a European style meal of meat, roast potatoes and vegetables, with not a hint of curry or other spices at all.

We spent a few hours with them, then the husband took us to a nearby lorry depot and arranged for us to be taken to Poona in the back of a lorry load of milk cans that were filthy dirty. The truck stopped at a dairy to unload when we were three miles from Poona. We spent the next hour helping them to unload all the cans. We also tried to scrounge a drink of milk but without any success. When we set off again the driver offered to take us for a meal but we declined and asked him to take us to a hotel. He dropped us in a part of town where there were a lot of lodges and we managed to find a lodge for 3 rupees each but we had to share the room with two others, both Indians.

The boy at the desk was a Beatles fan and he was over the moon to have two guests from Liverpool. He spoke good English and he knew the words of all the Beatles songs except for "Hey Jude". After we had eaten in the restaurant downstairs, he asked me to listen to the record and I spent the next hour playing parts of the record over and over again while writing down the words for him. For that favour he let us put our valuables in one of the lockers free of charge.

During the night I was driven mad by mosquitoes. It was the first time we had come across them in any great numbers. All I could hear every few minutes was their whine as they flew around looking for a free meal. The next morning my face and feet were covered in bites. The desk boy gave us some tea with bread and jam as a way of saying 'thank you' for writing down the words of 'Hey Jude'

We caught a bus out of town and when we got out onto the road we soon picked up a lift in the back of a lorry for 20 miles. A car driver then stopped for us and when we told him where we were going he told us that we were heading in the wrong direction. We got the map out and he pointed to a road junction about 18 miles back where we should have turned right. We had been happily heading East to Sholapur. He said that he was going another few miles down the road and would then be heading back to Poona and if we wanted to go with him he would be happy to take us. We decided to go with him and after travelling about 10 miles he flagged down a car that was travelling in the opposite direction. It was

being driven by an Egyptian friend of his and he took us back almost to the road junction that we had missed. We had to walk about a mile to the correct road and on the way we passed a number of stalls and stopped to buy bananas, ice cream and Coca-Cola. Louis was a faster walker than me and before long he was almost 100 yards ahead of me. I called for him to wait for me but he just carried on and the gap opened up even more. We had an argument about it, shouting to each other over the ever-increasing distance. The next lift was for about 30 miles in a little Fiat car, followed by a truck that was going to Korapur. The driver of the truck dropped us in a small town just before Korapur telling us that there were no hotel in Korapur and that all the hotels were in this town. It turned out that there were no hotels at all in that town so we hitched hiked in the back of a brand new pick up truck into Korapur where we managed to easily find a cheap hotel and a nearby restaruant to have our evening meal.

The next morning we got our first lift almost immediately we had started to walk away from the hotel. It was in an old 'sit up and beg' Ford Prefect that took us to Nipani. We got our next lift within 10 minutes in the back of a lorry that took us to the start of Belgaum. We had to walk through the town and managed to get a lift as we walked. He dropped us in a small village a few miles further along the road. We had some tea and put our luggage down at the side of the road while we hitched. In India it was not uncommon to see vehicles that had no doubt been rebuilt after a crash and the front wheels didn't line up with the back ones. They seemed to travel down the road in a slightly sideways, crablike way and while we waited for a lift one such lorry came along the road with it's rear wheels set off a good few feet to the left. The driver probably was probably not able to judge his peculiar clearance and his rear wheels went straight over Louis' luggage that also had his combat jacket lying on top of it. It bent the frame, burst open the suitcase and broke the bottles of medicine that he had in his jacket pocket. (Louis suffered from a fungal infection on his hand which he needed to paint on some medicine each morning to control it). We managed to get the registration number of the lorry, but we had no way of being able to report it.

Soon after that we got a lift to a small village called Landa. By now it had got dark and we could see lots of fireflies flashing on and off all around. There was very little traffic and we decided to walk to the road junction that was only 2 miles away, but by the time we had walked a hundred yards we got a lift in the back of a crowded truck that took us to the road junction. Many years later I would read in a guide book that it was unsafe to be out in the open in this area at night because this was one of the few parts of India where there were still wild tigers.

At the junction where we had to turn off the main road towards Goa and there was a police checkpoint. We went in to report the lorry for damaging Louis' bag, but it seems that we had crossed a state border since then and we were now in Mysore State. To report the incident properly meant us having to go back up the road into Maharashtra. The problem with reporting the incident was compounded by the fact that as soon as we tried to speak to any of the policemen, they suddenly found that they couldn't speak any English. Despite this, the police routinely wrote down the registration number of every vehicle that passed the junction and we were able to check the list, but the offending lorry had not come this far.

The police helped us to get a lift on the back of a lorry load of grapefruits that was heading to Panjim. For the first part of the journey we sat on the top of the fruit, but as we neared the Goa border the evening got cooler and we started to feel cold. We had to catch a ferry over a river and after that the driver let us come and sit inside the cab, which was although warm was not at all comfortable. After a few more stops we eventually arrived in Panjim at 2230 and found a hotel for 6 rupees. We then walked around looking for somewhere to eat but it was too late and nothing was open so we had to settle for a Coca Cola and bed at 2345.

GOA - Paradise soon to be lost



Calangute Beach in 1968. Royal Hotel on the left

There was no window in the room and we slept through until after 10 o'clock. We had no intention of staying in this hotel and packed our bags before going out. Panjim was a small sleepy town with very little going for it. We went to the Post Office to see if anybody had written to us and met an American who told us that the place to go was Calangute. We went to the tourist office and found that they had some week old English newspapers, which we sat and read for about half an hour. The lady there told us how to get to Calangute and so we went back to the hotel to get our bags. On the way we stopped at the police station to try to report yesterday's accident, but once again we were told that as it had happened in a different state the local police couldn't do anything about it. They did agree to give us a note for the insurance company to prove that we had reported it.

There were no local busses and so we had to walk out of town to catch a ferry to the other side of the river. We bought a bunch of bananas to eat for breakfast and munched away as we walked along. The ferry turned out to be something that looked like an old landing craft that chugged back and forth across the river. On the other side we had to wait about 10 minutes for a taxi to come along, then we had to wait another 15 minutes for it to fill up because it wouldn't set off for Calangute until it was full. We eventually arrived at Calangute at about 3.30. There wasn't very much there at all, just a petrol pump and a square where there was a small market a few times a week. We had to walk the last half mile to the beach past all the old Portuguese villas that had probably once belonged to the merchants and their staff when they used to rule Goa. It was only a few years since the Indian Army had rolled over the border and taken the state over. Calangute was at that time pronounced 'Calangutiy' which was the Portuguese pronouncement.

When we reached the beach there was a newly built Government Tourist Hotel that was all whitewashed and quite posh looking. It was a bit out of our budget so we left the road and headed down the beach to the Royal Hotel, which was where all the backpackers were

staying.

The Royal Hotel was a small building, which was primarily a restaurant with a veranda that went all the way around. The roof was flat with stairs at the back of the hotel and on the roof were a number of charpoy. The guest rooms which were in a separate building at the back cost 4 rupees a night, but for just one rupee you could hire a charpoy and bring it down onto the veranda or into the



restaurant for the night for shelter in case it rained. We chose to share a room so that we would have somewhere safe to put our luggage. There was no electricity in the hotel and oil lamps provided the only form of lighting. As soon as we had checked in we changed into our swimming costumes and went for a swim. After our swim we sat on the veranda and had some tea and a bite to eat. It was beautiful here with the hotel right on the beach, the sound of waves



in the background, palm trees and a clear blue sky. One of the other guests was playing a guitar and was very good, which all helped to set the ambience.

After watching a really beautiful sunset, Louis and I decided to take a walk into Calangute to get something to eat for our evening meal. There was some sort of fair going on and I bought a wooden flute for half a rupee. We returned to the hotel and as we walked along the beach we tried to knock a coconut off a

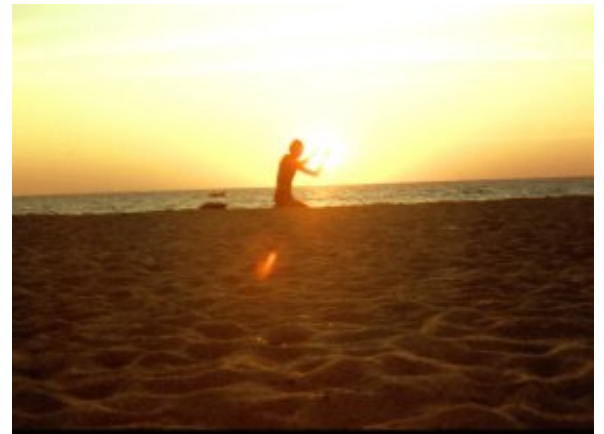
tree. We had found a low palm tree and Louis stood on my shoulders to pick one, but when we got it into our room we couldn't get it open. It turned out that it was not ripe enough to eat yet so we ended up throwing it away. We spent the rest of the evening sitting in the restaurant drinking tea and chatting to the other backpacker guests.

The next few days we spent doing just about nothing. Swimming was out because of a shoal of Portuguese Man of War jellyfish. They just looked like a load of clear plastic bags floating on the surface about a hundred yards offshore. Even though we were told the tentacles only stretched out about ten yard, nobody was prepared to go into the water to see if they reached the shore. Even so, the place was idyllic and a good opportunity to catch up on some sunbathing, reading and writing letters. I even took the opportunity to wash my sleeping bag. I expected it to take a few days to dry, but in the 100 degrees (fahrenheit) temperature, it dried in no time at all and I was able to sleep in it that night, or should I say "on" it. It was too warm to sleep under any covers.

The first morning we were there, Louis took a walk along the beach and bumped into our old friend, Laffy. Having sold his car in Pakistan, he was not short of cash and so he had opted for

the relative comfort of the Government Tourist Hotel. He often came over to the Royal Hotel for a drink or a meal, or just to sit and chat and we became quite friendly again.

The food at the Royal Hotel was good too. Lunch often consisted of fish and chips, saving the steak and chips for evening meals. One of the local delicacies in Goa was toffee peanut balls. An Indian guy used to come around to the hotel and sell them for 6 paise each. I used to eat about 15 of them every day.



Thursday 12th December 1998.

We had originally agreed to leave today, but I was enjoying the break from travelling so much, that I decided to stay a bit longer. Louis on the other hand wanted to get on with travelling around India, so we agreed to split up for the next two weeks, arranging to meet outside the G.P.O. in Calcutta on Christmas day. We both had to pack because with Louis leaving, I decided to move out of the room and sleep on a charpoy on the veranda for just one rupee a night. Louis left at about 10.30 am and I walked with him into Calangute where he got a taxi to the ferry. On the way back I got chatting to an English guy called Paul, who had just arrived and was looking for somewhere to stay. He agreed to share the room at the Royal with me. This was handy because I could now stay in the room and not have to worry about the security of my luggage.

By now the jellyfish had drifted off somewhere else and it was safe enough to go in the sea again. After the swim, I walked over to the Tourist Hotel to change a 100-rupee note for smaller change because the Royal Hotel couldn't give me any change. While there I got talking to an Indian businessman and he bought me a drink and a hamburger for lunch. We chatted for about three hours until Laffy joined us. He had left the hotel and was now renting a house near to the beach and invited us to come and visit him. I later decided to walk along the beach to his house, but I wasn't able to find it. At the North end of the beach in Baga, there was a lagoon, but no sign of the house that Laffy described, so I walked back to the hotel, which must have been almost a mile. The beach extended past the hotel for about another 10 miles or more and you could walk all day and hardly see anybody at all. Back at the hotel I found that Paul had decided to rent a house and wanted to opt out of sharing the room. The hotel manager agreed that I could stay on in the room for just two rupees a night until he needed it for somebody else.

The next morning everybody was woken up early by loud blaring music. Somebody was playing Cliff Richard "Congratulations" at full volume. It turned out to be a group of schoolchildren who had come to the beach for a party. They spent the rest of the day playing music at full volume, much to the annoyance of everybody at the hotel. One of the records they played was an Indian group singing a song that went "Down in Maharashtra..." that much to everybody's amusement finished up with the words "...we have 'swinging' Bombay".

Sleeping on the veranda was quite pleasant, even though I had been woken up one morning by two dogs apparently fighting to the death under my charpoy until the owner came out and hit them with a spade. At night I could watch the waves breaking on the beach and lying there in the moonlight with no street lights around there seemed to be more stars than I had ever seen before, as well as lots of shooting stars.

Over the next week I was to meet numerous backpackers from all over the world. Some were travelling to Europe, some to Australia, and many who were just travelling until they ran out of money, time or whatever. At this time of year a lot of the backpackers around India had decided to head to Goa for Christmas and more arrived every day.

Don Greer was from New York. He had a room to himself and let me to leave my luggage there. I offered to share with him, but he preferred to stay on his own. Don had a very dry sense of humour and we got on well together.

There was an Australian girl called Carry who was staying in a beach house. She was worried in case her cat had rabies because it had bitten her. She went to the hospital in Panjim for an injection, but they told her that cats didn't carry rabies. Don and I didn't agree with that, but she was happy.

There was a Danish couple who had driven out to India and were living in their motor caravan, which was parked outside the Tourist Hotel.

There was the retired American couple who had bought a house near the beach and had come to Goa to live.

A Canadian guy called Coke. I never found out his real name

A Canadian girl from Flin Flon, Man, who smuggled a load of hashish from Katmandu, inside tampax.

Jim, who had driven out from London and had to go to hospital with hepatitis. He had a three-legged dog called Tucker that everybody took pity on and kept it well fed.

A guy from Birmingham who had gone to France for a few days, but got a lift with somebody whom was heading east. His parents were quite surprised to get a letter from India. He decided he would carry on to Australia eventually.

A guy from Syria with whom I would have endless discussions about the Arab-Israeli situation.

And many, many more.

One of the people staying at the Royal had a battery-powered record player and lots of Donovan records. At night while we were all sitting around talking, eating and generally getting stoned, the records would be playing in the background. Now, whenever I hear the song "sunshine superman", I always remember the wonderful eight days spent at the Royal Hotel, Calangute.

Tuesday 17th December 1998.

I had decided to allow myself a week to get to Calcutta for Christmas Eve, and to travel there via Bangalore and Madras. I got up early that morning, said many goodbyes, before setting off on my travels again. I walked into Calangute to get the taxi to Betim. As the taxi trundled along the palm fringed, empty roads, I felt very sad that I was leaving. If I could have gotten in contact with Louis, I would have arranged for a delay in our meeting arrangements and stayed in Goa. As it was, I didn't know where he was, or how to get in touch with him before he got to Calcutta.

At Betim I caught the ferry over to Panjim, then started to walk and hitch at the same time. It would be 29 years before I would return with my wife to a very different Goa. (There is a separate section titled "[Goa Revisited in 1997](#)")

From Goa to Calcutta - via Bangalore and Madras

(Note: *Madras is now called Chennai*)

I soon got a lift to Ponda from an army truck full of milk churns. The next lift took me about 10 miles and dropped me in the middle of nowhere, followed quickly by a covered jeep that took me over the border out of Goa, to a village where there was a police checkpoint. I managed to tear my shirt quite badly while getting out of the back. The shirt was a write off, so I had to open my bag to get a new one out. The next lift was in an empty bus. The driver wouldn't accept any fare from me because he was taking the bus to the terminus at Londa, from where I was able to catch a train. I could have caught a train from Marmagoa in Goa, but I didn't have a timetable and decided that it was quicker to hitch out of the state and catch a train on the main line. The road to Maramgoa would have required travelling on more taxis and yet another ferry.

At Londa I tried to get a student concession, but they were not able to issue them there. I was told that I could get the concession forms at Hubli, about 50 miles away. So I bought the only full fare ticket I would pay for in India, only to find that the ticket office had just been painted and I got wet paint all over my arm and watch. The "wet paint" warning signs were in fact prominently displayed, but as they were in Hindi, I hadn't been able to read them.

While waiting for the train to arrive I spent the time trying to wash off the paint and managed to get most of it off before the train arrived. As I was getting on to the train, I met a French girl called Monica. She was also travelling to Hubli to get a student concession. Unlike most other Indian trains, this one was not very full and we managed to find a compartment with two seats. We spent the journey trying to converse in a mixture of English and French, as well as a smattering of assorted other languages when we couldn't find a commonly understood word in one of our own tongues. My French is not very good; neither was her English, but we managed. Monica had a wonderful sense of humour and we laughed most of the way to Hubli. The journey went very quickly.

By the time we arrived in Hubli the concession office was closed and we were unable to get our student concession until the next morning. Rather than hang around we decided to hitch hike the rest of the way to Bangalore. We had a Coca-Cola in the station restaurant, then walked out of town to start hitching. As we walked a group of children started to follow us and each time we stopped more children joined

them. Even though we tried to hitch hike, not surprisingly no vehicles stopped for us. They must have thought we were the Pied Pipers of Hubli heading off to the hills with all the local children following us.

Eventually while we were stopped having a drink, a Chinese man came over to us. He had watched us walk up the road with our entourage and decided to take pity on us. It turned out that he was Tibetan, there were two of them working in India and they gave us a lift in their jeep for about 20 miles to a roadside restaurant. We thanked them for rescuing us from the children and said our goodbyes. We decided to have something to eat at the restaurant that was run by Sikhs. We had a meal of chapati and daal, followed by rice pudding. This was something new for me for Indian cuisine, but the Sikhs had made it for themselves and gave us a bit. By the time we had eaten it was almost 11 o'clock. It had been a long day and we were both very tired. It must have showed because the Sikhs offered to let us sleep on some charpoys on the restaurant veranda free of charge. They took our bags inside for safekeeping and we settled down for a night under the stars.

I slept that night like a log. I must have been very tired because the next thing I knew it was morning. Monica was still fast asleep and I had to wake her up when the Sikhs brought us an egg sandwich with some tea for breakfast. The Sikhs wouldn't accept any money for the food or bed and even offered to let us stay with them for Christmas, but none the less, I decided to push on. We were packed and on the road by 7.30 and within 15 minutes we had got a lift in a truck going to Bangalore, that the Sikhs arranged for us. At first the driver asked us for money to take us to Bangalore, but when we refused to pay he said he would take us anyway.

After a few hours travelling we stopped for tea and everybody at the tea stall admired my divers watch and one man tried to buy it for 20 rupees. I decided to decline his offer. The journey was long and boring, the truck rarely exceeding 25 MPH. It was an unseasonably cold day and we were both freezing cold. I had to unpack a pullover and lend my combat jacket to Monica to keep her warm. It was a good opportunity to snuggle together. Just outside Bangalore the truck had a puncture and I helped them to lift the spare tyre down from the roof of the cab. The punctured tyre was completely bald, but the spare tyre was even worse. It had a big repair in the sidewall, which was held together with metal plates, and had bits of canvas showing through.

It was after 10 pm by the time we arrived at the truck's depot in Bangalore. We thanked the driver and took a cycle rickshaw to the station. We had been advised to stay in the railway retiring rooms, but they were too expensive, so we walked down the road and managed to find a lodge. The owner spoke good English and took us both out for a drink of tea. It was almost midnight by the time we got back to the room and we both fell asleep quickly.

The next morning the owner woke us up at 8.30 by bringing us coffee to the room. We chatted to him for a while and he told us the train times to Madras and what to see around Bangalore. We had some breakfast downstairs in the hotel restaurant and then headed off to the station to get the student concession. We filled in the forms, then the official who dealt with us told us to return at 4pm to collect the concession authority. There were two trains to Madras that day. One at 2 pm and an overnight train that left at 9 pm. We had hoped to get the 2 pm train, but as the concession wouldn't be ready in time we decided to catch the overnight train. We had to check out of the hotel so we took our bags to the station and put them into the left luggage. I then went off to get a haircut, while Monica went off on her own.

At 1 pm I decided to check the station to see if the concessions orders were ready, they were. Because I was using my brother's student card (slightly altered) the concession form read "Mr. Steven Abrams, foreign student at London School of Economics, member of the British Student's Union".

This meant that we could now catch the 2 pm train to Madras, but there was one problem, I was not due to meet Monica until 3 pm. If I could find her in time we could catch the earlier train. I started to look for her by walking around, but she obviously wasn't going to the same places as me. Eventually it started to rain so I went back to the station and sat on the platform to wait for her. She turned up at 3 pm

prompt and we both went to buy the tickets. My ticket right through to Calcutta cost just 23 rupees. Not a bad price for a 1500 mile journey. The man in the ticket office told us the carriage numbers and where we could find them, so we could walk out to the siding and claim a luggage rack. We walked out along the tracks to the siding and found the carriages with the numbers we had been told, but they were locked and we couldn't get on. Back in the station the same ticket office clerk then told us where the train would come in and at what time we should be on the platform to meet it.

By now it was pouring with rain outside and it looked set in for quite a while. We decided to stay in the station restaurant. Monica went to get some tea and managed to get some cake to go with it. I tried to explain the English currency to her. At the time we still used Pounds, Shillings and Pence (£sd). She had never been to England and didn't realise how complicated the money system was. While waiting we met a French couple who had been in Calangute. Monica chatted to the girl in French for a while I talked to her husband. He was telling me that they always travelled on the Indian trains in the Purdah (women only) compartment because there was plenty of room. They got on early before anybody else and got into their sleeping bags and went to sleep. I asked him what would happen if they found him and he said that once he is tucked up in his sleeping bag nobody could tell what sex he is. I wished him luck, but I dread to think what they would do to him if he were caught.

The train eventually came in just where the ticket office clerk said it would. The doors were still locked but we were able to climb through the windows and claim a pair of luggage racks to sleep for the night. I left Monica to keep our places while I went to get some tea for us both. I had to go out of the station to find somewhere open and bumped into a boy from Birmingham. He was the one I had met in Goa who had originally set out for a short holiday in France. He had just arrived in Bangalore and was intending to stay for a few days to look around. Back at the train we settled down for the night on our respective luggage racks. All the long distance Indian trains I had travelled on so far had fans mounted on the ceiling. I had yet to see any of these fans working, and the ones in this train were no exception. As I always did, I tied my shoelaces together and hung my shoes over the fan at night while I slept. In the middle of the night there was a terrible commotion in the carriage that woke me up. During the night the fans had started running and my shoes were flung across the carriage, "kicking" a number of people in their travels. The people they had hit were startled and had shouted out and everybody was trying to find out who's shoes they were. When I claimed them they were very angry and shouted at me in their own language, which I didn't understand at all. Eventually things settled down and I went back to sleep again.

The train took all night to get to Madras as it chugged slowly through the Travadi Hills. There was a brief stop at Vellore where the usual bedlam of people getting on and off the train briefly woke me up. By now I had got used to the sound of fifty yelling and shouting people all trying to battle through the same narrow door all at once and I soon went back to sleep again. In our carriage there were bars across the windows, so at least nobody was able to climb in that way.

Early the next morning we arrived in Madras. Despite the occasional disturbance I had managed to have a good night sleep on the train and felt quite refreshed, though in need of a good wash. Monica on the other hand was feeling like a rag. I think it was the first time she had travelled overnight in India and she hadn't been very happy on the luggage rack. She hadn't managed to get any sleep that night and all she wanted to do was find somewhere to flop down and close her eyes for a few hours. After I had put my luggage in the station left luggage office, I went to find a hotel for her. Although she spoke some English, her French accent was not easily understood by the Indians, so I did the talking for her. I found her a hotel not far from the station and she immediately lay on the bed and went straight to sleep. While she slept I used her bathroom to take a much-needed shower.

Feeling refreshed from the shower, I left Monica to sleep for the day and headed off to find the GPO to collect my mail. Madras post restante was my first mail collection point since Bombay and I was looking forward to hearing some news from home. It was quite a disappointment when as soon as I handed over my passport the post restante official told me that there was no mail for me. I asked him how he knew without first looking in the A box. He replied that there was nothing at all in the A box,

nor for that matter in the S (for Steven) box. I leaned over the counter to have a look and saw that there was hardly any mail at all in any of the boxes in the foreign mail section except for one box, which seemed to be overloaded. I asked what box that was and was told it was the M box. Nearly all the mail was for people with a surname beginning M, which I found hard to believe. I persuaded him to let me look through some of the M mail, only to find that anything addressed to Mr. Mrs. Miss Mme. Mlle, etc had been put in M box. That meant that more than 90% of the letters were totally wrongly allocated. I pointed this error out to him and fortunately he accepted my explanation. We spent the next half-hour or more sorting out the foreign mail into the correct boxes. Apart from all the mail in the M box, there was also another box full under the counter. Lo and behold, when we had finished there were three letters for me, which made all the effort worthwhile.

Outside the GPO I met an Indian gentleman who had been in the same compartment on the train the night before. He asked me to join him for breakfast and when I agreed he called a taxi to take us to the sea front, where we had a large breakfast in one of the beach front cafes. Parked outside the cafe was a Volkswagen camper van bearing the usual oval German Z number plates. Part way through the breakfast the two occupants of the van came into the cafe for their breakfast and sat at the next table. They were from New Zealand and were driving home and were in Madras to get the ferry across to Penang. We all chatted for about half an hour, then went down to the beach for a paddle. Considering that we were well inside the Tropic of Cancer and only about 750 miles from the equator, I was quite surprised to find that the water was cold. We had a short walk along the beach before saying goodbye and thank you to the Indian gentleman.

Prohibition was in force in a lot of Indian states, and Madras was one such "dry" state. In most of these states it was possible for foreigners to register as alcoholics and receive a permit to buy up to two bottles of liquor per day from specially licensed shops. The Government of India Tourist Office issued the liquor permits, which was my next call. In exchange for one passport photograph I was declared an alcoholic and received my permit. I had been given the address of a shop near the YMCA where the owner would pay to use my permit, which is where I went to straight from the tourist office. The shop owner took me to the liquor shop and bought two bottles of whiskey on my permit, for which he paid me 16 rupees.

After making some money I decided to celebrate by buying myself a bar of Cadbury's chocolate for 50 paise. It was the first chocolate bar I had eaten since leaving England and it was a disappointment. Although it was Cadbury's chocolate, it tasted nothing like the chocolate in England. It was later explained to me that it had to be made to a different recipe to prevent it from melting in the heat of the Indian climate. If they used the same recipe as in England, it would just turn to liquid. Many years later I would be able to prove this theory when I was given a bar of Cadbury's chocolate with an airline meal on the way to Goa. I didn't eat it at the time but kept it for later. When I removed the bar from my hand luggage in the hotel in Goa it would have been possible to drink the contents.

I then caught the bus to the railway station to arrange for a student concession permit for the train to Calcutta that night. Even though I already had a ticket to Calcutta, I figured that I may be able to sell the concession to somebody. While I was there I met a New Zealander (Kiwi) called Charles who with his wife Jenny, was also hoping to get the same train. The concession permit would not be ready for a few hours, so we decided to use the time to go and have a meal together. When we went back to collect the concessions I noticed that my concession was made out to Mr and Mrs Abrams. The official issuing them seeing that the Kiwi was asking for permits for him and his wife must have also assumed that I also had a wife travelling with me. When I pointed out the mistake he told me that although the concession was for two, there wouldn't be any problems buying a ticket for only one person.

I then went back to the hotel to say goodbye to Monica. She was heading off to Pondicherry, a former French colony some 50 miles south of Madras. Like the Portuguese in Goa, the French had now gone away, but all the French travellers seemed to head that way though it didn't seem to hold the same attraction to other nationalities. When I got to the hotel, Monica had gone out to get something to eat after having slept all day. I left a goodbye note for her and went back to the station to get my luggage

and catch the train to Calcutta.

At the ticket office there was an Australian guy also wanting to travel to Calcutta. He didn't have a concession form so I offered to buy his ticket on my form, thus saving him 50% of the fare. In exchange he agreed to buy me some food and drinks on the train up to the value of the saving. We then went to the platform for the train and met Monica. She had read the note and had hurried to the station to say goodbye. She was all dressed in frills and ribbons and looked totally out of place. Even the Indians, who were used to seeing hippies dressed in strange clothes, turned to stare at her. The Kiwi couple were also there and we all found a carriage together. Although there were people sitting in the seats already, they were squatters who had claimed the seats earlier in the day so as to be able to sell them to travellers. I had been warned about them in advance and was told that the going rate was 50 paise per seat. The initial asking price was twenty times that amount, and being foreigners the price didn't drop very much at all until the five of us physically removed the squatters from the seats. At first we refused to pay them anything and they hung around us almost until departure time, when they were glad to receive the 50 paise going rate. Monica stayed with us until the train left. As the train pulled out at the start of its 50-hour journey, she walked alongside waving to me until the train gathered speed and she was left behind. I do hope she made it safely to Pondicherry.

The train was packed and that night we all had to sleep sitting upright, which is something I have never been able to do for long. The other three seemed to be happy sleeping upright and slept for most of the night. It was also freezing cold. The window was jammed open and nothing I could do would shift it. As I had the window seat facing direction of travel, the slipstream blew in on me all night. Even with a pullover on I couldn't get warm. Jenny and Charles snuggled up to each other to keep warm, but although the Aussie guy was sitting next to me, somehow I didn't feel like snuggling up to him at all. The next morning the Indian guy in the luggage rack above got down and let me sleep in it for the day. In fact I slept right through until almost 4 pm when a man got on carrying loads of parcels and proceeded to hold an auction sale right in the middle of the carriage. I don't know what on earth he was selling, but business was certainly brisk.

As the train was slowing down on the approach to Vishakhapatnam everybody seemed to come to life. Somebody shouted something out and suddenly people were jumping down from the roof of the moving train. Passengers were throwing luggage out of the window and climbing out after it. All hell seemed to be breaking loose. Everybody was shouting in their own language and I was beginning to think that maybe I should also be considering abandoning train. The only reason I didn't was because some other people were sitting it out and seemed to be laughing themselves silly. When the train finally pulled into the station the reason became obvious. The platform was lined with ticket inspectors. It was a raid. I have already said that most passengers in India don't bother to buy a ticket. These were the ones that had jumped off. The train now seemed quite empty as the inspectors moved through the carriages checking the tickets of the remaining passengers. They did remove a few protesting people who were either deaf, blind, or too infirm to jump from a moving train. Afterwards, as the train pulled out of the station to continue the journey, it slowed down briefly to allow all the evacuees to climb back on. Having walked around the station they were waiting en masse at the trackside to re-board.

Sunday 22nd December 1968

As the journey progressed and people got off there was a little more room to be able to stretch out on the second night and get a bit of sleep. It was still not ideal though and I was glad when



we eventually arrived a mere two hours late at 11.15 am into Calcutta's Howrah station. I said goodbye to Jenny and Charles and went to find some transport into Calcutta. Howrah station is on the other side of the Hooghly River to Calcutta just the other side of a large metal bridge called the Howrah Bridge. It was a bit further than I would want to walk after a not too good night's sleep. A rickshaw driver offered to take me over the bridge into Calcutta for 1 rupee and I accepted, thinking it would be one of the usual cycle rickshaws that I

had seen everywhere else in India. The rickshaw turned out to be one of those that are pulled by the driver. The poor man struggled through the traffic, almost coming to a stop trying to pull the thing up the slight hill leading to the brow of the bridge, and struggling just as hard on the other side to stop the rickshaw from running him over.

Eventually my conscience got the better of me and I called him to a stop at Chitpoor Road, near the Nakhoda Mosque, and paid him his rupee. After a short walk I found the Rajasthan Guest House where I was able to get a dormitory bed for just 3 rupees a night

Having hardly slept for the last few days, I immediately lay down and slept for a few hours.



The other people in the dormitory were all travellers like myself, and later in the day I got chatting to a Jewish boy from Paris. Together with two German guys, we went out to find somewhere to have a bite for lunch. One of the Germans had to leave early to go to Howrah station to catch a train, so we decided to go to the station to eat. While seeing the German off we met a group of Americans who had been working in Malaysia for the last two years. We all chatted for a few hours before catching the tram back to the hotel. That evening I went out with the remaining German and the French guy to eat. I showed them the way to make rice pudding by ordering a plate of rice and a glass of hot milk, then adding sugar. It made for a cheap meal and was a welcome break from some of the spicy Indian food I had been eating lately.

As we arrived back at the hotel there was a black South African family just checking in. The two daughters were beautiful and the Frenchman started to chat them up straight away.

Although I had arranged to meet Louis outside the GPO in Calcutta at noon on Christmas day, I had arrived a few days early, but just in case Louis had also arrived early I decided to make the first rendezvous at noon on Monday 23rd December. Louis wasn't there, so I decided to leave a letter for him both at the GPO post restante and at American Express to tell him where I was staying, in case he arrived at any other time and checked his mail first.

I then went to various airlines to check the flights out of Calcutta. We had effectively reached the end of the road here. Although it was possible to travel up to East Pakistan (now called Bangladesh) it was very difficult to get the permits to do so. Even if we did go that way, the road through Burma was not passable and anyway, the border was closed. It was just not possible to visit Burma as a tourist at that time. The only exception was if we were to fly to Bangkok with Union of Burma Airways (UBA). They didn't have a direct flight and we would have to make a connection in Rangoon. If we flew out on the Tuesday or Sunday flight, the connection was the next day and the airline would put us in a Rangoon hotel overnight as long as we had a transit visa. UBA would also give a 25% student discount, but instead of the hotel you would have to sleep in the airline office or pay for a hotel yourself.

With that in mind I went to the UBA office in Chowringi. It was well hidden, down an alley and up some stairs, but they confirmed the information I had been given. To get a student discount though, I would need a letter from my college or university, or get the British High Commission to issue a letter confirming my student card was genuine. Unfortunately the British High



Commission in Calcutta had been inundated with travellers asking for such letters and had a notice outside the consular office saying they would make a two pounds charge for the letters and payment had to be made in sterling. If we wanted to pay in rupees we would have to provide a bank receipt to prove that they had not been bought on the black market. Airlines also wanted payment for international flights in a similar way. Needless to say, I hadn't changed any rupees officially the whole time I was in India.

In Lou's absence I decided that UBA was going to be the way out of Calcutta. The fare was US\$84, or \$63 with student discount. I provisionally booked 2 seats on the flight for the following Sunday. We could buy the tickets as late as the day before. I then went to the Burma Embassy to apply for a visa. The visa cost 15.75 rupees, and required two passport photos. I filled in the form was told to come back to collect it in two hours time because the consul was at lunch.

Somewhere on my travels I had lost the flashgun from my camera. It was quite an expensive unit and it was insured. To be able to claim I would have to get a police report to prove that I had reported its loss. While waiting for the visa I visited the Calcutta police. They gave me a receipt to prove that I had reported it. Now all I needed to do is find a Prudential Insurance Company office to make the claim. I decided to leave it until either Singapore or Australia. If I claimed in India I would probably be paid out in rupees that I wouldn't be able to exchange for foreign currency. And speaking of currency, I changed £1 for 21.5 rupees with a man standing on a corner in Chowringe.

I went back to the hotel and tried to write a letter home. The German I had been speaking to yesterday was just leaving to catch his flight to Bangkok. He was going with Thai International, who also gave a student discount, and stopped in Rangoon, but you couldn't leave the airport if you flew with them. They did give all their passengers a nice flight bag and a pair of slippers to wear on the plane. In the 1960's it was not uncommon for airlines to give free flight bags and gifts to passengers.

There was a new guy in the dormitory that spoke with a broad Birmingham accent. Strangely enough he turned out to be an Australian who had been working in Birmingham for a while and managed to pick up the accent. He was going shopping for a mosquito net, so I decided to abandon the letter writing and join him. We went to the market where I managed to get a good net for just 6.75 rupees. It was like a tent made from net curtains, with a tag to fasten a string at each corner so it went around the bed in a rectangle, not the circular type that hangs from a single hook. Apart from when I was in Poona, mosquitoes hadn't effected me much until Calcutta, where I had been bitten a few times during the previous night. That situation was soon to change and the mozzey net was probably to be one of the most important pieces of kit that I carried. On the way back from the market I bought a bag of crisps to eat. I think they must have been chilli flavour or something like that, for they were red hot and by the time I had eaten a few of them I felt as though steam was coming out of my ears. Needless to say I didn't finish the pack.

Back at the hotel I met Fred, the Australian owner. He had been living in Calcutta for more than 30 years. I had found that hotel by accident, but it was one of the hotels that were recommended on the "grapevine". He had a list of places to stay all along the route, some of them I had stayed in already. He

gave me a card for hotel to stay in Bangkok and I took details from him for other places along the proposed route. In the dormitory I erected the mosquito net for the first time. It felt strange sleeping in it. I must have looked like an animal in a cage and it did keep the mozzys off me that night, but it also had the effect of keeping the bed bugs in. It seems that the bed I was sleeping in was one that was infested with them. During the night I found a few of them on the inside of the net and decided to move to another empty bed in the middle of the night.

The next day a few of us carried the offending bed bug ridden bed to one of the empty rooms that was open and swapped it for a bug free bed. A number of guests had left early to catch the Bangkok plane. I sat around and read until it was time to go to the GPO to see if Lou had arrived. He wasn't there, but I managed to find a piece of chalk and scrawled a message for him on the wall in case he arrived later. I tried to phone Ashok Agarwal, the Indian boy we had met in Salzburg and travelled with to Zagreb. I couldn't get through at first, and then I got a wrong number - twice, before giving up. I had a long walk around Calcutta before returning to the hotel. That night I slept under the net and the mozzys stayed outside, and there were no bed bugs inside.

Christmas Day 1968.

There was a new guy in the dorm, a Liverpudlian no less. His name was John. There was also two more Scousers, Alex and Mike, staying in one of the rooms upstairs. (Scouser is another name for people from Liverpool). Alex and Mike had found a bakery that was open where they made fresh bread that tasted delicious. They had managed to find some Irish butter and some cheese. I had not come across any of these things since leaving England and it made a strange but enjoyable Christmas dinner. As soon as we had finished the loaf, Mike and Alex headed off to the airport to catch the plane to Bangkok. I would come across these two many times over the coming years. I even worked with Mike for many months in Darwin, Australia, and visit him and his new wife in Tokyo. Alex I would meet in Darwin, Sydney and eventually bump into a number of times back in Liverpool.

John was going to the Indonesian Embassy and he walked with me to the GPO, and this time Lou was there. Even though he was standing right in front of the chalked message, he had not noticed it on the wall. John went on to the Embassy, and Lou came back to the hotel with me. We spent the afternoon washing our dirty clothes, which in Lou's case was just about everything. In the evening we went out with John for a Tibetan curry, which was much nicer than an Indian curry. On the way back to the hotel we saw a fight, and joined the crowds that stood around watching it. We bought a large fruit cake and back at the hotel we ordered some tea and invited Fred to join us.

Early the next morning a lorry came down the street, but it was no ordinary lorry. In Calcutta and all over India there are people who live on the streets. In fact you can sometimes see whole families living on the street. At least they don't have the cold weather of Europe to deal with. Occasionally I would see somebody who I thought was asleep with their blanket pulled up over their heads and tucked in tight, with a begging bowl beside them. I often wondered how they managed to tuck themselves in so well before going to sleep, but dismissed any further thought because India is a truly wondrous country and people do many strange things. What I hadn't realised was that these were street people who had died. They were wrapped up and a bowl placed beside them to collect for their cremation. One of these had appeared outside the hotel the day before and this lorry had come to collect him. Two of the men from the lorry lifted the body into the back while the driver collected the begging bowl. At this moment somebody ran down the street and snatched the bowl with the collected money out of the driver's hands, then ran away. The three men from the lorry got into a huddle to discuss what to do. They then climbed into the back of the lorry and lifted the body down again. Another bowl was placed beside him and the lorry drove off. At this moment Fred came running out of the hotel and chased the lorry down the street. Because there are people teeming all over the road, traffic moves very slowly in the side roads and he was able to catch them up without too much difficulty. He then had a heated discussion with them. He was concerned that if the body were left much longer in the heat of the day it would start to smell. Eventually a price was agreed so Fred paid for the cremation and the lorry came back to collect the body again.

After the excitement, Lou and I went to Amex to check mail. Lou had asked his father to post him some of the anti fungal medicine he used to paint on his finger. At Amex there was a demand for Lou to pay a huge sum in customs duty. We then had to go to the customs department at the GPO to sort it all out. Eventually we managed to persuade them to cancel the duty as it was essential medicine and that we were taking it out of India again in a few days. We got the necessary form to give to Amex so they could release it. On opening the parcel we found that Lou's dad had transferred the medicine from a glass bottle to a plastic one that was lighter and wouldn't get damaged in the post. What he hadn't realised was that the medicine would dissolve the plastic bottle, rendering the contents of the parcel into a solid blob of plastic goo. Lou was distraught. He suffered badly from this fungal infection and the medicine was the only thing that seemed to keep it under control. In fact once he stopped using the medicine, within a short time the finger flared up quite badly, then got better again and never gave any more trouble.

Next we started to head to the Burmese Embassy to get Lou's visa. On the way we saw the Land Rover boys from Lahore. They gave us a lift to the embassy, explaining on the way that they were headed back to Kathmandu to sell the Land Rover. The high cost of shipping it on from India had proved too much and they decided to sell up, share the proceeds and split up once the Land Rover had been sold. When they were in Kathmandu a few weeks before there was no shortage of buyers for Land Rovers and they felt confident of getting a fair price.

After Lou applied for his visa, we went back to the hotel. It was too late to get one the same day and he was told to come back the next day. Now we had to find a letter for UBA, and we didn't want to pay the price asked by the British High Commission. We asked Fred at the hotel for advice and he took me around to a local printer. In no time we had designed a letterhead for the Liverpool College of Art (I had attended there a few years earlier) and agreed a price of 8 rupees. We returned later that day to collect 20 beautifully thermographed letterheads and when the owner found out that I was a printer; he gave me a guided tour of his print shop. He also gave me a 2 rupee "trade" discount, so we only had to pay 6 rupees. Fred then lent us a typewriter that must have come out of the ark, and I typed a letter each for Lou and I saying that we were both students.

When we left England we had been told that Indonesia did not issue tourist visas and that we would either have to sail or fly once we got to Singapore. John had told us that Indonesia were shortly to start issuing visas for tourists, which meant that the overland route could be taken to within 400 miles of Australia. If we could get across to Indonesia we could island hop down the archipelago to Timor and fly the last bit into Darwin. We tried to phone the Indonesian Embassy to enquire, but as soon as I asked about a visa the person at the other end rudely just put the

phone down without saying a word.

We had become friendly with the South Africans upstairs, and they were leaving the next day. The two girls asked to take our photographs and we went outside. We also took their photos and while I was taking the photograph of them, a bullock cart came along the road and sent me flying. The girl's father took a photo of me being knocked over, but I have never seen it. There was no damage or injuries caused.



Later that evening we went back to the Tibetan restaurant for a meal. John and I decided to go to the pictures to see Hurry Sundown, while Lou went off to do his own thing. We bought a loaf of bread to eat during the film. It was after midnight before we got back to the hotel, but Lou didn't get in until

much later. I don't know where he had been. Calcutta tends to sleep at night. It is not a city renowned for its nightlife.

The next morning Lou had diarrhoea. I went to the Burmese embassy to collect his passport, but they wouldn't give it to me without a letter of authority from Lou. So back to the hotel where Lou wrote me the letter. He also signed over a £25 traveller's cheque to pay for the UBA plane fare. The Burmese embassy gave me the passport and I went to UBA to buy the tickets. They wouldn't accept the traveller's cheque, but insisted on rupees and a bank receipt. So off I toddle to Amex to change the traveller's cheques. At Amex they asked what I wanted to cash the cheques for and when I told them they issued a banker's draft in rupees to UBA and a foreign exchange bank receipt. I then took this back to UBA who were not at all happy because Amex had deducted travel agents commission from the cheque. They still issued the tickets and accepted the letters from the College.

When I got back to the hotel Fred was waiting for me. He had some Jewish friends in Calcutta and they had asked Lou and I to come and visit them. He took us for miles on the tram and we



had a wonderful evening. Being Friday night they had lit candles for the Sabbath. We suggested that it would be nice if we went to the Synagogue the next morning, but apparently the service starts at first light. By the time we had got up it would have all been over. As we didn't know where the Synagogue was and nor did we feel like getting up so early, we decided to give it a miss. The trams had stopped running when we left them so we had a one hour walk back to the hotel. On the way we walked up Chowringi and saw some busses going along

empty. During the day there are so many people hanging on to the left side of the bus that they all travel along permanently leaning to the left. The same busses travelling empty at night lean to the right because of the strengthened springs on the left. Back at the hotel Fred found that he had forgotten his key and the door had been locked. We banged on the door and John let us in. There had also been two new arrivals while we had been out. Doug from Australia, and Colin from London.

In the morning we made one final check of Amex, but there was no mail for us. We then went around a number of pharmacies to see if Lou could get his medicine, but it was not available in India. Somebody had told us that we needed a permit to enter Australia and that it was free in India because it was a Commonwealth country, but that if we applied in Thailand it would cost \$20. We were looking for the Australian High Commission when an Indian in a chauffeur driven car stopped and asked us where we were looking for. He gave us a lift to the Australian High Commission, but it was closed. He then went into a shop and made a number of phone calls to try to find out for us, but being a Saturday he couldn't get any information.

We then tried to look up Ashok and managed to find his home, but he was not in. His mother said he would be home in half an hour so we walked around the area for a while before going back again. He was still not in when we returned but his mother invited us in for to wait. After waiting for nearly an hour we decided to give up.

We went to the market to buy Lou a mozzly net and at the same time I bought two shirts for 6.5 rupees. We each changed £6 on the black market, getting 22.5 rupees to the pound. We had heard that at the airport we could change up to \$12 worth of rupees back without a bank receipt. I then left Lou to shop for a sari to send to his girl friend in England, while I returned to the hotel.

When Lou returned at 8.30, John, Colin, Doug, Lou and myself all went out for our final meal at the Tibetan restaurant. Afterwards when we went back to the hotel, Colin got out his guitar

and played for us. I joined in some tunes with my flageolet and Lou managed to find a chamber pot which he played like a drum. Doug got out his mouth organ and before we knew it, we had a band. We decided to go outside in our bathing costumes and entertain the locals and although we attracted a large crowd, when we handed the hat around we didn't collect a thing. A group of Sikhs invited us to come and play in their cafe and we got a good round of applause. It was after 2 am before we finally went to bed.



Sunday 29th December 1968.

After the night before I don't know how we managed it, but at 6 am we got up and packed. We paid our bill and said goodbye to Fred. Louis left just before 7 because he wanted to walk to the UBA office. I didn't leave until 7.20 and caught the tram. We both arrived at the UBA office at the same time from opposite directions. We both checked in and then went to get some breakfast, returning at 8 to catch the bus to the airport.

Dum Dum is Calcutta International Airport. At the time it was about the same size and a similar design to Liverpool Speke Airport. As we had already checked in at the airline office we were able to go straight through into the departure lounge where we could change our remaining rupees back to dollars at the official bank rate. As a result I made a \$4 profit, having bought them on the black market. I did have a bit of trouble at passport control because I had grown a beard since my passport was issued and the photo didn't show a beard.

Our travelling companions for the flight were a group from England who had travelled out to Calcutta on an organised tour in a converted army truck and they seemed very friendly. They had paid the full fare and were spending the night in the Orient hotel in Rangoon. One of them had a short wave radio and we were able to listen to the BBC World service news. The news was all about Britain being swept by blizzards. Because of the time difference most people at home were still in bed (5.30 am) and didn't yet know about the weather that they were going to wake up to. I couldn't help feeling that here I was sitting in Calcutta airport and I knew about the snow before my parents. I could just imagine my father in the morning digging out his car before setting off to work, and the usual problem of having to also dig out the neighbours

cars that would get stuck in the middle of the road so he could get passed. Ho hum!

The plane was a Vickers Viscount, a turbo prop, and it took off about half an hour late. We had a good view of mouths of the Ganges as the plane headed out across the Bay of Bengal en-route to Rangoon, passing close to Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar in East Pakistan.

Soon after take off we were served a meal which could either be a late breakfast or early lunch. It was an omelette with all sorts of vegetables. We also had an English language newspaper to read all about the snow back home. I spent the rest of the flight writing a letter home.

Burma

Burmese Currency:

Official rate: US\$1 = 5 Kyat

Black Market US\$1 = 10 Kyat

Equivalent to sterling £1 = 12 Kyat / 24 Kyat



Sunday 29th December 1968

We landed in Rangoon at 13.30 local time, which is an hour ahead of Indian time and six and a half hours ahead of England. Although customs at Rangoon went through the luggage with a fine tooth-comb, none of us were really sure what they were looking for. Everybody on the plane was thoroughly searched, but it was efficient and we had completed all formalities within half an hour of landing.

We all travelled in to Rangoon on the airline bus, which took us to the U.B.A. office. We were going to spend the night in the office, but the others who had paid full fare were taken to a hotel. Three of them were in the Orient hotel, which was just around the corner, and two girls were taken to the Strand Hotel, which was a bit further away. Why they split them up we don't know. We left our luggage in the office and headed off to the Orient Hotel to meet the others.

It felt strange walking through Rangoon. After the teeming masses of Calcutta, the city seemed deserted by comparison. We also realised that because tourism to Burma was not possible at that time, the group of us who had arrived on that flight were probably the only tourists in the country, even though we were only on a 24 hour transit visa. It also felt good to be able to walk along the tree lined streets without being hassled by beggars or people trying to sell things.

We needed to get some Burmese money and decided to ask a rickshaw driver where we could change some. He told us to get on board and while he took us around to the Orient Hotel, we agreed to change one U.S. dollar for 10 kyats, which was double the official bank rate. When we got out of the rickshaw we paid the driver the dollar and he gave us the 10 kyats as change. The fare was complimentary.

The Orient Hotel was like something from last century. It was large and very colonial in appearance. It was also in a good state of decoration and well staffed, considering that they did not get many tourists. The others had already left to go to the Shwedagon Pagoda, and so we went outside and caught a bus to go there ourselves.

At the Shwedagon Pagoda we had to take off our shoes and socks before we could go in. We then had to climb up what seemed like thousands of stairs up to the top. The Pagoda was a most beautiful place. A large stupa contained not only some of the relics of the Gautama Budha, but also some relics of three other Budhas that had been born a long time before him. As you can imagine, this pagoda is one of the holy of holys to Buddhists. The stupa is 320 feet high and the bud at the top is made of pure gold, which according to the guide book consisted of

8688 sheets of gold. Each sheet measures a foot square and is valued at about US\$300. I calculated that the value of the bud alone must be in the region of 2.6 million US dollars. In addition to the gold, the buildings were encrusted with many diamonds and semi-precious stones. All around me people were buying small pieces of gold leaf then sticking it on the statues. The accumulation of years of gold leaf left the place looking so fabulous that words just couldn't describe it. I felt privileged to be there and couldn't help thinking that so few tourists had seen it.

We met up with the three from the Orient Hotel who were also walking around the temple complex,



and from the Shwedagon, we all shared a taxi to the Sule Pagoda, another smaller Pagoda near to the airline office. Compared to the Shwedagon, this one was disappointing, so we decided to split up with the others and go for a walk around Rangoon. We found the post office and I posted the letter I had written on the plane. I later found that it took just 2 days to get to Liverpool.



We had arranged to meet up with the three from the Orient hotel for a meal that evening. We decided to eat in the hotel restaurant to finish off what remained of our money. Also because the evening meal was included for the others and they understandably didn't want to spend money eating out. They introduced themselves as David and Prudence from England, and John from USA. The hotel had automatically assumed that David and Prudence both being British were married, and had allocated them a room together. Fortunately for Prudence, David and John agreed to share and let her have the single room. They showed us the rooms, they were so large and old fashioned, but well decorated with big wooden ceiling fans turning slowly. It was like a time warp, just as I imagined the hotel in the days when the British ran the place. I don't think it has changed a bit.



We had a fantastic large meal that evening, waited on hand and foot. Surprisingly the dining room was quite full, probably well to do locals and businessmen.



We had been careful to check the prices before we ordered to ensure that we had enough money to pay. When the bill came it was exactly as we had calculated. We still had a few pyasa left over, which was to be the souvenir coin from Burma. I had kept a coin from each country visited so far and was quite disappointed when the waiter didn't bring the change. When I asked for the change he got very agitated, saying that a rich tourist like me shouldn't be bothered about a few pyasa. I explained why I wanted the coin, and he reluctantly gave me the change. I guess he thought it was a tip, and looking back I can understand why. We had not eaten in such a grand place up until now and were not used to leaving tips.



The others decided to get an early night, so Lou and I

took a walk around the area. We saw a house where the door was open and people were all gathered chanting what appeared to be prayers. I asked what was happening and was told it was a house of mourning. We decided not to stay and walked back to the Orient, where I had left a bag to collect later. We managed to avoid the disgruntled waiter. On the way back to the airline office we found a British registered mini parked just down the road to the airline office. It also had a diplomatic badge on it, so I guessed it must have belonged to somebody at the British Embassy.

Back in the airline office we each set up our mosquito nets over tables, taking care to tuck the ends in underneath the sleeping bag. It was just as well we did because that night the net was covered by thousands of mosquitoes all trying to get a good feed, while we slept inside, even though it was a very hot night and the lights were left on all the time. At one point I must have touched the inside of the net and immediately felt the sting of dozens of mozzies biting me through the net. You don't usually feel a mosquito sting, but when there are lots of them in a concentrated area, you know about it. I was very tired and despite the hardness of sleeping on a table, I still managed to get a good sleep even if it was only a very short sleep.

The next morning the airline bus came to collect us just after 6 am. We were the first pickup, but the driver went straight past the Orient and went directly to the Strand to pick up the two girls who had stayed there. He then headed out to the airport. We tried to tell him he had to pick up at the Orient, but he didn't understand any English, and continued merrily on to the airport, arriving at 6.40 am.

We told the check in clerk that the driver had missed out the Orient Hotel, and this started a bit of a shouting match. While they argued about who's fault it was, we checked in and went through customs and immigration into the departure lounge. There was another flight going to Peking, and the passengers for that flight had formed a long snaking queue around the departure lounge. They also seemed to still have their baggage with them as they filed out of the door and onto the plane they looked like refugees.

David, John and Prudence arrived in the lounge at about 7.45, having arrived by taxi, and we boarded our plane at 8.15. We had a nice breakfast shortly after take off, then I went to sleep. Shortly before we reached Bangkok, the stewardess woke me up to see if I would like some more to eat before landing. You don't often get offered second helpings of airline meals,