



A Diary of my overland journey from England to Australia

By Steven Abrams

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BEST
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WITH
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SCREEN
RESOLUTION

Nineteen sixty-seven.

It all started when I telephoned the overseas touring department of the AA to ask them to send me the Eastern Europe handbook. I was starting to plan my 1967 summer holiday in which I intended to go motoring behind the Iron Curtain for two weeks. As events turned out the holiday was destined never to take place, but that is another story. The brown envelope that arrived in the post a few days later contained the Middle Eastern handbook. Some clerk in the overseas touring section had obviously considered his duty completed, after all the word "Eastern" was correct. This seemingly minor mistake was to change my life.

The book made fascinating reading. Even though I thought it was highly unlikely I would ever get the chance to travel overland to such places I still read it from cover to cover. By the end of a week I could have taken an exam on the contents and passed with flying colours. Suddenly I became aware that there were roads to places beyond Europe and I felt that I just had to drive along them. I was able to study street maps of cities like Tehran and Kabul and cities as far away as Rawalpindi. The handbook was to stretch my imagination into realising that roads went to such far off places such as Pakistan and India. It also tickled my sense of adventure by mentioning the possibility of onward travel to other even more distant places such as Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore and even mentioned the possibility of continuing on as far as Australia. I had never before even considered the possibility of overland travel beyond Europe, yet this book was quite casually explaining the traffic regulations in all those wonderfully mysterious far off countries.

By early March I had decided to change my summer holiday destination so as to at least try to get to the start of the book's territorial coverage. The Iron Curtain was out and Turkey became the new destination. I spent the next few months trying unsuccessfully to persuade some of my friends to take a motoring holiday of making a quick dash to Istanbul and back. I figured that it was about the furthest I could get during my two weeks annual paid leave from the family printing business. I enthused on the merits of the trip to any unsuspecting person who would listen and as a result everybody started to avoid me. "I must be mad to consider such a journey by car," I was told. "If you want to go that far you should fly."

"But that would take all the fun out of it" I would reply.

At last I managed to cajole one of my unsuspecting friends into sharing the trip with me. To keep an element of the original holiday intentions alive it was decided that the route would pass through some "Iron Curtain" countries. We had all the necessary visas in our passports and car documents were obtained for a July departure. Apart from the usual "green card" for the car, we also had to obtain International driving licences and a customs carnet for Turkey, which the AA issued free of charge to members taking out the Continental touring service. We were on our way; nothing could stop us now, Turkey, here we come!

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About a month before our departure, events in the Middle East took a distinct turn for the worse and on 5th June war broke out between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Being Jewish I did the expected thing and during the days running up to the start of the war, I volunteered to go to Israel to help. To be honest, although I had volunteered I didn't really expect to be accepted, so it was much to my surprise that a week later I found myself on board an El Al jet heading for Tel Aviv. By the time I arrived in Israel the war was over and like the war, events had moved along at a very fast pace. So fast indeed that before I knew it I found myself picking apples in Kibbutz Hulata in the Upper Galilee only 3 weeks before our planned departure to Istanbul. I was not due to return to England until October even though I was still booked to go on the car ferry from Dover in only 21 days time. A few airmail letters later and I had managed to sort out that problem. Now all I had to do for the next four months was to pick apples and enjoy kibbutz life.

At Hulata there were about 50 volunteers from all over Britain, but the majority of them came from Liverpool. Being a small Jewish community in Liverpool, I knew them all except for one. I had never met Lawrence Goodstone before, but his influence on my future was to equal that of the AA Middle East handbook. This may at first seem to be a strange simile, but Lawrence had already completed the journey that I could only dream about. The reason I had not seen him around before was because he had only recently returned to England after an overland journey to Australia. Now at last I had found another loony to talk travel to, somebody as mad as myself; After all he seemed perfectly sane to me.

By the end of my four-month stint at Hulata I returned home with a definite resolve to "do" the overland trip. On my first morning back in the family business there was a banner stretched across the machine room. It read "Welcome home Steven" in large letters. Underneath some joker had hung a smaller sign that read "When are you going away again?" Little did they know that I already had plans for just that event, only trouble was that I couldn't pluck up the courage to tell anybody.

Over the next few months, life on the surface returned to normal, while inside I knew that I just had to do this overland trip. Outside everybody made plans for my future in the business; after all I was not yet 21 years old and in 1967 I was still classed as a minor.

I was involved as a youth leader in the Jewish Lads Brigade (JLB), an organisation I had been a member of for the last 9 years. I had come up "through the ranks" and was now a junior officer. While I had been in Israel a new officer had joined the Brigade who like myself was active in training members for Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme camping expeditions. His name was Louis Simans and we became the best of friends. It turned out that Louis also had plans to travel once he had qualified as a chartered accountant. In December I told him of the journey of my dreams and from that moment on it became a shared ambition. We agreed to carry out our ambitions as soon as he had qualified and I had finished my apprenticeship.

After my discussion with Louis I finally plucked up the courage to tell my family. To say that there was one hell of a row would be an understatement. It was put to me in no uncertain way. "If I wanted to continue with these lunatic ideas of travelling the world I could say good-bye to any future I might have in a successful family business". In other words "don't even think of it".

Nineteen sixty-eight.

In the early part of 1968 the subject was not mentioned. It would be ages before Louis qualified, and my apprenticeship didn't finish until August; in the meantime I could still dream and make plans. The AA book became more and more dog eared.

It came as quite a surprise to both Louis and myself when following the spring examinations he learned that he had passed his finals and was now a fully qualified accountant. Suddenly the dream looked more and more like it would become reality, but first ... the family had to be told!

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The row in December was tame compared to this one, but this time nothing they could say or threaten would stop me from going, my mind was made up. Nobody spoke to me in a normal voice for at least a week but gradually they got used to the idea that I wouldn't be around for the next few years. Eventually tempers subsided and by the time I finally set off on my adventure I think my father would have dearly liked to join us.

Over the next few months every available moment was spent planning and buying. The original plan was to take a car but the cost of getting it past India appeared prohibitive. Also, although the AA would issue a customs carnet free of charge, it didn't include India. To get a carnet for India we would have to deposit a sum of money equal to three times the value of the car. Although we would eventually get it back when we left India and the carnet was discharged, there was no way we were going to be able to find that amount of money, so this idea was dropped in favour of motorcycles. One major drawback was that neither of us had ever ridden a motor bike before. This would mean learning and taking a driving test before we could set out, which wasn't the only problem. Louis didn't know a spanner from a spark plug and although I was able to carry out complicated repairs on my car, I was not too familiar with the intricacies of motor bike mechanics. After dismissing these options we were now down to a rucksack on our back, a pair of stout walking shoes and our soon to be well-exercised left thumbs. Yes, to everybody's horror we had decided to hitch hike ... oyvay!

The list of items bought that summer was as follows:

Army surplus "man pack" frames. These were extremely lightweight alloy frames fitted with quick release straps to enable things to be attached. They were originally used by the United States Army for carrying heavy items of ordinance, so we decided that they could be used to attach a suitcase that could be carried on our backs just like a rucksack. The main advantage of using a suitcase was in the amount that could be carried as well as much easier access to the contents. Our Duke of Edinburgh's Award experience had already taught us that whatever you wanted to get out of a rucksack was invariably at the very bottom. Not only that, but rucksacks had to be packed very carefully to avoid things sticking through the soft sides and digging into your back when they were being worn. The man packs were comfortable no matter what weight they were loaded with. The main drawback being their rigid shape and sharper than normal corners meant they couldn't be squeezed into a small space like a rucksack.

Mess tins for cooking and eating out of; a new sleeping bag and a ground sheet for sleeping rough (which fortunately we didn't have to use too often). We managed to get aerogramme forms without the stamps, so we could use them in any country and stocked up with many rolls of film. We even obtained a blackboard to write our destination onto and hold up when hitch hiking.

Trying to find a small blackboard was not such an easy task as you would expect. Wooden blackboards tend to come only in large sizes. Smaller ones available in toy shops are usually made from hardboard and we felt that they would soon get damaged. Eventually we found an ideal one in Philip, Son and Nephews book shop at the exorbitant price of four shillings (20p). We thought this very expensive and asked for the manager to try to obtain a discount. The horrified expression on his face as we explained the purpose it was to be used for indicated that he thought we had escaped from a lunatic asylum. He eventually gave us the board at half price, but I think it was only to get us out of the shop before the moon came up.

I had taken an extended lunch hour from work and now headed back to my car that was parked just around the corner outside Frank Hessy's musical instrument shop. Hessy's main claim to fame was that they had sold instruments to the Beatles in the early days before they became famous. As we walked past I noticed that they had a display card of flageolets (penny whistles) in the window, complete with a booklet for teaching you how to play it. On impulse I decided to buy one.

Back at work I was running a long job on one of the printing machines that was tucked into a corner behind a large stack of paper. I had very little to do that afternoon except watch the machine to make

sure the sheets of paper were fed and delivered without fouling up. And so I settled down to teaching myself to play the flageolet. I had assumed that the machine noise would mask the squeaking sounds I was generating. Unbeknown to me some of the higher pitch notes were being heard across the machine room. Teddy Jones who used to maintain the machines could hear a noise that sounded like a machine in urgent need of oil, but where was it coming from? And which machine? He spent the best part of the next hour oiling every part that moved on the four machines that were on his side of the room.

Unable to find the "dry bearing" he called my uncle and my father over to tell them that one of the machines was making a strange noise. Because he wasn't able to find the noise everybody joined in the search; everybody that is except me. Hidden behind a stack of paper I was in a world of my own. While my machine chugged away I was happily oblivious to everybody.

My Uncle Stan eventually worked his way across to my side and found the source of the "dry bearing" noise. To say he was not amused was an understatement. At least all the printing machines had received a thorough oiling that afternoon.

During my next extended lunch hour Louis and I visited the AA office. It was after all their fault that these events were taking place. If everybody else we visited thought we were both mad, the "very very nice man" at the AA dealt with our enquiries as though it was a daily occurrence. (Of course we didn't tell him we intended to hitch hike.) He took our request to have a route prepared with as much surprise as if we had requested one to London or Glasgow.

Not surprisingly they didn't have any road maps for Afghanistan or India in the Liverpool office so he gave us the phone number for John Bartholomew & Son. They proved very helpful and supplied all the road maps we needed for the princely sum of seven shillings each. At that price we decided to order just two maps, one of India and one of Australia. The India map covered an area from the Iran and Afghanistan border in the West to Burma in the East and later proved to be an invaluable map.

Both Louis and I had been to Israel and had our passports stamped. Although we were not intending to pass through any Arab countries we still decided to get new ones just in case. (Although Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan are Muslim countries they didn't at that time impose any restrictions on holders of passports bearing Israeli stamps.) A new passport cost £1-10-0 (one pound ten shillings, or £1.50 in today's decimal currency) and the day after we handed the completed application forms into the passport office they arrived in the post.

The next problem was currency. In 1968 there were strict laws governing how much you were allowed to take abroad. There was an annual travel allowance of £50 and whenever you bought travellers cheques or foreign currency the transaction was entered on the back page of your passport. This was fine and quite adequate for a two or three week holiday but was certainly nowhere near enough for the time we would be spending abroad. The limit was strictly applied and nothing we could do or say could persuade the Bank of England to allow us to take any extra, even though it was our intention to be away for two or more years. They still couldn't or wouldn't make any exceptions and we were only allowed to take just the one current year's travel allowance. It was not going to be possible to achieve our goals on just £50, so something had to be done.

Some months earlier we had already made arrangements to take a group from the Jewish Lad's Brigade abroad in their mini-bus. By collecting everybody's passports I was able to get the full £50 allowance for each person in travellers cheques (TCs), half with my signature and the other half Louis signed. Also on production of the relevant documents we automatically qualified for an extra £25 of travel allowance for the vehicle's expenses. This meant that Louis and I became the bankers for everybody throughout the trip and at the end of the holiday there was nearly £200 left and our own allowances were still intact. Everybody received their refund in cash and we kept the TCs. A bit illegal, but the currency problem was now solved.

Now we each had almost £150 of TCs valid anywhere in the world, but this was still not going to be

enough to get us all the way to Australia. Fortunately the law still allowed us to take an unlimited amount of TCs that were only valid in Sterling Area countries. Apart from the UK, the Sterling Area mostly comprised of Commonwealth countries and a few other countries such as Jordan and Kuwait, who's own currencies were tied to Sterling. We would be visiting Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Australia and would be able to use the Sterling Area TCs there. We decided to get these TCs from American Express. This qualified us to be able to use at any of their offices world wide as a mailing address. This would later prove to be an invaluable facility that was used by just about all overland travellers we met.

My interest in photography proved useful for our passport photographs. We had been warned that we would need lots of them, mainly for visas. We took each other's photograph and I then developed the film and printed of about 30 passport size prints for each of us. Just for good measure we also packed the negatives in case we needed more prints along the way. As things turned out we would eventually use 22 of the photographs just for visas and a few more for other bits and pieces that I shall mention later in this diary.

By the beginning of August we were almost ready to go and decided to set our departure date. The first week of August was the annual JLB camp at Deal in Kent and the mini-bus trip was due to depart at the end of the month. Jewish New Year fell near the end of September that year followed ten days later by Yom Kippur and we decided to spend the festival period with our families before we left. So the date was set as 3rd October 1968, the day after Yom Kippur.

At JLB camp that year we decided to tell everybody that we were going to Australia. It was much less complicated than explaining our overland trip to everybody. Eventually it leaked out that we were going overland and much to our joint surprise we were not considered quite so mad. It was probably down to the fact that most of the leaders also had a sense of adventure. On open day the inspecting officer that year was the Warden of the Cinq Ports who was none other than Sir Robert Menzies, the former Prime Minister of Australia. Louis and I were introduced to him. It was a typical English summer day, sunny with light clouds and a cool wind. I remember him telling me that, "In Australia at the moment the weather is just the same as it is here, only we call it winter."

One job left to the last minute was membership of the Youth Hostel Association (YHA). We were both of us already members but only until the end of the year. As we were to be away for a while we needed to extend that membership. This was only possible from 1st October, so bright and early on that date we visited the YHA office in Birkenhead to become their first renewal for 1969. It was also a pleasure to talk to somebody who offered us encouragement and wished us the best of luck for the journey without sounding cynical.

3rd October 1968

*Every long journey begins with
the first step. (Confucious - (I
think))*



From Liverpool to Istanbul.

At last, the big day was finally here. Louis arrived at my house very early having travelled through the morning rush hour from his home in Hoylake. He had come on public transport wearing his "man pack," much to the pleasure of his fellow travellers.

My father had agreed to drive us to the first service area on the M6 heading south. We loaded our packs into the car and I kissed my mother good-bye and all got into the car. At the end of the road I suddenly realised that I had left my camera behind, so we turned around. Good start! Letting myself in I found my mother still standing where I had left her a only few minutes earlier; she was crying her heart out. My only brother had left home to go to university a few days earlier and suddenly she had no children left at home. At the time I hadn't realise how sad she would be, but looking back some 26 years later and thinking of my own children I can appreciate how she must have felt.

My father dropped us both at Knutsford Service Area. We then got out our best thumbs and in no time at all we had got our first lift in a lorry loaded with timber which took us to the end of the motorway. At the time the motorway finished at Cannock, just north of Birmingham and drivers had to travel along ordinary roads to join up with the M1 when heading south. Almost immediately after getting out of the lorry we got lift number two from a monk who took us all of three miles before turning off. Within 15 minutes we had lift number three in another lorry loaded with paper. the lorry belonged to the Inveresk Group, one of the few paper suppliers that our family printing business didn't buy paper from, though we didn't tell the driver that. He was heading for Dartford and not being sure of his way across London was grateful for our navigation skills. All went well until half way around London's North Circular Road when he broke down causing a massive traffic jam. The breakdown only delayed us by forty minutes, though I dare say it delayed others for much longer. Our 4th lift took us right to the door of Dover Youth Hostel where we spent our last night in England.

The next morning we left the Youth Hostel at 7.30am and headed towards the ferry port. On our way we visited a supermarket and bought a few packets of Kraft processed cheese so that we could make ourselves some sandwiches for lunch each day. While travelling down to Dover

the day before, the strap broke on my shoulder bag, so we also visited an Army and Navy store to buy a replacement.

The next stop was the Townsend Ferries office to buy our tickets for the ferry to Zeebrugge. The ticket cost £2:12:6 (Two pounds twelve and six = £2.62½) and after a bit of last minute shopping we caught the ferry at 11.30. I watched the white cliffs of Dover disappear and we got out to sea I felt a sense of excitement thinking of the adventure to come. I wondered if this



mad-hat travel scheme we had dreamed up would be successful or if would end up returning home early and have to make up some sort of excuse to everyone.

We had told everybody that we would be away for a year. In the end I would spend almost three years travelling. It was more than a decade for Louis.

The ship arrived in Belgium at 16.30. Instead of lining up with the foot passengers to get off we both went down to the car deck and went around the drivers asking for a lift. I found us both a lift to Munich and excitedly ran to get Louis. He was just as excited as I, having found a converted ambulance that was heading to Istanbul. This was indeed luck and it seemed that lift number 5 was going all the way to Turkey and who knows, maybe even further. The former Welsh ambulance had been converted into a mobile home by a married couple from Canada, David and Marilyn Glovers. The inside was very comfortable and they had done a good job with the conversion, but one vital thing they had overlooked was insurance. As we passed through Belgian customs they were unable to produce a green card (International motor insurance certificate) and so had to pay to take out a policy before we were allowed to pass.

We travelled straight through Belgium that afternoon and shortly after midnight crossed into Germany, also having to take out a German insurance policy. This was a pattern that was to repeat itself at every frontier.

At about 2am we stopped at a Rastplatz on the Autobahn somewhere between Aachen and Cöln. Dave & Marilyn occupied the only beds in the ambulance so we had to sleep outside. It was pouring with rain and the only place with cover was under the awning of a kiosk. That was where we bedded down for the night, on the pavement at an Autobahn service area. It was not the most ideal place to sleep and throughout the night we kept getting woken up by people walking past making comments and laughing at us. Shortly after 0700 the kiosk owner arrived and spoke to us. I didn't understand a word he said but by the tone of his voice he wasn't very pleased to find us sleeping there.

Shortly after, the Glovers awoke and made some coffee. This was most welcome as both Louis and I were feeling very cold from our night on the "tiles", or should I say, paving stones. We



didn't really drink our coffee, we just hugged it for the warmth. By 9 o'clock we were on the move again, heading south along the Autobahn towards Austria.

Dave & Marilyn had a hand cranked siren on board and we took great pleasure at sounding it while passing a German Army convoy. The lead driver obviously thought it was a police car and pulled over onto the hard shoulder, pulling back onto the

road again when he realised it was a false alarm. We took great pleasure watching all the other trucks of the convoy follow my leader onto the shoulder and back.

That evening we crossed the border into Austria and headed towards Salzburg, intending to stay in the Youth Hostel (YH) there. The YHA book showed it to be open but when we got there the doors were locked and the place in darkness. Outside there where a number of other would be hostellers who had already settled down to spend the night in their cars. On exploring the area we found an empty outbuilding that was not locked, probably a cycle shed, and that is where we decided to bed down for the night. After having slept on the pavement the previous

night I had been looking forward to a soft warm bed in the YH but this was not to be. The hard floor of the out-building was a bit of a disappointment but at least we didn't have people walking past all night and it was dry.

Sunday 6th October saw us all awake by 0600, frozen and stiff from a second night on a concrete mattress. Two Australian girls



who had slept in their car hadn't fared much better. When Marilyn and Dave opened up the ambulance at about 0800 their coffee was a welcome warming for all of us.

It was at this point that we decided to part company with The Glovers. Coming from Canada, it was their first visit to Europe and they wanted to do a bit of sightseeing on their way through. They wanted to head up into the mountains and see a bit of Austria. For them Europe was a place to be explored whereas to us it was a place to get through as quickly as possible. We were not going to start our sightseeing until Istanbul.

They dropped us out of town on the road to Graz and we bade our farewells, agreeing to meet outside the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. We were going to miss them; The four of us had had loads fun over the last few days. I stood and watched as the ambulance turned around to head back into Salzburg and it was then that I started to feel the first pangs of homesickness. Things had gone so well since we set out that I hadn't had time to think of home at all. Now standing at the side of the road in Austria without receiving a lift for over an hour, things didn't look so rosy. The lack of sleep over the last two nights didn't help matters either.

We had to wait a long time to get lift number six. The spot we had chosen to stand was near a pedestrian crossing and in desperation one of us would cross the road just to stop the traffic in the hope that a driver would see the other one hitching and pick us up. After crossing and re-crossing the road for half an hour or so we came to the conclusion that that method wasn't going work and gave it up as a bad job.

We eventually got a lift to Bad Ischl in a Volkswagen, followed quickly by another lift (number 7) to Plochen where for almost two hours we exercised our thumbs without success. Louis, who by this time was desperate for the toilet decided to go behind a bush. No sooner had he gone than an empty bus stopped. Louis was still fastening his fly as he ran from behind the bushes. The bus was returning to its base in Yugoslavia with just the driver and two others. Although we couldn't understand a word they said the crew were very friendly, and a few hours later lift number 8 dropped us outside the door of Graz YH.

At the YH we met somebody else from Liverpool. Together we went to the railway station where we were able to get a good reasonably priced meal. There we got friendly with an Austrian man who spoke good English. He listened to our travel plans and thought them so outrageous that he laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks. He asked us all about our plans and the more we told him the more he laughed and the more beers he bought for us. We were sorry to leave but we had to be back at the YH before it closed at 2200. As it was, we made it just in time.

At Graz YH we met for the first time somebody else with the same plans as ourselves. Ashok Agarwal was from Calcutta and he had already travelled overland to England. Having been refused entry at Dover he was now on his way home again by the same route. It was encouraging to know that despite the misgivings of our friend at the railway station we were not such a rare breed after all. We got much valuable information from him, places to stay, places to eat, problems to avoid, best place for visas, etc. This was our first encounter of the "grapevine" that exists amongst overland travellers.

Having slept on concrete for the previous few nights it was so marvellous to sleep on a mattress that neither of us awoke until after 9 o'clock the next morning. By that time all the others had left for virtually all the four corners of the world. When we eventually set out it was already late morning and we assumed that all the best lifts had gone.

Within ten minutes a ramshackle Fiat van of Yugoslavian registration stopped for us. In the back much to our surprise was the Indian we had met the previous night. Our luck was in, he had been waiting hours for his first ride of the day and there was us, hardly having to wait at all for our 9th lift of the trip.

The van chugged along at a snail's pace, crossing the Yugoslavian border and eventually reaching Maribor in the early afternoon. The driver stopped outside some very impressive and official looking building. He said something to us that we didn't understand, then went inside, leaving the three of us sitting in the back of his otherwise empty van. It was more than an hour before he returned and without any explanation, not that we could have understood if he had tried to explain, carried on his way. The van belched out a blue /grey cloud of oily exhaust fumes leaving a trail behind to blazon our route all the way to the centre of Zagreb.

We said good-bye to the driver and the Indian and caught a tram to the outskirts of the City where the map said there was a motorway to take us all the way to Belgrade. The Yugoslavs call it the Autoput and seeing it for the first time we renamed it the Auto Phut. It was a narrow, two-way road that cut its way across country in a straight line as far as the eye could see. Although in reality visibility was not too great because a fair percentage of the traffic was emitting similar fumes to our previous lift.

While waiting for lift number ten, a crowd of school children gathered around us and obviously seemed amused by our appearance. One young girl who spoke English very well told us that we looked very funny with our large packs on our backs. The children were very friendly and brought us some delicious hot cheese cake. Seeing we hadn't eaten since breakfast the cheesecake was very welcome and the time we had to wait for our next lift was most enjoyably spent. The girls wanted Louis' address so that they could write to him so he gave them my address so as not to upset his girl friend, Michelle, with letters arriving from strange girls.

We were making new friends with the children when along the Autoput came an old friend - the same empty bus that had taken us to Graz YH stopped for us yet again. I don't know where they had been all

day but they were a very welcome sight indeed. We travelled for quite a way with them, at one point stopping at a roadside eating place where we enjoyed some hot soup and bread. The homesickness I had felt yesterday fizzle away as we enjoyed our time laughing and joking with the bus crew. Language didn't seem such an insurmountable barrier after all.

At the turn off for St. Brod the bus left the Autoput and we had to exercise our thumbs again. A short lift (11) took us to a quiet roadside stopping place. It was getting late so we started to look for somewhere to sleep. The owner of the eating place let us spend the night in his wood shed at the back of his building. Inside it was pitch dark and we stumbled our way across the wood to find a place to set our sleeping bags down. We found a number of old wooden pallets that we laid out to make a flat area and to keep us clear of the cold ground and settled down for the night.

The next morning we awoke, feeling as though we had fed the entire insect population of Yugoslavia during the night. We spent the first waking half hour scratching, scratching and more scratching. We had been bitten all over.

Lifts proved hard to get on the Yugoslavian Autoput and eventually, like buses in the rain, two cars stopped together. It seems that they were a group of men who were travelling together. They had room for one extra person in each car, and most important of all, they were going all the way to Belgrade. Although we were reluctant to split up, the lack of lifts and the chance of getting all the way to Belgrade in one lift was tempting enough for us to accept their offer. We arranged to meet outside the Hotel Moskva in Belgrade centre, then Louis sped away in the first car while I was still loading my bag into the other one.

Apart from the car heater being on full heat with all the windows closed, lift number 12 went quite smoothly until about 50 km before we reached Belgrade. One moment the engine was running smoothly when there was suddenly a shuddering feeling, followed by what can best be described as a series of crunches. It appears that something quite major had failed, and in a spectacular way. The car glided to a silent and smooth stop into the side of the road. Behind us the Autoput was littered with an assortment of car parts that had probably been the result of the crunching noises we had heard. Something big had fallen out under the car and was now many little somethings all over the road. It was obvious that I was not going to get to Belgrade for a little time yet.

While the other passengers and I ran all over the road gathering the bits and pieces of car, the driver managed to flag down an obliging motorist in a Mercedes Benz bearing German oval registration plates. The Mercedes driver had a tow rope and after a bit of financial negotiation he agreed to tow the Yugoslav car into Belgrade. The oval plates would become a familiar sight in our travels and were generally referred to as Z plates, because they all began with the letter Z. I understood them to be cars which were registered in Germany to foreign nationals who were going to export them and had not paid any customs duty. The Z was for the German word for customs - Zolamt)

On the journey into Belgrade I travelled in the Mercedes and managed to strike up some sort of communication with the driver. It transpired that he was driving to Tehran. I tried to persuade him to take us along but he refused. He indicated that the car was going to be smuggled across the Iran border to evade duty, and that it could be dangerous for any passengers. I had already heard about this smuggling route where stolen cars from Western Europe are driven to the Middle East to be re-registered. No questions asked and high profits were the order of the day, so I decided not to pursue the matter.

We eventually arrived at a back street garage somewhere in Belgrade. Once the tow rope had been removed the Mercedes driver left in a hurry. Fortunately the Yugoslavs arranged for a driver to take me to the Hotel Moskva in a little Fiat 500. By the time I arrived there, Louis, who had an uneventful journey, had been waiting for over an hour and a half. He was just beginning to worry about me when I turned up.

We celebrated our safe arrival with a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice bought at a street stand, and then caught a bus to the outskirts of Belgrade. After all, there was no point in hitch hiking in the city centre.

It was only about 1230 by the time we started hitching on the road out to Niš, even though it seemed like we had been going all day. By 1400 we were still in the same spot and the "never going to get out of here" feeling was starting to set in when a lorry stopped and took us all the way to Niš. That was lift number 13.

It was early evening when we arrived in Niš, so we walked around the town looking for a place to eat. In Southern Yugoslavia they use the Cyrillic alphabet and that made it quite difficult to understand the signs over shops when looking for somewhere to get a cheap meal. Fortunately we met a group of boys who spoke English reasonably well who showed us to what could be best described as a transport cafe. They then bought us each a very welcome bowl of stew, and while we ate they sat and talked to us. It was an ideal opportunity for them to practice their English and we enjoyed their company for a few hours.

By the time we left the restaurant it was dark. We walked out of town and hitched as we walked. After we had travelled about 2 km we gave up and set our sleeping bags down in a field on the edge of a wood. We were both exhausted and were sound asleep by 2130.

Shortly after 6am we both woke up - soaking wet. It hadn't rained during the night and the wet was restricted to our head and shoulders. We could only assume that the humidity of the early morning dew combined with our breath had caused the condensation on the ground sheets.

Heading back to the road we started hitching. Within half an hour we had lift 14 and with it Lafayette Bosman entered our lives. Lafayette was an American Negro hippie who was driving a white Opel bearing Z plates. He had a boot full of leaflets about crockery and was on his way to Turkey to try to sell expensive sets of dishes to the United States servicemen based there.

He had been driving all night and was going to stop in Sofia for a sleep. In the meantime we were welcome to ride along. Laffy, as he liked to be known, had spent his time in Europe bumming from one job to another making a buck where it could be made. He was now heading east to make his fortune. He was looking forward to Istanbul to get a bit of hashish, a commodity he was quite partial to. Fortunately he didn't have any with him in the car, for if he had, I have no doubt that the Bulgarian customs would have found it, with catastrophic consequences for all of us.

At the Bulgarian border we all had to go to a small office to get visas before we could start with any of the formalities. Once we had obtained the visas and had our passports stamped, then the customs officers had their turn. They asked us to open the boot and when they looked in and found the leaflets all hell broke loose. The leaflets were in German and that only made matters worse. As neither they nor us spoke enough of the language to be able to translate, another customs officer who was more senior was called. He in turn called another customs officer who was yet more senior. Convinced that the leaflets contained anti-communist propaganda a number of more senior customs officers were phoned for. We waited for them for more than an hour and when they eventually arrived they gave an order for the car to be searched. They went through all our bags and gave us all a thorough body search, looking for goodness knows what. Eventually we were all allowed through, leaflets and all.

Laffy eventually dropped us on the far side of Sofia before heading back in to the town to find a place to have a few hours sleep. He promised that if we were still there later when he came passed, he would pick us up again.

It didn't take long for us to get lift 15 in the back of a lorry going to a village just after Plovdiv. The lorry trundled very slowly along, and whenever it went up a hill it almost came to a stop. What little traffic there was built up behind us along the winding road between Bulgaria's two main cities. We also

noticed that most of the cars that passed us were Mercedes with their German Z plates. We later found that most of the drivers were paid to drive the cars to Tehran where they were much in demand. Most of them were quite legal, but some were stolen cars and some would be smuggled into Iran.

By the time we reached Plovdiv it was dark. We had stopped on the way and the driver had given us some food. This was not out of the ordinary as we found the Bulgarian people very friendly. It also turned out to be one of the easiest countries to get a lift. As we travelled through Bulgaria we would find ourselves getting into another lift almost as soon as we had been dropped off from the one before; unfortunately they were all short distance lifts but what we lacked in quality we more than made up for in quantity.

In Plovdiv the lorry stopped for a short while. It was while we were stopped that we saw Laffy's car overtake us. I jumped down and tried to run after him when he stopped at a set of traffic lights, but they changed before I could reach him and he went on his way before without us.

Our Bulgarian friend took us another 70 km beyond Plovdiv before dropping us off. It wasn't too long before we got another lift (number 16) that took us into Haskovo. Not realising how large a town Haskovo was, we started to walk out. We soon realised that this was a bit larger than any of the other villages we had passed through and so we decided to stop for a rest and something to eat at the side of the road. While we were stopped, a Mercedes bearing oval plates stopped and offered us a lift to Istanbul for £1 each: we refused.

By the time we had eventually walked our way out of Haskovo it was after 2200 and apart from the occasional car with Z plates, the traffic had stopped. Bulgaria was now asleep and we decided it was time we were too. For the second night we found a comfortable field and bedded down.

I didn't sleep too well that night, as it was freezing cold. The cold from the ground was permeating through the sleeping bag from below, and the cold air was cooling me from above. The misery was compounded by condensation on the ground sheet and it not surprisingly we were up at first light feeling miserable and hungry. While we were packing our sleeping bags we were joined by some of the local farmers who seemed very happy to have had us sleeping in their field. A brief attempt was made to converse with them, but I regret that my Bulgarian was not up to much and neither was their English. One of the farmers offered me a 10-lev note (about £2) in exchange for my camera. I declined the offer.

The day's hitching started well with a number of lifts in an assortment of vehicles. Once the sun came up the air got warmer and so did we. I remember feeling the heat from the road through my shoes and the wonderful feeling of finally thawing out. One lorry stopped to pick us up, but before we had chance to get on board a policeman on a motorcycle stopped and gave him a ticket, presumably for stopping. That was one lift we didn't get, but it wasn't long before the next ride came along. At one point we came across a border style checkpoint where everybody had to show their passport or identity card. After we had passed through that checkpoint the volume of traffic became a bit lighter but it was still easy to get lifts, until we reached Svilingrad.

Riding on top of a lorry load of bricks we arrived at Svilingrad, the last town before the Turkish border. We were dropped off at the beginning of the town and had to walk through. On the other side of town we started to hitch hike. Apart from a number of foreign registered vehicles who didn't stop, the traffic was non-existent. Obviously there was no need for Bulgarians to travel to the border.

We waited at the side of the road for about 3 hours without so much as a hint of a lift and we were getting desperate. Eventually a Dutch registered Triumph Herald came along and started to slow down. Whether the driver had second thoughts about picking us up we don't know. We were so desperate that we ran out into the road forcing him to stop.

The Triumph Herald was not a very large car, and with the driver's luggage filling the boot there was not too much room inside for both our giant packs and us. The driver protested that there was only room

for one of us but after Louis and I spent the next few minutes rearranging of the driver's luggage we eventually succeeded in making enough space for both of us. I sat on the front seat with my pack balanced on my knee and Louis sat on top of his bag in the back of the car.

At the border the Bulgarian guards took everything out of the car and searched it thoroughly. Tapping all the door panels, inspecting underneath the car and under the bonnet before letting us out of the country. On the Turkish side the formalities were much less strict and we passed through quite quickly. From the border to Istanbul the road was good and we made it in no time at all. It was just as well that we did, as the pack balanced on my knee was very heavy and my right leg went numb quite early in the journey. It turned out that our driver was also heading to

Australia but it was quite obvious that there wouldn't be any room for us to travel any further than Istanbul.



Our driver dropped us at the Blue Mosque, and after a bit of hopping around to regain the blood supply to my leg we headed off to find somewhere to stay. Louis had been to Istanbul before and knew of a clean youth hostel nearby where we could stay for 10 lire per night. At Yucel Hostel we had a much-needed shower, changed our clothes and relished in the fact that we would be sleeping in a bed

again. After all, we had been sleeping rough for the last three nights since we left Graz. We had a meal at Yenner's Place for 2 lire (1s 8d or 8½ pence in decimal currency). This was indeed luxury.

For the rest of my life the 10th October will always be remembered as Istanbul day. As I have already said, our intention was to rush through Europe as quickly as possible. Now the sightseeing was to begin and we wouldn't be in such a hurry to cover ground.

Our journey to Istanbul had taken us just one week and had cost £4:10:2 (£4.51) out of which £2:12:0 (£2.60) was for the ferry from Dover to Zeebrugge. We had travelled over 2058 miles and had 21 lifts in a vast assortment of vehicles. This part of the journey had been through relatively civilised country. The next part was to be a step into the unknown. We were still in Europe, in a few days we would set foot into Asia for the adventure of a lifetime. For now we had to find out as much as we could about the route ahead and at Yucel Hostel we were in the right place. It was to be our first contact with "the grapevine."

The guests at Yucel Hostel consisted of quite a mixture. There were students on extended vacations getting a civilised taste of the East, as well as a number of overland travellers on their way to or from India and other points beyond. It was also to be our first encounter with drugs.

Just inside the entrance to Yucel Hostel there was a poster that read "Do you like it in Turkey? Would you like to stay here a bit longer? You can quite easily! The penalty for possession of Hashish is 2½ years in prison. You have been warned." Despite this warning the place was overflowing with the stuff. One English boy on his way home from an overland trip to India showed me a 250-gram slab of Hashish. (It was usually referred to affectionately as "shit".) He had bought it in Pakistan for just US\$5. It even had the manufacturers stamp and a serial number on it, just as a bar of gold would have. He intended to have two such slabs made into the soles of his shoes and walk them into the country. I don't know if he was successful or not. Others had the stuff hidden inside hollowed out brass Buddhas and other such ornaments.

This was 1968 and the world was a little more tolerant to hashish. Within a few years the prison sentence in Turkey would increase to 10 years, and places like Iran would introduce a death penalty, effectively cutting the overland supply route. Although drugs like heroin and crack were around then, they were not as predominant as they are now 30 years later.

For me the best part of staying in the hostel was "the grapevine." Travellers going in the opposite direction would pass on advice as to the best way to travel. Details of places to stay, where to change money, get visas and other such useful bits of information that made overland travel a lot easier than it would have otherwise been. Within hours of arriving in Istanbul we already had a list of hotels and places to eat in all major cities between here and Delhi. We had also been given advice as to where to change money (legally or black market), and the best cities to apply for our visas for Iran and Afghanistan.

We spent all the next day sightseeing with a vengeance. Starting early in the morning we headed off to see the sights of Istanbul. It was an almost magical experience walking around or travelling on the old trams and buses. We checked the American Express office in the Hilton Hotel for any mail but it was too soon to be receiving anything from England yet as we had only been away a week. It was while walking down the hill from Taxim Square to the Galata Bridge that we met up with Laffy.

Laffy had arrived in Istanbul the day before us and had installed himself into a cheap hotel near Taxim Square. He was about to visit a shoe shine boy and so we stood and talked to him while the boy applied the spit, polish. He also applied a small packet of something black that he stuffed into the back of Laffy's shoe. We also noticed that the amount he paid for the shoe shine was rather generous, even for an American.



The three of us walked down to the bridge together while Laffy told us all about his wonderful get rich quick schemes. He had a plan for selling to American servicemen and their families who were based all over Turkey. On the bridge there was a man cooking freshly caught fish and making them into the most delicious sandwiches. We all bought a fish sandwich and while we ate them Laffy managed to persuade us to come with him and do some selling; on commission of course. We were so convinced that we were going to be making a fortune that we had another fish sandwich, hang the expense.

We said good-bye to Laffy, arranging to telephone him at his hotel for details of our departure the next day. It was time to continue our tour of the city. Istanbul, like Jerusalem, was a wonderful place just to walk around and watch life going on.

By the time we got back to the Blue Mosque it was early evening and closed to tourists. After our evening meal at Yenners we decided to visit the Pudding Shop. This was a place where all the back packers met. Sitting in the Pudding Shop was Ashok Agarwal, the Indian boy we had met in the Salzburg youth hostel. We spent the next two hours talking, comparing notes and getting information from other back packers of all nationalities. We also met a man from Leeds who had driven to Bulgaria on business. Having successfully concluded his business he then decided to spend a few days touring in Istanbul before driving home again. He would have been good for a lift if he hadn't been going in the wrong direction.

It was after midnight before we were thrown out of the Pudding Shop and we had to say our good-byes

to everybody in the street outside. The businessman took our parents phone numbers and said that when he got home he would give them a call to let them know he had met us and that we were safe and well. I later learned that he did as he had promised. Receiving such a phone call made my parents a lot happier about my safety, as he arrived back in England ahead of my first letter home.

Travelling in Turkey



Turkish currency:
28 Lire = £1 Sterling

We were up bright and early the next day and out by 7.30. It had rained heavily during the night and although there were large puddles everywhere, it was now very warm and sunny. Our first stop was the Blue Mosque to finish the sightseeing tour of Istanbul. It was also the place where tourists in camper vans parked overnight. We had hoped to meet up with the Glovers again but they were obviously spending a longer time touring in Europe and they hadn't yet arrived.

We caught a bus to Taxim Square and walked to the Hotel Ron where Laffy was staying. The night before when we telephoned him for details he sounded as though he was having a good time smoking the contents of the packet from the shoe shine boy.

While we waited for Laffy, Louis went to the Hilton Hotel to check American Express, but there was still no mail for us. He left instructions that any mail that came for us should be returned. One letter from my mother that arrived the next day eventually caught up with me over a year later when I was in Australia.

Once everything was packed in the car we headed for the ferry to cross the Bosphorus into the Asian part of Turkey. On arrival at the ferry all the cars queued up in orderly lines ready to get onto the boat. It was not unlike the cross Channel ferries except that while we waited in the queue, we were also charged for the privilege. Fancy having to pay for parking while sitting in a queue. When the ferry arrived the resemblance to Dover ended and it became a free for all. All the cars left the queue and made a mad dash to be first onto the boat. Being unfamiliar with the routine we ended up being one of the last vehicles to board the ferry.

At 11.35 we left Europe and crossed over into the Asian part of Turkey. We then headed for Kantel to get another ferry to Yalova where there was an American military base. On the way we stopped at a roadside farm vendor and bought some grapes. Not knowing the cost of grapes and assuming them to be similarly priced to England we decided to buy 3 lire (2/-) worth between us. For that small sum we received a 4 kilogram bag of grapes that was more than enough for us all to make pigs of ourselves. We ended up throwing most of them away when a few days later they started to go bad.

When we arrived in Yalova, Laffy checked us all into the Hotel Sahil. It was only a very basic hotel, but it was still a vast improvement on the Yucel Hostel. We even had the luxury of a wash basin in our room. While Laffy drove around to find the base and where the American families lived, Louis and I had a rest and an opportunity to catch up on some letter writing. When Laffy returned he brought two Turkish boys who spoke good English and who also knew all of the American's

houses in the town.

That evening we set out to knock on as many doors as possible with our leaflets and samples of very expensive hand painted plates. It soon became obvious that the Americans were not buying, and looking back on it I don't blame them. One recently married couple invited me in and sat patiently as I went through my rather poor sales pitch. When I had finished they told me that they would have loved to buy some but they didn't have any money having just married. They did feed me, which was some consolation, and I ended up talking to them about my travels and plans to get to the Far East and beyond.

It was sometime after 9 pm before I met up with Louis and he had experienced a similar success rate as myself. It then started to rain heavily so we decided to call it a night and headed back to the hotel. Earlier in the day we had bought a loaf of bread. This was combined with the remains of our first pack of processed cheese to become our evening meal.

The next day, Sunday, I had a lazy morning and stayed in bed until mid day. Louis went out early to see somebody who had shown an interest and had asked him to return. It turned out to be a waste of time, which is the conclusion we had both come to about the whole thing anyway. We had decided to tell Laffy we didn't want to continue but he was nowhere around. It turns out that he had gone to try to see the Commanding Officer at the base. While we were sitting in the hotel lobby waiting for him to return, one of the Turkish boys we had met the night before arrived. It seems that Laffy had offered him our jobs and we were probably going to get the sack anyway.

By the time Laffy eventually returned it was almost 4 pm and he was an a hell of a temper. Obviously his meeting at the base had not gone well and he seemed to be in something of a hurry to get out of town. We were told to pack our bags quickly and get into the car. Laffy settled the hotel bill and twenty minutes later we were all on the Road to Ankara, Laffy, Louis, the Turkish boy who called himself John and myself. The journey was not an enjoyable one and Laffy was not his usual jolly self, a mood that seemed to spread to all of us. Later that night we pulled over and parked at the side of the main road about 6 km outside Ankara. We had parked just behind two British registered Ford mini buses. Louis and I spent the night sleeping on the grass verge beside the car while John and Laffy slept inside on the seats. The next morning as soon as it started to get light Laffy & John took our packs out of the car boot and without even saying good-bye they drove off, confirming our suspicions that we had indeed been sacked.

The people in the mini buses watched us packing our sleeping bags away and offered us a very welcome cup of hot coffee. We talked to them while we drank the coffee and found out that there were twelve of them in all, six in each mini bus. They came from Afghanistan and had been working in London for the last few years. Now they were all heading home with the vehicles loaded with all sorts of goodies they had bought in England. They gave us a lift into the centre of Ankara, dropping us outside the tourist office so early that it had not yet opened for business.

After waiting for goodness knows how long for the tourist office to open, a student translated the notice on the door for us. The notice in Turkish said that the office had moved but did not

give the new address. The student who spoke passable English then took us to the student headquarters that was nearby. There we were able to leave our packs while we went off to American Express to see if there was any mail. Like the tourist office, the American Express had also moved and we had much difficulty finding the new address, but in the end we found it, only to find that there was nothing for us.



Back at the student HQ we met the

secretary who sent us to a student hostel 2km away. We walked all the way there only to find it was full, but the warden allowed us to leave our packs in his office while we looked around for somewhere else to stay.

We decided to walk to the Iranian Embassy to get visas. It was quite a long way and by the time we got there the consular section had closed for the day. The guard at the gate however had visa application forms that we completed and left for the visa to be collected the next day.

From the Iranian embassy we headed for the Afghan Embassy. On the way we stopped at a luxury hotel to use their toilet. This was to be the first place for a toilet roll swap. I had always made a point of carrying my own toilet roll wherever I went. This was because there wasn't always one supplied, or the paper that was supplied was either not too clean or was hard enough to be used as sandpaper. Whenever the opportunity presented it I would swap the almost finished roll for a full one in some luxury hotel or an Embassy. I would eventually be able to boast that I had travelled for three years and not once did I have to buy a new toilet roll.

At the Afghan Embassy we filled in our application forms for visas to enter Afghanistan. While we waited for the consul we were able to sit and read English newspapers, while the secretary gave us coffee and sweets. The Afghan consul came out and spent 10 minutes laughing and joking with us. Because of his cheerful attitude we left that Embassy feeling on top of the world. After the disappointments of the last few days he had lifted our spirits again. We looked forward to our visit the next day to collect the visas.

Back at the student hostel we collected our packs and made our way to the university and the other hostel. Unfortunately this hostel was only for Turkish students but the warden introduced us to an English speaking student, Naim Canturk, who took us to find a cheap hotel. Duly installed in a hotel for the princely sum of 7 lire (4/8 or 23p) we then walked back for our luggage.

One of the reasons we had been walking everywhere in Ankara was because we couldn't find any buses; This was because there weren't any. Ankara worked on a system of shared taxis plying the same fixed routes as the buses. The shared taxi was called a Dolmus, and once we had collected our luggage we took one back to the hotel.

Once we got back to the hotel we found that our room had been invaded by what seemed to be the entire fly population of Ankara. We spent the best part of half an hour swatting them furiously until they were all gone before we could settle down to an early night.

The next morning Niam woke us up by bringing us each a cup of tea to the room. He then offered to spend the day and show us around Ankara. It was an ideal opportunity for him to practice his English, and for us to have an unpaid tourist guide. We told the hotel we would be staying another night and headed off with Naim in tow to collect our visas.

Our first stop was the Iranian Embassy where we were kept waiting for about an hour. Also waiting for visas were some Swedish lorry drivers and a Swedish hitch hiker. The lorry drivers had done this route a few times already and gave us a few tips as to which way was best to go. When the consul brought the visa stamped passports out he firstly called the Swedish hitch-hiker. He held up the ragged, dog eared, folded and creased remains of a passport between two fingers and pulling a face asked him just where it had been. The hitch hiker just shrugged, while everybody else in the room expressed surprise at seeing a passport in such a state. I must admit that I haven't seen one like it before or since. When it was our turn he held the passports away from us at arms length until we had paid the visa fee. I don't know if he thought we would grab them and run away without paying, but he was not a very friendly man.



From the Iranian Embassy we found a shop and bought food for lunch before walking up the hill to the Presidential Palace, from where there was a superb view over the whole city. On the way down the hill again we passed the British Embassy in a suburb called Chankaya, one of the better off areas of Ankara.

It was a beautiful warm day, not too hot to sit out and enjoy our lunch at the side of the road. While we were enjoying our lunch

a familiar figure came by carrying a load of leaflets about dishes; It was John. He stopped and had a bite to eat with us. After a day and a half lugging all over the city he had sold no more than Louis or I had in Yalova. He was now getting fed up of working for Laffy and realising that there wasn't any future in selling dishes he intended to head back to Yalova the next day. We said our good-byes and wished him luck the headed off to the Afghan Embassy to collect our other visa, stopping at American Express on the way to find there was still no mail for us.

At the Afghan Embassy the door was locked. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," so we knocked on the door. The friendly consul came to the door and invited us all in. He apologised for the locked door explaining that when we had come the day before he had forgotten to tell us it was an Afghan public holiday today, and that the Embassy would be closed. Because he had promised us the visas today he opened up especially and duly stamped our passports as valid for entry into Afghanistan. Not that we were able to read it, the stamp was in the Farsi language and they use a script that appears similar to Arabic.

Our next stop was a bank to change a £2 traveler's cheque into Turkish lire at an exchange rate of £1 = 28 lire, or 8d per lire. This would be enough to last us until we got to the border.

For the next few hours Naim took us around the city, finally ending up at the Citadel to watch the sunset. Ever mindful of our stomachs we had bought a melon on the way up, which we tucked into as we sat there admiring the



fantastic view. There was a busy market just below us, and as the sun went down all the noises filtered up from below. Blended with the sight of all the lights gradually coming on all over Ankara it had a somewhat magical effect on us and we sat there for what seemed like a few hours. When it was completely dark we made our way to the university where Naim took us to the student's restaurant for a very cheap and enjoyable meal. After the meal we went to the Youth Park, a nightly fun fair, where we

all bought ice cream at 2d per cornet. I enjoyed it so much that I had three.

It was late when we heard the distant thunder. Not wishing to be caught out in a storm we said good-bye to Naim, exchanging addresses before heading back to our hotel. When we eventually reached Australia we wrote a long letter to Naim telling him about our journey and to thank him for showing us around. It was returned "not known."

Our first call the next day was a post office, or PTT as they are called in Turkey. We posted our letters home and bought some stamps for the next one before catching a Dolmus to the edge of the city.



The Swedish lorry drivers we met at the Iranian Embassy had advised us to go by way of the Black Sea coast, so we headed north in the direction of Samsun, a resort town on the Black Sea. It was raining heavily and we were glad to be picked up by a covered truck. This lift took us 47 miles to a town called Kirikale, by the time we got off the rain had thankfully stopped. We walked through the town buying some bread on the way, and started hitching again. We were

picked up by an open lorry within a few minutes and as we travelled along we ate our bread and watched the fertile countryside go by. The driver dropped us in Sungurlu where we quickly got a lift in a Turkish Army ambulance that was so full of crates that we had to squeeze in between the top of them and the roof. I suppose it quite apt for us to be lying down while travelling in an ambulance.

The driver and passenger spoke a bit of English so we were able to strike up a bit of conversation. While we were in the ambulance Laffy passed us. He must have seen us because he flashed his lights and waved as he passed. He was by himself. The ambulance dropped us off in Corum. While walking out of Corum and hitching as we walked, a PTT van stopped for us. A short way down the road it stopped again and about 20 people got in. There was very little room in the van and we had to climb on top of the mail sacks to make room for the others. The other passengers tried to make conversation but our knowledge of Turkish was almost nil, as was theirs of English. They offered us money to buy our cameras, our jackets, our shoes, and in fact just about everything we possessed. The amounts that they offered us were ridiculously low, and even so, we were not selling.

The others got out of the van at various points along the way until eventually we were on our own again. At Harza the van stopped and much to our surprise a horse was put in. I suppose

it had to happen at some point along the route. The horse decided it had to water the mail sacks, as well as leaving other deposits. I hope that none of our letters were in one of those mail bags. When we arrived in Samsun we helped the driver to unload the van before heading off to find a hotel for the night. Being a resort there were plenty to choose from and we settled for a one with a room at 8 lire.

It was very warm that evening so after we had

eaten we took a walk around the town. By European standards it was a bit ramshackle but for a Turkish resort it was very nice place. They even had fairy lights strung out along the road and there were many horse buggies plying to take people for rides through the town. Even so, some of the horses looked as though they were in need of a good meal. We must have been mistaken for German tourists judging by



the prices they wanted to charge for a ride and so we decided to remain on foot.

The next morning as we walked out of town we came across a small printing works and stopped to look in. The owner was friendly and invited me for a guided tour around his factory that consisted of a single Heidelberg Platen machine and hand picked loose type "composing room." It was a far cry from the family business back in Liverpool.

Our next stop was a tea room for a bit of breakfast. While we were drinking our glass of tea one of the Turkish customers noticed the flageolet (penny whistle) sticking out from my pocket. He indicated that he wanted me to play a tune and at first I refused, I was after all only just learning how to play it. When a few more men joined in trying to persuade me, I gave in and started to play the one tune that I could do well, the folk song "the leaving of Liverpool." At the end of the "concert" I was given a rousing cheer, and more glasses of tea arrived, compliments of the management. I carried on playing for about 10 minutes even though most of the tunes I played were just a series of notes made up as I went along. Everybody seemed to enjoy it and somebody even put a 25 kuru coin (2d) on the table.

We could have stayed all day but we had some serious hitch hiking to do. We used the 25 kuras to buy some dried apricots and headed for the edge of town. Shortly after we were given a lift in a Turkish made car called an Anadol. The driver was a lunatic and today must have been the eve of a full moon. He travelled at a speed that was far too fast for the type of roads, continuously sounding his horn to move people out of the way, scattering groups of farmers who had the habit of congregating in the middle of the road. During this headlong dash across Turkey at breakneck speed, we passed the Afghans in their mini buses. We also passed a Bedford van with "England to Australia" painted on the side, and a Land Rover being driven by an older man, all with British registration numbers.

We reached the town of Ordu in record time and the driver dropped us on the far side of the town to save us having to walk through. Almost as soon as we started to hitch we were surrounded by a group of children who stood and stared at us, which was quite off putting, although not an uncommon occurrence. One of the older children came over to us and tried to talk to us. Unfortunately we did not speak any Turkish, but this didn't seem to deter him and he carried on with the one sided conversation regardless. He seemed quite disappointed that we didn't understand him, so he obligingly hailed a taxi for us. Unfortunately he chose the moment that Louis had decided to have a pee at the side of the road. We politely refused the taxi, which puzzled our Turkish friend who didn't seem to understand the principle of hitch hiking.

Having a crowd of children surrounding us wasn't doing our prospects for a lift much good so we decided to walk up the road to get away from them. As soon as we had moved off, a lorry stopped for us and gave us a ride to Giresun, which was the next major town along the coast. It was now raining heavily and we were very happy to have the British Land Rover stopping for us within a few minutes of getting down from the lorry.

The Land Rover driver was an older man who spoke to us through a narrow gap in his partly wound down window and no doubt, a locked door. He told us he was headed to Australia but refused to give us a lift as he had no passenger liability insurance. We tried to persuade him to take us but he just drove off while I was in mid sentence, leaving us standing in the pouring rain.

To get out of the rain we popped into a roadside tea shop. They had the television on and it was showing some highlights from the Olympic Games in Mexico City. Although it was an Olympic year we hadn't realised that they had started or even what results there had been until we saw the television in this tea shop.



minds. The two lads in the van were from London. Chris and John offered us a lift to the other side of Trabzon and we climbed into the back.

Before we got to Trabzon the van broke down. Apparently they had been having trouble all day, that is why they were so far behind the Land Rover that we had seen them with during our high speed ride out of Samsun. They didn't seem to know much about cars except that they had got it going again by jiggling some of the wires under the dashboard. I got my torch and looked under the dashboard and within a few minutes had located the culprit, a loose wire to the ignition switch. It only took a few minutes more to make a permanent repair and we were on our way again. To show their appreciation for the repair they offered to take us on to Erzurum.

The floor at the back of the van was covered in foam rubber and this was where they slept. They were headed for India and the van was their home and transport. They had their suitcases and hanging on each side was a suit. I don't know what they expected to find but there were not going to be any night clubs for them to wear their suits on this trip.

As we headed off into the Pontus Mountains it was getting dark. The road was very badly marked and although there was not very much other traffic, it didn't always have any lights. Driving at night along this road was not to be recommended, so we decided to look for a suitable spot to stop for the night. A few minutes later we came across a piece of flat land at the side of the road, and there was the Land Rover, curtains drawn, presumably asleep.

The two lads climbed into the back of the van to sleep while Louis and I prepared to spend the night sitting in the front seats. To make more room we put our packs under the van. While we were both trying to get comfortable I was startled to see that somebody was peering in at us through the window. We tried to chase him away but he just kept coming back again. He finally went away when we threatened him with the baseball bat that Chris and John kept handy in the front of the van. Before finally settling down we had a cup of coffee and a long chat with the two lads in the back. It was after midnight before we finally got to sleep.

To say we slept was a bit of an exaggeration. Sitting up in the front of the van it turned out to be an uncomfortable night even though we managed to keep warm and dry. At 7.30 am we got out and had a walk around the van. We talked to the Land Rover driver while we were waiting for Chris and John to wake up. He still kept his window only partly wound down, presumably afraid that we were going to attack him if he opened it any further. He was headed for Australia and he and his vehicle were booked on the M.V. Chusan that was due to sail from Bombay on 4th December bound for Freemantle. He was a motor cycle racing fan, a subject that I didn't know very much about until now.

Chris and John got up shortly after and we removed our bags from under the van and headed off. It was raining heavily, the road that wound up the mountains had no surface and

as we got higher it became foggy. Our speed was down to just 20 MPH and it took ages to get to Gumushane, a small town 6000 feet up in the mountains. We tried to buy some food but prices were more than double the price of everywhere else, so we moved on to the next town. A few hours later we arrived at Bayburt. Food here was a lot cheaper and we brought some bread, fruit and some more dried apricots for a late breakfast.



The road was one of the worst I had ever travelled along, and probably one of the worst of the whole trip. It was narrow, unpaved and climbed higher and higher until the car engine started to labour from the thinning air. We went over the mountain pass at Kopdages (elevation 8000 feet) then the road headed down again. Before long we got caught up in the first of a number of flocks of sheep that all seemed oblivious to the vehicle trying to get through. Before long it got dark and the next hazard was the lorries without lights. Finally at about 1830 we arrived in Erzerum and said good-bye to Chris and John. Erzerum is the most eastern city in Turkey. With a population of 240.000 it is Turkey's 4th largest city and only a short hitch hiking distance from the Iranian border. It was also where we saw the first road sign to Iran.

We found a hotel without any difficulty. The cost for the room was 14 Lire, (7 Lire each). We were tired, but not so tired that we couldn't go out for a bite to eat. We even managed to celebrate having almost crossed Turkey by having some ice cream for our dessert. On our way back to the hotel we even enjoyed some hot chestnuts bought from a street vendor, eventually flopping into bed exhausted, for an early night.

Before setting out the next morning we visited a local tea house for our usual breakfast of bread and cheese. The second packet of cheese that we had bought before leaving Dover was lasting well, mainly due to us becoming experts at spreading it very thinly on our bread. The bread we bought from the local bakery before going to get our tea. Tea houses in Turkey are just shops with a few tables and chairs that sell glasses of tea and nothing else. They are probably the Turkish equivalent of the local pub, but they serve tea instead of beer and you do not see any women in them.

As usual we walked to the edge of town and started hitching. Within 10 minutes we got a result when an Opel Record with German international plates stopped. The two occupants didn't seem to care where we were going but just kept asking us for a fuhrerschein. We couldn't understand what they were talking about as neither Louis nor I could speak any German. Eventually by sign language we realised that they were asking us if we had a driving licence. We quickly produced our international licences and they both leapt out of the car, put our packs into the boot and held the back doors open for us to get in.

Neither of them could speak any English, but we still managed to find out that they both all from Iran and that they had been working in Germany. The driver's name was Mahmoud and the passenger was Khalil. It seems that they didn't have a licence to drive in Iran, and that is why we now had this lift. At Agri we stopped for lunch which Khalil paid for, and before setting out again we picked up a Turkish hitch hiker who was going as far as the border.



On the way to the border we could see Mt. Ararat over to the North. Mt. Ararat straddles the Iran, Turkey, Soviet Union border and is reputed to be the place where Noah's Ark came to rest after the great flood mentioned in the Old Testament. The snow capped mountain in the middle of such a desolate area looked so beautiful. We stopped to take a photograph and generally admire the view.

When we were ready to move off again I was

put in the driver's seat and told to drive. I suppose you could say that this was my driving test. It was the first time I had ever driven a left hand drive car and it seemed very strange indeed having the bulk of the car on my right hand side. The car handled well, and I quickly got the hang of it. The strangest thing was the gear lever, which was steering column mounted. In the past whenever I had driven a column gear change the gear lever was on the left of the wheel. Being a left hand drive car the gear change was positioned on the right, and felt very awkward indeed.

Just before we reached the border a flock of birds flew across the road in front of the car just as we rounded a bend in the road. It happened so suddenly and the car hit quite a few of the birds. We stopped to check for damage, but fortunately the car had fared better than the birds and was undamaged. We then set off again to drive the rest of the way to the frontier with Mahmoud driving.

The Turkish border with Iran was not like any of the European borders that we were used to. We had expected the usual border guards hut with the red and white striped barrier pole across the road but this was not the case. The first thing we saw was what seemed to be a car scrap yard in the middle of nowhere, then just around the bend we came to the border compound.

When you drive a car into Turkey Iran or Afghanistan, all the vehicle details are written into your passport alongside the entry stamp. When you leave again they are checked against the car you take out with you. If you don't take a car out, or if the details don't match you then have to pay quite a hefty amount of import tax before you can leave the country. If your car breaks down or is involved in an accident you have to arrange for the wreckage to be taken out of the country to avoid having to pay the duty. This presumably was the reason for the "scrap yard" at the border. Cars that had wheezed their final breaths up to the frontier, or had even been towed or brought on trucks were just dumped once their owners had their passports stamped.

The border compound was a large square surrounded by buildings. You entered the square through a large archway and parked in front of the immigration office on the Turkish side. After you had cleared immigration exit formalities it was the turn of the customs. There was also a "last tea house in Turkey" where we met a group travelling as fare paying passengers in a mini bus headed for New Delhi. They were a mixture of Australian, British and Germans and we discussed the route at length while we drank tea as we waited for the customs to clear us through. It was at this point that we said good-bye to Mahmoud. He was heading back into Turkey, and presumably would eventually make his way back to Germany. He had only

travelled this far to drive the car for Khalil, who we later found out, couldn't drive.

With all the Turkish formalities completed it was now my turn to drive the car across to the Iranian side. The square was divided in half by a chain fence. In the middle of the fence was a soldier who checked that we had the correct stamps in our passports before removing a section of chain for us to pass through.



From Liverpool to the Iranian Border had taken 16 days including the time we had spent sightseeing in Istanbul and Ankara. Altogether I have spent £7-17-8 since setting out.

Iran



*Iranian currency:
179 Rials = £1 Sterling.
(10 Rials referred to as 1 Tumen)*

19th October 1968

If we thought that the formalities at the Turkish side of the border were slow, we had yet to compare them with the Iranian side that we still had to pass through.

Khalil being a returning Iranian citizen was given a very thorough once over by customs, and as we were travelling with him we were also included in this search. The car had to have customs duty paid on it, which Khalil settled with loads of traveller's cheques, and the German number plate was exchanged for an Iranian one.

While Khalil sorted out the formalities we changed money at the bank. Louis changed a £10 travellers cheque, and the cashier handed him the money. He should have received about 1790 rials but we were

not able to distinguish the value of the notes as they were printed entirely in the Farsi script. We were trying to work out their values when the cashier called him back and asked him if he had the correct amount. Judging by the smile on his face we could see that he was having a laugh at our expense. Our assumption was proved correct when he took out another bundle of notes and gave them to us. He then patiently explained the values of the notes, and wrote out a list of the numbers and their English equivalents for us. This was to prove very useful as we passed through both Iran and Afghanistan, as both countries use the Farsi (Persian) language with its Arabic looking script.

The delay seemed to go on forever. We met some British lorry drivers who had been there for a day and a half. They had TIR plates and seals on the lorries, but that protection ran out when they left Europe. The Iranian customs had completely unpacked the lorries, and the drivers were now reloading them again. They were headed for Saudi Arabia but were unable to pass from Turkey into Syria as the border was closed, so they had to take a diversion through Iran. They expected to have to go through the same rigmarole at every Middle Eastern border they passed through.

As we were about to leave, John and Chris and the Land Rover guy arrived. They intended to spend the night at the border and get an early start the next day. It had taken us 2 hours to cross the border, and coupled with a 1½ hour time change (Iran is 2½ hours ahead of UK) the time was getting late.

I drove out of the border compound, through the archway on the Iranian side. As the car passed through the arch the headlights caught the reflectors at the side of the road and revealed a superb tarmac road heading off straight, into the distance as far as the lights could reflect. Compared the dirt road that we had driven on for the last 50 or so kilometres in Turkey, this was heaven to drive on. I enjoyed driving the 100 km that I had the wheel for before Khalil asked for Louis to drive.

Louis drove for a while until we stopped for some fuel. Petrol in Britain was about 6 shillings a gallon, (equivalent to 1/4 per litre, although nobody sold petrol by the litre in 1968). By comparison, petrol in Iran was only a few pence per litre, less than a shilling per gallon. The nationalised Iranoil petrol was the only brand available, but at those prices who cares!

Once we had refuelled, Khalil decided to have a go at driving himself, despite his lack of a driving licence. He didn't have a clue and was terrible and wandered all over the road whenever he changed gear to the accompaniment of grinding noises. As luck would have it he drove right into a police checkpoint about 5 km down the road stalling the car some 50 yards before reaching it. While the policeman was walking towards us Khalil did a quick swap with Louis. Fortunately for all of us the policeman had the lights shining in his eyes and didn't see the changeover. Once the policeman had inspected all the vehicle's documents as well as Louis's driving licence and passport he allowed us to go on our way. Now Louis was doing the driving.

Shortly after midnight we arrived in Tabriz, which is 7000 feet above sea level and not surprisingly for late November the weather was very cold. We were a bit worried about finding somewhere to sleep at that late hour. We didn't relish the thought of spending a night in the car, but fortunately Khalil found us all a hotel room that cost 70 rials (7 Tuman) for which he paid. Thankfully we at least had somewhere comfortable and warm to spend the night.

The next morning we woke up at 0645 to find that Khalil had already gone out. We were concerned that he had driven off with our luggage in the boot of the car leaving us behind. Luckily this was not the case. Looking out of the window we saw Khalil driving the car up to the hotel front door. He had only gone out to practice his driving early in the morning while there wasn't so much traffic about.

One thing we discovered about the hotel was the toilet down the corridor with a glass door. I don't know what you were supposed to do about privacy. Maybe the whole idea is to give everybody a good view; at least nobody would have an excuse for barging in while you were there. We also got our first sight of what Iranians use instead of toilet paper. They have a jug with a very long curved spout that enables you to trickle water down your backside. There is one of these in every toilet in Iran, you never see toilet

paper. We were glad that we had brought our own toilet paper with us. I could never imagine myself mastering the art of using one of those contraptions.

The road for the first part of the journey was very winding, with many hairpin bends. Unfortunately Khalil decided to take over for an agonising 100 km. We stopped in a small town and bought some grapes, dates and bread for dinner then Louis and I took over the driving for the rest of the afternoon. By now the road was back to being straight and generally very good for driving. It was mostly scrub desert and very boring scenery. Apart from the occasional whirlwind dust storms blowing across the road there was not a lot to see and I slept most of the time that I was not driving. The last part of the road to Tehran was a toll motorway at a cost of 10 rials. We made good time and arrived in Tehran shortly after 4 pm.



Driving in Tehran was terrible. There didn't seem to be any pattern or rules for the traffic flow with cars, buses and lorries all fighting their way through without any regard for anybody else. Cars would pull out into your lane without any warning, would pass through any gap that was available if you were not quick enough to fill it yourself: in short it was chaos. At one point I was driving in heavy traffic and was eager to shoot into a gap quickly. I grabbed the gear lever to change down, but by habit I mistakenly grabbed the indicator stalk on the left side of the wheel instead. An indicator is not built to withstand such force and it just snapped off in my hand. Not surprisingly Khalil was not very happy and promptly took over the wheel. For once his bad driving seemed to be an advantage. He drove us to his house and on his arrival was greeted with hugs by all his family while we waited in the car for him.

After all the greetings were over Khalil and another man who spoke a little bit of English came back to the car and drove off. They took us to a youth hostel that was run by the scouts, but it was full. He then drove us to another youth hostel but that was also full. He then tried for a cheap hotel near to the centre that cost us 40 rials for the room for a night. We said good night and Khalil and his friend drove off after promising to come back the next day to show us around Tehran. It turns out that we couldn't have landed at a better place to stay. Staying in the same hotel were some other overland travellers headed for Australia, an American, an Argentinean (Geoff Gough), a Japanese and some other Liverpoolians (Mike Swanson and Alex McMullen).

By now we felt quite hungry, so the whole group of us headed off together to find somewhere to eat. We settled for a local restaurant that had a television set on, so we could watch some of the Olympic games, but all that was on was a weight lifting event that an Iranian probably won judging by everybody's excitement it. Once the report on the Olympic Games was finished the television programme was just people talking.

Part way through the meal an Australian we had met in Istanbul came in and joined us. We spent a very enjoyable evening eating, chatting and comparing travel notes. Louis and I were the only hitch hikers in the group. Although the others had hitched for a bit, they were mostly travelling on public transport which was quite cheap. We all sat around talking until we were thrown out just before midnight when we returned to our hotel to write some letters. We were feeling quite happy with ourselves at getting this far so quickly and relatively free of problems. In fact the only problem we had was that we had travelled much quicker than our estimate. We had allowed ourselves a month to get to Tehran and we were almost two weeks ahead of schedule. This would have been fine if our families hadn't been writing to us at American Express and we would be gone before the mail had arrived.

I woke up very early the next morning and made an immediate dash to the toilet. At first I thought that the dreaded tummy bug had got me, but fortunately it was just a one off run and my stomach settled down again quite quickly.

I knew an Iranian family from Tehran whom we had met on holiday many years ago. Their son David had visited and stayed us in Liverpool on more than one occasion and I was hoping that if we could find them they would repay the hospitality. For this reason we decided not to check into the hotel for a second night and to leave our bags with the hotel porter for safekeeping.

Khalil arrived in a taxi being driven by his brother and took us for a drive around Tehran. We ended up in the bazaar where they searched out the shop belonging to the Yadegar family. Mr Yadegar was there, but he didn't speak English so Khalil's brother translated as best he could. He told us that the family had all emigrated to the USA and he was the only one left in Iran. He had remained until the sale of his business had been completed, and would then be going to join them. Needless to say I was very disappointed at not having the opportunity to meet them all again.

We then said our goodbyes to Khalil and his brother and headed off for the American Express office which was inside the Park Hotel. The clerk told us that the post restante facility was at another office about 1 km away and gave us a map to show where it was. We walked there with an Australian who was had also come to collect his mail. As we got near we saw signs to American Express in a number of different languages including much to our surprise in Hebrew. There were two letters waiting for me at Amex and a whole bundle waiting for Louis. His girlfriend was obviously missing him and had written to him every day.



As we spent the day wandering around we found that there was not an awful lot to see in Tehran from a tourist point of view. It was the capital of a large oil rich country and as such it was very busy. Traffic was appalling and obviously a major problem. We were two weeks ahead of our planned schedule and concerned about missing mail. We decided to take the opportunity to deviate from our itinerary and head south to visit Isfahan and Shiraz, the ancient capitals of Persia. We spent the rest of the day just wandering around and kept bumping into other travellers like ourselves.

In the evening as we headed back to the hotel we met an English backpacker who was looking for a

cheap hotel. He joined us as we walked back to ours and agreed to share a room with us for the night to keep the cost down. We managed to get a room for the three of us for 35 rials each although we did have an argument with the porter about the luggage. He tried to charge us for looking after it at a rate that was dearer than if we had kept the room. We refused to pay and eventually he gave up asking.

Our room mate for the night was Paul. Talking to him we discovered that he had also met Laffayette Bosman and had worked for him in Ankara, managing to achieve exactly the same success rate as ourselves.

We left the hotel very early the next morning before the hotel porter could catch us, and caught a bus to the outskirts of Tehran so we could start hitch hiking south. It wasn't easy trying to find our way as all the signs were in Farsi and it was difficult to find anybody who could speak English so we could ask. I couldn't help noticing how many beautiful girls there were who were not covered up in the traditional

Moslem way but were wearing western style clothing. I remember thinking how western Iran was in its' approach to women's behaviour.

We came across a crowd of men all gathered around some sort of attraction. I pushed to the front of the crowd to find a dancing bear performing, much to the delight of all around. This was in the suburban streets of Tehran and was totally unexpected. The keeper got annoyed when he saw me taking a photograph and chased us both away.



We eventually made it to the Isfahan road and started to hitch. It wasn't long before we

got picked up by a van for our first lift of the day, 15 km. The next driver was going all the way to Isfahan but he wanted 200 rials for the ride, which we declined.

We then had a quick series of rides. A lorry took us to Saveh, then in a Land Rover took us another 40 km to a tea house where we were picked up by a husband and wife in an Opel. They took us to just past Delijan and dropped us in the desert outside a pipeline construction station. At the time they were laying a pipeline across the desert and it followed the track of the road.

Our last lift that took us into Isfahan was in a Willyx Jeep driven by a man with a large bushy moustache and while driving along he took out a cigarette to smoke. I had the cigarette lighter the staff at work had given to me and decided now was the time to put it to use. I held the lighter under the cigarette and pressed the button. The lighter that had been unused in my pocket for the last two weeks had probably been knocked out of adjustment. When lit it sent out a sheet of fire, not unlike a flame thrower, setting the poor driver's moustache alight. The car veered all over the road while he struggled to put out the forest fire that now raged just beneath his nostrils. Fortunately there wasn't too much damage and all credit to him he didn't dump us at the side of the road as we would have fully expected him to do.

In Isfahan we had been recommended to the hotel Ferdowsi and we soon found without too much difficulty. We even managed to bargain the price down to 40 rials for a room but unfortunately it appeared that in the room we were shown to the previous guest had taken the light bulb with him when he checked out. There was no other light, the porter didn't have a spare bulb and there were no other rooms available so we decided to look elsewhere. We went into an air freight office where we found some boys who spoke good English. One of them offered us a place on the floor of his flat and we gladly accepted. As he still had over an hour to work we left our bags with him and went to find somewhere to eat.

Not too far away we found a restaurant with a British registered bus and car parked outside and so we decided to give it a try. Inside was a group of tourists who were travelling to India by bus with a company called Sundowners. The passengers were a group of mostly Australians who had stopped for their meal and were all very friendly. The car, a Morris Minor, was also owned by some Ausies who were taking it home with them. We had a meal for just 22 rials and enjoyed meeting everybody until we were introduced to the driver of the bus.

The bus driver was an Australian who called himself Bluey. He had driven the route from London to Delhi and back at least half a dozen times before, being one of a number of tour bus operators travelling the route at that time. He expressed his surprise "that we had got this f..... far by hitch hiking and frankly didn't give a s... for our chances of getting to India in a month of f..... Sundays". (That was the clean version.) He told us that "we didn't stand a chance of getting over the Iran/Afghanistan border.

The only vehicles that passed that way were tourist buses like his or oil tankers, and he wouldn't give us a lift. The oil tankers would charge us US\$10 just for a ride on top of the tank." His best advice was to give up while we were ahead.

With these words of encouragement ringing in our ears we went back to the air freight office just in time for them to close for the evening. The student, Faramaz Faramazi, who asked us to just call him Farey had a flat at the north end of the city. He was the son of a former Iranian diplomat and had travelled with his family on postings to various parts of the world. He was 20 years old and had spent 15 of those years abroad. His flat was full of English and American magazines and books, and he had a superb record collection. While we sat and talked, Farey's friends started to arrive and they all spoke excellent English. It was almost like a party that night.

Up to now we have travelled 4211 miles and had 37 lifts

Wednesday 23rd October we got up quite early, mainly because the boys in the flat had to get to work and we were sleeping right in the middle of the living room. Before going out Farey made us some tea and we had a short discussion about what we should do that day. He gave us a list of things he recommended for us to see and do in Isfahan and told us what bus to catch to the main tourist area and shortly afterwards, we set off to find the bus stop.

It wasn't too long before the bus number we wanted came along and we got on. When the conductor came to collect the fare and we asked him for the Masjid Shah (Shah Mosque) he tried to tell us something we didn't understand. It was only when he flagged down a similarly numbered bus going the opposite way and ushered us onto it that we realised we had been heading in the wrong direction.

We eventually arrived at Royal Square, a large square with gardens in the centre, which the Iranians proudly boast to be seven times larger than St. Mark's Square in Venice. Surrounding the square are most of the tourist attractions in Isfahan. We started with the Sheikh Lutfolle Mosque, then went on to the Shah Mosque where we came across a group of American back packers we had met in Tehran.



At 11.30 we were all kicked out of the Mosque when it closed for prayers. We decided to spend this time looking around the shops. It became apparent that the local "best buy" was metal plates. Not only was there shop after shop selling the hand beaten ornately engraved plates and assorted items of crockery wherever you looked but in each shop there was always somebody hammering away making them. We eventually found a shop selling food and bought some bread

and dates for lunch that we ate sitting in the gardens in the centre of the square. We even managed to find an ice cream seller and enjoyed some for dessert, even though it had almost melted by the time we argued with him about short changing us. This custom is often practised on tourists throughout Iran, the seller pretends not to understand, and most tourists give up in despair.

While sitting in the park we became surrounded by children. They were delighted to show us their school books for their English lessons, and to have the opportunity to practice asking us "how are you?" and "what is your name?", etc.

In the afternoon we visited the bazaar where we met some of the Sundowners. We then visited the Friday Mosque where we were lucky enough to find somebody to show

us around free of charge so that he could practise his English. Unfortunately we couldn't visit the Chetel Sotup Palace because it was being renovated. By the time we got back to the square it



was getting late. We only just had time to squeeze in a visit to the Ali Cuapu Palace from where we had an excellent view over the city. It was an ideal opportunity for a photograph. At sunset we sat in the square's gardens and listened to the noise of the metal plate makers echoing in from all the surrounding shops, talk about tin pan alley. While we sat there we ate some Gaz, a local sweet that we bought from a child who was selling it in the park



We decided to head back to the flat, walking along the centre of the dual carriageway while I played my flageolet as I walked along. When we eventually reached the flat there was nobody there and Louis was desperate for a toilet. We were lucky enough to find a policeman who directed us to a petrol station who allowed him to use their hole in the ground. I too had wanted to pay a visit but I was struck with instant constipation on seeing what served as a public convenience.

We then tried to find a tea house for a drink and were invited home by a charming gentleman who was a school teacher who spoke very good English. He entertained us well, offering us tea, grapes, figs and dates. He was a stamp collector and he also gave us some foreign stamps. We enjoyed his company and talked about many subjects until almost 11 o'clock before heading back to the flat where the boys had been getting worried about us.

Thursday 24 October was the first sign of tummy trouble and so I decided to skip breakfast. Before long I was feeling a bit better so we decided to pack and carry on with our plans to head off to Shiraz, some

300 miles to the South. We said our goodbyes to Farey and his friends and left to catch the bus to the southern edge of the city. This time we caught the bus in the correct direction and once we started hitching we didn't have to wait long for a lift in a station wagon that took us to Shahreza. I slept all the way but felt a lot better for it when we got out.

We walked through the town hitching as we went and inadvertently managed to stop a police car. The policeman was not amused and directed us to the bus station where we would be able to travel to Shiraz the way everybody else does. Deciding it would not be wise to continue to hitch immediately he had departed we headed for a tea shop for a glass of tea. That proved to be a big mistake as the tea made me feel ill again and shortly after that when we started walking I soon had to stop and sit down outside a shop. The shop owner noticing me flop down on one of the chairs he was trying to sell came out thinking he had a potential customer. When he realised that I had only stopped for a much needed rest he kindly brought me out... yes you guessed... a glass of tea. I politely refused it but Louis not wanting to see it go to waste drank it for me.

Tea in Iran is served in small tulip shaped glasses. It is never served with milk but there is always plenty of sugar to go with it. Iranians just pop a lump of sugar into their mouth and sip the tea through it until it dissolves. The first cup of tea costs 2 rials and the second cup comes free, as does the sugar, which is just as well because Louis used to go through about a pound of sugar with each cup. The sugar is not like normal sugar lumps but comes as one large cone shaped lump, probably weighing about 2 kilograms. The waiter just hits it with a mallet and serves up the irregularly shaped lumps.

While I was sitting down Louis managed to get a lift from a passing family who spoke a little bit of English. They managed to squeeze one of the bags into the boot but the other one had to come in the car with us. They gave us a lift to Abadeh that is a bit over half way between Isfahan and Shiraz. Their English was only basic and our conversation mainly consisted of asking our names and exchanging pleasantries. They dropped us on the far side of Abadeh so we were in a good place to start hitching again. The only trouble was there were no cars. Louis stayed on hitching duty while I had a good sleep at the side of the road.

When Louis woke me over an hour later there was an army jeep stopped and waiting for me to get in. Louis claimed that I had been snoring while I slept. All I knew is that I felt a hell of a lot better for having had that sleep. The driver of the army vehicle kept giving us nuts to eat, and not having eaten anything all day I gladly accepted them and they stayed down. By the time he dropped us after about 75 miles in a small village I was feeling a lot better.

Once the truck had gone we became surrounded by a large crowd of about 100 children who followed us as we walked out of the village. Louis decided to have some fun and suddenly



turned around to face the children and shouted - boo! The effect startled us both as well the children who all ran away screaming as though they were genuinely frightened. They never came back again.

As we waited outside the village for a lift the wind started to get up. It was a cold biting wind and we both started to shiver. Some boys came along and not realising at first that we were foreigners they tried to talk to us. We indicated that it was cold and they responded

by gathering a bit of loose weeds or gorse that was blowing around, and set it on fire. It burnt with an amazing and fierce heat and they kept gathering more and piling it on the fire to keep it going. I didn't know what it was but it was an amazing fuel, probably full of Iranian oil soaked up through its root

system. It was still burning about an hour later when we got a lift in the back of a Dodge truck.

The truck driver took us to Sivand and then asked us for money. We had not expected this and refused to pay. He then started to shout at us and when we still didn't pay him he walked off in a huff into a nearby building. Over the next 10 minutes or so he and a few of his friends came out to try to get us to pay. Although nobody threatened violence we started to get worried that they might start to get nasty and it was a great relief when a truck stopped. The driver took us the rest of the way to Shiraz, dropping us at the truck depot. We helped him to unload the few parcels he had on board before heading off to find somewhere to stay.

Farey had given us the name and phone number of a friend who lived in Shiraz and we tried to telephone him but without success as there was no reply. We decided to have a meal and give him a bit of time to get in. This plan was successful and after we had eaten we tried him again this time he answered his phone. He invited us around and gave us his address, recommending that we took a taxi. We tried a number of taxis we found that either they didn't know where the place was or they didn't want to take us. In the end we gave up and decided to find a hotel.

We managed to find a room for 80 rials, but after seeing the room we found that the sheets were dirty, probably not having been changed for the last few guests. It was getting late and we were getting tired. We didn't feel like wandering around the streets looking for another hotel so we decided to bargain the price of the room down and managed to get 20 rials knocked off the price. We then pulled the dirty sheets off and used our own YHA sheet sleeping bags.

We have now covered 4521 miles and had 42 lifts.

The next morning, or should I say the next afternoon we got up, both of us having slept until just after midday. Louis was the first to wake up and while I got dressed he went out to find somebody who could tell us what there was to see and where it was. He returned shortly after, having found a Jewish boy who spoke good English and he was prepared to act as our guide. His name was Asher and the first place he took us to was his Shule (Synagogue). We were shown around the small but beautifully ornate building and then after seeing his Shule he took us to another one. It turns out that our hotel was right in the middle of the Shiraz Jewish area.

Having got the Shules out of the way he then started to show us around Shiraz, visiting four different Mosques. One of the Mosques wouldn't let us in because entry was only permitted for Moslems. Asher took our cameras to take a photograph for us, after all he was Iranian and they couldn't tell that he was Jewish. We were able to see inside by taking turns of standing on each other's shoulders and looking over a wall. The inside was beautiful with the walls and ceiling being lined with gold and silver and the place was full of gold and silver ornaments. There were probably enough riches in there to feed the entire population of Iran for a few years.

Shortly after, Asher had to leave to get home to prepare for Shabbat (the Sabbath). He had only been with us for





a little over an hour but he had shown us almost all there was to see in Shiraz. We spent the rest of the afternoon wandering around and talking to other tourists

We met some Germans who were on holiday, and an American family who were working nearby for an oil company. The Americans had just bought some bottles of Coca Cola from a stall and had been charged almost twice the going price that everybody else was being charged. Obviously the stall holder knew they

were Americans. We saw a bus go past with "Australia to England" painted on the side. We even met two Russian tourists. (You don't find many of those!). We bought some ice cream that

turned out to be nothing more than frozen water, sort of like a sorbet but without any flavour at all. We walked through the bazaar, but as it was Friday everything was closed. We went to a local park to see the tomb of Hafez, a local hero poet. In the evening we headed back to the hotel and the place was getting lively. It was the Shah's birthday the next day and everybody was getting ready for the celebrations. One stall was selling what appeared to be boiled potatoes and both Louis and I decided to buy some, spitting them out straight away because they tasted awful. I am sure they were potatoes, but whatever they were being boiled in was giving them a terrible flavour and both of us ended up throwing them away. Thus ended our day in Shiraz, a place that I found to be a little bit disappointing, you could say a poor relation to Isfahan,



though had we gone to Shiraz first of all we would no doubt have enjoyed it a lot more.

We were up bright and early the next day, and after enjoying a glass of tea in our room we checked out of the hotel shortly after 7 o'clock. We started walking to the edge of the town and on the way managed to get a lift to the city gates. Within 5 minutes we got a lift in a jeep to Persepolis.



Persepolis is an archaeological site of the former capital of the Persian Empire. We left our bags in the gatehouse spent an hour or two looking around the site where we met the two Russians again. We left Persepolis at about 11 o'clock and started hitching. In England on a bank holiday the roads become jammed with traffic from people going out on day trips. In Iran it is just the opposite and the roads were deserted. After waiting for about 45 minutes with very little traffic on the road, a car stopped to pick us up. The driver spoke excellent English and told us he could take us about 10 km, but while we were travelling he invited us back to his village for dinner. He was an army schoolteacher, assigned to teach the young children in the village of Abanar.



Our host's name was Nasser. He asked us if we liked chicken and when we replied affirmatively he promptly caught one and killed it. He handed it to one of his pupils called Reza who got on with the job of plucking and preparing the chicken for cooking (at least we could be sure it was fresh). Although Reza was probably not much more than eight years old he was well capable of preparing a meal. It was obvious it would take some time prepare so while it

cooked Nasser took us to the village swimming pool.



The pool was a natural spring surrounded by pomegranate bushes. This pool was what gave the village its name, Ab being Farsi for water, and anar meaning pomegranate. We took soap and shampoo with us and while we swam we took advantage of the opportunity to have a good wash. It was almost half past four before Reza came to tell us the meal was ready and we returned to the house. The food was just like Shabbat meal at home. Chicken soup with lockshen, chicken and roast potatoes. Having waited so long to eat we were by now starving hungry and that made it even more enjoyable. For dessert we had fresh pomegranates.

By the time we had finished eating it was dark and Nasser invited us to spend the night. He supplied mattresses and blankets. Before going to bed Nasser and I played chess, a game that I don't play very well. I still managed to win one game and lost the other. By the time we finished playing it was after 10 pm, quite late for these parts, so it was lights out and off to sleep. During the night it rained heavily and the noise of the rain on the roof was quite soporific, helping me to get to sleep.



The next morning at 7am Nasser prepared a typical English breakfast for us, although Being a Moslem country there was no bacon, which was just as well, us being Jewish. We got up and started to pack when Nasser informed us that he would be driving to Tehran tomorrow and that we were welcome to spend the day with him. Needless to say we accepted.



He then changed into his army uniform, and at 8.30 prompt he headed off to take his school class. When he returned at 10am he took us for a guided tour around the village and introduced us to the villagers. They made us very welcome and it was quite obvious that they didn't get many tourists, Abanar is about five miles from the main road and is not figure on the list of important places to see in Iran. The village boasted a Persian carpet factory and we were shown around. Everything in the

manufacture of the carpet was done by hand and it was fascinating to watch the women working. I would have liked to buy it but it was quite expensive and I would have had to wait for it to be completed. Being hand made that was quite a long time to have to wait and the carpet was probably promised to a dealer anyway. Although I considered it to be expensive I had no doubt that it would have cost a lot more to buy in a bazaar, and even more still from a dealer in Europe or America.



Nasser then took our dirty washing away to be washed by one of the local women, then he returned shortly afterwards to prepare lunch. Over lunch he told us of his plans to attend Wabash college in USA when he eventually left the army. He had taken some form of overseas

scholarship exam and was hopefully awaiting the result.

His family lived in Tehran and he was going to visit them. His school classes had finished for the day and he had an idea to set off for Tehran that afternoon and drive through the night. The only problem with that suggestion was, firstly his car lights didn't work, and secondly our washing still hadn't come back.

Not long after lunch the lady brought our washing back. Some of the things were still a bit damp, so while Louis hung them up to dry, I tried to fix the fault with Nasser's car lights. I spent more than an hour trying to find the fault before eventually admitting defeat. It was obvious that we were not going to head off to Tehran today, so we decided to set out at first light the next morning. Nasser prepared an early supper for us and we all settled down to sleep by 8pm so that we could be up bright and early.

Reza came in to wake us up at 5.30 just as the sun was rising. Before we left Nasser left Reza a number of letters to be given to be given to his superior officer should he decide to pay a visit during his absence. Each letter said that he had gone to visit the library in Shiraz and would be away for the day. Each letter was dated for a different day and Reza was trusted to show him the correct letter in case of a visit. Obviously Nasser was taking a bit of French leave.

We were on our way less than an hour after getting up. Nasser drove like a maniac and we reached Isfahan in only 4½ hours where we stopped for an early lunch and to fill up with petrol. I don't know what kind of car it was, probably something made locally as the name badge was in the Arabic alphabet, but the engine was a two stroke. When we had filled the tank with petrol Nasser poured in half a can of oil. We then had to shake the car from side to side to ensure that it was thoroughly mixed before restarting the engine.

We left Isfahan just before noon and headed North at 120 KPH (75 MPH). This may not seem very fast when you think about British motorways, but on the narrow desert road in car with a two stroke engine it was very fast.

We passed the holy city of Qom (pronounce Gom), home of the Ayatollah Homeni, who at the time was still unheard of internationally. We could see the beautiful blue dome of the Mosque but as we bypassed the city we were not able to visit.

We arrived in Tehran just after 4pm and Nasser drove through the traffic like a kamikaze trainee. Both Louis and I were terrified and were glad to get out of the car at the American Express office. We said good-bye and thank you to Nasser and went in to check for any mail. There was nothing for us. On the way out we bumped into some of the Sundowners and another Australian girl who was heading the same way as us. We talked for a while before heading off to find a cheap hotel on the North side of the city so we could head out quickly the next morning.

We managed to find somebody who could speak English and he directed us to a hotel that sounded just what we wanted. Unfortunately we couldn't find it, and having walked for what seemed like miles we gave up looking. Somebody else told us to get a bus to Tehran Pars. They were also kind enough to give us both bus tickets, put us on the correct bus and tell the driver where to put us off.

Our destination turned out to be about 10km out of the city with not a hotel to be found. We managed to find a partly built building without a roof and decided to settle down for the night behind the shelter of corner wall. Our evening meal consisted of some bread and a some of our dwindling stock of processed cheese from Dover before settling down for another freezing cold night.

We were both up at first light, or should I say that we both decided to abandon our efforts to get to sleep. Both of us were feeling very cold and miserable from what must have been the coldest night since we left home. The first thing we noticed was a sprinkling of snow on some nearby hills that had presumably fallen overnight.

What we had thought the night before was a partly built building turned out to be a partly collapsed building. There was plenty of bricks around from one of the collapsed walls and we used them to build an incinerator. We filled it with anything we could find to burn and within a few minutes we had a roaring fire going with which to warm ourselves.

At about 7 o'clock we started hitching and managed to get a lift after only 10 minutes. The driver took us just 3 miles up the road and dropped us off at a tea house where we were able to have breakfast. We bought a loaf of bread and some tea and had some more of the processed cheese. Iranian bread is not the same as the stuff you buy in England. It is oval shaped being about 15 inches long and only about ½ an inch thick, not unlike the Indian nan bread. It is baked in an oven lined with small stones and it is not uncommon to find a small pebble stuck to the bottom of a loaf, so in order to avoid losing the odd tooth it is wise to inspect the bread on both sides before eating it. It is also very cheap costing just 2 rials wherever you are in the country.

From the tea house we managed to get a lift in a United Nations vehicle that took us to a police checkpoint. The driver spoke to one of the policeman and after he had inspected our passports he agreed to find us a lift to Sari which is not very far from the shores of the Caspian Sea.

We waited by the checkpoint while the police stopped and checked all the drivers' documents, but after an hour had gone by we gave up waiting and started to walk up the road. Once around the corner we started hitching and soon managed to get a lift to Ab-Ali, followed by a lift to Amol in a Mercedes. On the way we had a beautiful view of snow covered Mount Damarvand, at 18,386 feet, the highest mountain in Iran.



We got plenty of lifts that day, but like Bulgaria, all the lifts were for short distances from one small town to the next. Up to now we had been averaging 250 miles per day but from here we would only be covering about 50 miles each day. We eventually arrived in Gorgan late in the afternoon in the back of a lorry loaded with bags of rice and pears and we got down from the lorry in the depot. We walked next door to a tea house and took some refreshment before starting to look for a hotel for the night. We managed to find a hotel above yet another tea house and managed to bargain the room cost down from 50 to 40 rials each.

Once the deal had been struck I had to visit the local police station with both of our passports to register for the night. I was presented with a form to be filled in that was printed in Farsi, without an English translation. The visa that was rubber stamped into the passport was in two languages. I spent the next half hour comparing the Farsi on the stamp with the questions on the paper and somehow managed to complete the form after a fashion. Even though I had answered the questions in English, which the policeman couldn't read, he still seemed to be happy with my efforts.

I have already mentioned that the hotel was situated over a tea house so we both went downstairs for our evening meal. Because we had managed to successfully bargain down the hotel price we decided to do the same for our meals. They served a fixed menu for 30 rials each and we managed to get both meals for just 50 rials. I became the centre of attention when the waiter noticed my watch and called all the staff over to have a look at it. It was a divers watch with a timer bezel that you could rotate to mark off a period of time. They were quite common back home but judging by the excitement it was causing they had obviously not been seen very often in this area. They offered to buy it from me, and even offered to swap it for various items without success.

Back in our room we used one of ground sheets as a curtain to cover the windows. The other one we used to block the view through the wide gaps between the planks that went to make up the door. I then settled down for the night and fell asleep while Louis was still writing letters home.

About 4am we were rudely awoken by the sound of somebody hammering on the door and shouting to us in Farsi. At first we thought the hotel was on fire but as neither of us could smell smoke we decided that this wasn't the case and tried to ignore it. I don't know what it was all about but whoever it was they kept the banging and shouting going for quite some time before eventually giving up and enabling us to get back to sleep again.

The next morning Louis got up at about 7am and went out by himself. He wanted to get to the shores of the Caspian Sea that he presumed wasn't too far away for a quick run there and back before breakfast. I decided that I would much prefer to stay in bed and catch up on some of the sleep I lost during the night. He returned an hour later having gone off the idea when he found that it was about 12 kilometres to the nearest part of the sea. After breakfast we made a point of saying good-bye to the hotel staff, hoping to get some sort of explanation for the disturbance during the night, but none was offered.

Our first lift was from in a jeep being driven by an Iranian who spoke excellent English, but with an

American accent. He had been living in USA for 12 years and had married an American. They had both returned to live in Iran but she wasn't settling down in Iran and so they were making plans to permanently return to USA in the new year. He dropped us off in Ali-Abad where we soon got a lift in a Mercedes Lorry to Shokarpasand. There then followed a series of short lifts. We finally ended up in a Land Rover driven by a Cossack who dropped us at the roadside when he turned off into his farm.

We waited over 2 hours without a lift before a British registered jeep passed by. I shouted out to him and he stopped. He told us he was being sponsored by Lord Montague of Beaulieu to drive to India and back. He wasn't able to give us a lift because he didn't have any room inside, not even for one of the bags, let alone two of us as well. Even so, we did have a good chat for the next half an hour. Not long after he had driven off, the Cossack came out from his farm and gave us two very large watermelons. They were delicious and we enjoyed tucking into one of them for our lunch. While we eating the melon, a jeep stopped and took us another 5 km. Maybe we looked hungry, because when he dropped us off he gave us 2 sheets of bread to go with the watermelon.

To relieve the boredom we played at throwing stones at a signpost. By the time the next car stopped I was winning 21 hits to 19. The car that stopped was a Volkswagen Beetle with Australian number plates. Unfortunately it was going the other way so it wasn't much use to us for a lift. It was being driven by two Australians who were headed for England. We had a chat with them for another half an hour. Although there were not many lifts to be had in this area, the social life was beginning to look pretty good.

Not long after the Aussies had driven off we got a lift in another jeep. The driver dropped us off in Galikesh, where we started to hitch again on the road out. After what seemed like an endless wait for a lift another British registered car stopped for a chat, this time it was four people in a Volkswagen. They were Ugandans and they were headed for Pakistan. As it was now getting dark they decided not to continue and to spend the night in Galikesh. Thinking that it was probably not very safe to travel on these roads at night we decided to do the same, and walked back into the town.

We checked into the same hotel as the Ugandans and managed to get a room for 25 rials each. We decided to get an early night so that we could make an early start in the morning, so after our meal we settled down to sleep by 8.30pm.

At 6am we awoke to find that 3 other people had moved into our room during the night while we were asleep. We packed quietly and tip toed out of the room so as not to wake them up, had a glass of tea. As there was nobody around to give us our bill, we made up our own. We then paid the man who made us the tea, and set out for another hopefully more successful day of hitch hiking.

One of the first vehicles along was a Volkswagen Combi van. The driver stopped, but the van was too full of luggage to fit us in. The German couple inside said they were headed for Kathmandu and apologised for not being able to give us a lift. Half an hour later and we got a lift on the back of a tractor, to a road junction 5km down the road. While we waited at the junction for a lift we saw a group consisting of a number of vehicles with various European countries' registration numbers go past. They had a sign that said "International party, England to Australia".

About an hour and a half later we got a lift for 20km in a jeep, who dropped us just outside a small village. While waiting for our next lift an Iranian joined us who was also trying to get a lift.

Louis found a bush with what looked like a tomato growing on it. He picked one to ask the Iranian if they were OK to eat. Not understanding what Louis was asking he took it off him, smiled as if to say 'thank you', then ate it down in one go. It obviously was OK to eat.

About an hour later a lorry stopped and picked us all up. Louis and I were invited to travel in the cab with the driver and his mate, while the Iranian had to go in the back. After a while we stopped for a toilet stop in the middle of nowhere. The road was only a dirt road and the man in the back was covered in dust that had been thrown up from the road. When the truck moved off again I had to go in the back with the Iranian while Louis was able to sit comfortably in the cab. Although the lorry only travelled at 40 kilometres per hour, it still threw up clouds of dust. So



when we stopped for lunch, I too was covered in a layer of white powder. Luckily there was somewhere for me to have a wash before eating.



The driver bought both of us some lunch, and we in turn shared our remaining watermelon with him. After lunch both Louis and I had to go into the back of the truck for the rest of the journey. We eventually arrived in a small village and thinking that this was the end of the road we got down and started hitching again.

We were soon joined by a small crowd of lads who spoke a bit of English. We talked to them for the hour and a half that we waited at the side of the road until the same lorry came along. He stopped for us again and we both climbed into the back. A bit further down the road we passed the International Party, and one of them had broken down. We came across a crowd of people

standing at the side of the road and the driver stopped to give them all a lift. He dropped us all in Bodjnord at about 6.30pm.

We did try to get out of Bodjnord that night, and while waiting at the side of the road a crowd of children came out and stood around staring at us. They started to throw stones at us so Louis tried to chase them away. He didn't have any success until he shouted "go on - shoo!" The children all ran away laughing and calling out what sounded like they were repeating what Louis had said. We later learned that Borro Gumshoe, or something like it, is a swear word in Farsi, which is probably what they thought Louis had said.

By 7.30pm it had got dark and was also getting very cold, so we decided to call it a day and headed back into Bodjnord where we spent the night. We met the International Party while we were having a meal and chatted to them for a while. We even tried to cadge a lift without success.

Although Bodjnord was a bit bigger than most of the other towns along that road, it was still only a small town. The sort of town that you would pass through without giving it a second look. It was to hit the International headlines some fifteen or so years later when a massive earthquake flattened all the buildings in the town. Many people were killed or were missing in the aftermath and the death toll eventually rose into the tens of thousands. When I saw the news I couldn't help thinking back on the

place I remembered from 1968 and wondered where so many people could possibly have come from.

Friday 1st November. We woke up early feeling freezing cold. The room was so cold that we both felt as though we had spent the night sleeping outside again. We had some tea in our room to warm ourselves up and then left the hotel. We refused to pay the bill because of the bitterly cold room.

As we walked out of the town we saw the Sundowners bus filling up with fuel in a garage. We tried to cadge a lift from Bluey, the driver, but he refused. He again expressed his opinion that it was highly unlikely that we would get much farther, and that it was only very good luck that had got this far. Eventually he agreed to take us to Mashhad for 100 rials each. We thanked him very much and then declined his offer.



By 8am we had managed to get a lift in a truck that was going to Shirvan. On the way we stopped for breakfast at a tea house that was in the middle of nowhere. We took a photograph of the owner standing outside his establishment, and he in turn didn't charge us for our breakfast and teas.

Not long after the truck driver had dropped us we picked up a lift in another truck that took us to Quchan. Outside Quchan when we

started hitch hiking we were suddenly joined by a large group of people who just stood around us while we were trying to get a lift. Shortly after, a bus stopped and everybody got on board, everybody except us. One person who seemed to be seeing somebody off realised we were hitch hikers. He said something to the driver in Farsi and then pushed us onto the bus. I don't know who he was, but we had a free ride all the way to Mashhad, arriving at 4pm, much earlier that we had expected. On the way we sat by a man who spoke fairly good English and we chatted for most of the journey.

I suspect that most of the people on the bus were Pilgrims, visiting the tomb of the Imam Riza in Mashhad. Every now and then a young boy would shout out what sounded like a prayer in Farsi or even Arabic. All the passengers on the bus would reply with, "Alah-u-Akbah" which means "God is great". Our English speaking friend declined to translate any of what the boy had shouted out.

We asked the English speaking passenger if he knew where we would be able to renew our visas because they only had one day left before they expired. He asked the bus driver, and when we arrived in Mashhad we were shown into the bus company office where he made us a drink of tea. When we had finished he directed us to the police station to renew the visas. Before going to the police station the driver took us to the office of the bus company that ran the service to Herat. There was one bus daily, and it was fully booked for the next three days. We put our names down for the Tuesday bus then went with the driver to the police station. On the way we met a young boy who spoke perfect English; His name was Ahmed. He told us that we couldn't renew visas at this police station, and took us to a different one but the place was closed. He then took us to a hotel and arranged to meet us in the morning.

For supper we had some bread straight from the baker's oven. It was so fresh that it still had some hot pebbles attached, and we ate it with some of our dwindling supply of cheese. We met two Americans who were staying in the room next door. They were also heading for Afghanistan and like us, were also looking for transport across the border.

In the morning Ahmed came to our room at 8am to take us to the police station. Before we could leave the hotel the manager wanted our passports to take to the police to register. As we were also going to

the police we agreed to go together. On the way we called at the post office to post some letters while Ahmed and the hotel manager waited for us. When we reached the police station we were not allowed in and we had to hand our passports to a man standing in the street to take them in for us. At first we were reluctant to give them to a stranger in the street until we met Scottish guy there who was calling to collect his passport. He assured us that it was the normal procedure to hand the passport over in the street, and as though to prove it was OK he was now calling to collect his.

The Scot, whose name was William was travelling with his girlfriend Sandra to Afghanistan in the back of a van. They were sharing petrol expenses with the owner and agreed to introduce us to them. The van was a Volkswagen Combi, and it was painted with flowers and psychedelic colours. The owners, an American couple called Robert and Trish, agreed to give us a ride to Herat for 400 rials. After a bit of haggling they agreed to accept two Canadian dollars and the remainder of our Iranian currency - 110 rials. They were ready to leave but agreed to wait until 12.30 the time when we could collect our passports from the police.

While we waited in the van the vehicle became surrounded by children. When we tried to leave to collect our passports they surrounded us and pulled at our clothing as though we were two pop stars. Robert threw a cup of water at them and they scattered, leaving the way clear for us to leave.

William, Louis and I went to collect the passports that were handed over without any problems. Today was the last day of validity on our visas, but as we were on our way out of the country it was no longer necessary to have them renewed. William went to the bank to change the last of his Iranian money. Instead of going into the bank he struck a deal with a man outside to buy some Pakistan rupees at a very advantageous rate of exchange.

We got back to the van at 1pm and immediately set off for the border. As soon as we set out William and Sandra started to smoke hashish, which in 1968 was quite acceptable in Iran. A few years later they introduced the death penalty for possession of any drugs, but for the time being there was no problem. We stopped in a small village to buy some bread and the van became surrounded by people who were all staring in. It was an ideal opportunity for me to practise my newly acquired skill of swearing in Farsi, and it worked quite well.

Robert had been briefed on the route beforehand and had been warned that Iranian immigration was in a small town some 20 kilometres before we reached the border. He pulled into a small compound where there was a tent erected for the immigration officers. We went through all the red tape of leaving the country, getting our passport stamps and clearing through customs. One of the customs officers offered me 500 rials for my camera, while another offered me five dollars for my jacket.

By the time we set off for the border proper it was dark, and the road was not lit. The road was just a dirt road that was very hard to follow in the dark. At one point a fox ran out in front of the van and Robert was not able to avoid it, in fact I don't know if he wanted to avoid it. He stopped the van and went back to retrieve the dead fox, cutting off its tail to tie to the radio aerial.

Robert was driving along the dirt road at a good speed when he suddenly slammed on the brakes sending all of us in the back flying around the van. When we looked to see what he had stopped for we saw one very frightened border guard standing just in front of the van. He had been standing in the middle of the road in his brown uniform, no torch, just his hand held up to signal us to stop. Robert had nearly smashed into him and the chain behind him. This was the border, in the middle of nowhere. There was nothing else around, not even a building.

Another man in uniform loomed out of the darkness and advised us that we must go back 20 km to get our passports stamped. He was quite disappointed when he found out that we had already done so. Nearly everybody else we later spoke to had missed out the immigration tent and had been sent back to get their passports stamped. After checking the passports he removed the chain and let us out of Iran.