

Budget Bus, 21st August 1971
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Black text and b/w photos by Derek Minter
Red text and colour photos by Graham O'Neill

This account is dedicated to all my travelling companions, but especially Graham, Ian and Tony.

Introduction

In 1971 the need for travel and adventure overtook four of us, we had only been in the world of work for a couple of years since leaving school but already felt we needed an extended holiday! The four were Tony Couch, Ian Orpwood, Graham O'Neill and myself, Derek Minter. After we left school we had continued to meet up on Friday nights at the Green Dragon Pub in Winchmore Hill with a crowd of friends, and gradually an idea was born to travel overland to India and beyond, with our eventual destination being Australia

Originally we intended to take our own vehicle but after some research we began to realise that a basic problem existed with this idea, the need for a Carnet de Passage which would have been impossibly expensive. (A Carnet de Passage is actually a bond of several times the new value held as assurance that it would be re-exported and not sold locally). (Earlier, we had considered the prospect of buying a Landrover and making our own way, with the possibility of sponsorship from tyre manufacturers and suchlike. After numerous phone-calls to companies however, it became clear that nobody was interested in financing our adventure, resulting in our decision not to 'go it alone' after all.) On the proposed route Iran (part of the year), India and Pakistan all required such a document and this would prevent us selling the vehicle in India and so our early plans were pretty well scuppered.

While looking for vehicles we came across an advert in the Exchange & Mart offering bus trips to India by a company called Budget Bus for the princely sum of £39 each (equivalent to \$100 in those days). By good fortune Budget Bus was based in Whetsone which was only a few miles from where we lived, and we trooped along to meet Emil Bryden one evening at his parent's house, in a very pleasant north London suburb. In the driveway there was a coach minus the front suspension. After an evening drinking Emil's coffee and hearing his traveller's tales we paid up for a trip to New Delhi. In fact as Emil told us later, advertising in the Exchange and Mart had brought him more passengers than any other source. (There had been a regular advert in the 'Private Eye' magazine for a similar trip but it was considerably more expensive than Budget Bus.)

As the time passed and departure came closer we tried to get some money together for the impending trip. Our initial plans were to travel on from Delhi to Madras by rail and from there, take a ship to Australia, ideally working our passage. With hindsight it was a rather naive idea that we completely failed to research. (But in those dark pre-internet days it was more difficult to find that sort information). We decided that £150-200 each would

probably be enough money to get us safely to Oz, I have no idea what we based that calculation upon. When we left England we had about £1000 between us.

Equipment

With our limited experience of this sort of expedition we started to buy equipment for the forthcoming trip and deciding that we had to be well prepared. We gradually accumulated jackets, rucksacks, fly-spray, even talcum powder! (to become useful aligning the differential crown wheel and pinion in Germany), water bottles, tents, airbeds and a pump, first aid kit (not to mention a Primus stove that only worked once, when we tested it before departure) and dozens of other bits of useful or useless kit.. Graham insisted taking a hurricane lamp and we were all bristling with knives and money belts. During a trip to a cut-price chemist in Southgate we staggered to the check-out under the weight of plastic buckets packed full of cans of insect spray, boxes of batteries and rolls of toilet paper. At the cash desk the stunned cashier declared “Well, you guys are going to have a hell of a weekend!”

We took boxes of cassette tapes that Graham had painstakingly recorded and these were amongst the most used items during the next two years. Although if I ever hear Lulu singing “Shout” (fortunately an increasingly rare experience) I still expect her to sing “it makes you want to - click” as it cuts off at the end of the tape.

Departure

We resigned our various jobs and after a few weeks of farewell parties and general boozing, during which we spent more money than was sensible, the day came. With an entourage of well-wishers, the four of us arrived at Emil’s house for the grand departure. No previous life experience had helped us to prepare for the chaos that met our eyes! In Emil’s front garden an engine was still being fitted into an old green and cream Bedford coach, (registration number 102 HPH). Oily parts were littered around with Emil and Peter, an Australian lad, suitably adorned with the black stuff. Outside there were strange looking people, most of whom were to be our fellow passengers, milling about. One woman was throwing up into a neighbour’s front garden. (One man seemed rather incongruous, attired in a somewhat crumpled jacket and standing adjacent to a well-worn piece of luggage. He had remarked that, when travelling, it was only really necessary to carry one small bag... full of money! We looked thoughtfully at his lone ‘carry-all’, obviously considering the contents. During the trip he kept himself very much to himself and disappeared unnoticed somewhere in Germany). Inside the house another group were watching TV. It appeared at first sight that they were all crazed ‘long-hair hippy horrors’ and at that point I started regretting the whole idea. My parents had arrived and this did nothing for my peace of mind as I hesitated to guess what they were thinking...

After a couple of hours some semblance of order was established, the engine ran although with so little power that we had to help by disembarking from the bus and pushing it out of the driveway! We climbed on board again along with all our, by now, embarrassing paraphernalia including the buckets of batteries. Emil and Peter threw all the old parts that were lying around into the boot of the bus (which included a crankshaft and cylinder head), presumably to use as spares, and we stacked our gear at the back of the coach. The

coach, although old was in quite good condition but one problem which was to come back to haunt us repeatedly was the lack of a lock on the boot – it was tied shut with a short length of rope.

Wisely, a good few of us extracted our luggage from the boot and kept it inside, on the empty seats. As we headed towards Dover and we began to assess our fellow passengers, there were 21 of us in all which half filled the coach. Occasionally Emil stopped the bus to tinker with the timing, once outside a fish and chip shop where people ran off to get food.

I was starting to lapse into a state of shock at actually starting such a journey after all the months of planning! I don't know how the others were feeling but I remember we were a bit quiet, except for Graham who was pub spotting "We must try that one when we get back in two years time"!

Eventually we pulled up at the Dover docks and Emil went to organise paperwork for our passage to Ostend but as he left the bus he gave us a travellers tip - that a 5p coin was the same size as a Deutschmark which was worth considerably more and would fit German slot machines! Now we knew this we set about finding some 5 pence coins. We boarded the ferry and the four of us made our way to the upper decks and stood looking at the White Cliffs as we sailed away. I felt wretched, I seemed to have a cold and was tired and heading for India on an ancient coach, I can't remember feeling so depressed before or since. (I, on the other hand, felt quite elated to think that we had finally made a start on a journey that I had been dreaming about for a couple of years. Looking back towards Dover the experience already seemed ethereal, watching the fairy-lights of the increasingly distant port whilst the drumming of the engines affirmed our progress towards a plethora of new and exciting possibilities. I also had complete confidence in the collective judgement of our group of four, a confidence that was to prove wholly justified.) We went below and found chairs to sleep in, occasionally spotting a strange looking person amongst the passengers and then realising that he must be with us...

The start

We arrived at a grey Ostend and as we drove through Belgium my spirits lifted, the bus was going and the adventure had started. It didn't take long to get to the border with Germany where we joined the Autobahn and seemed set to get a few solid miles under the wheels. After a few hours we all realised to noise of the coach had changed and Peter came to the back and opened up an inspection panel over the rear axle differential and we could all hear a loud mechanical noise. Emil stopped the bus on the hard shoulder and we got out and sat on the grass bank.



Differential trouble in Germany
(Don, Fred, Peter, Dave B, Tony)



(Ian, Tony, Bela (standing), and me
*This must have been taken on my
camera by Graham*

After a while we drove slowly on for a few miles until we came to a picnic area with a snack bar just off the main road and parked. It was obvious that we had a serious mechanical problem but as passengers we did not feel the need to be very involved. We spent the next 24 hours wandering around, eating and sleeping, and starting to get to know the other people.

Meanwhile Emil removed the differential fortunately there is good access to this on a large vehicle where you can sit underneath. The axle half shafts were released and the prop-shaft removed. Emil had a spare crown wheel and pinion(!) and replaced the damaged ones with this. Our personal comprehensive stocks of equipment were raided for such items as talcum powder to align the cogs and scissors to cut gaskets from cornflake packets! All was re-assembled and filled with oil (lack of oil had caused the failure) and at dusk on the second day we climbed on board and set off once more. A few miles down the road we stopped again at another lay-by and Emil got out of the bus presumably to check on his repair. We all sat and waited until someone spotted that he had climbed into his sleeping bag and was asleep on the pavement! We all followed suite and in the morning set off with the bus running smoothly.



Bob Hughes, left and Emil still in his sleeping bag

Our fellow passengers to Istanbul

During the enforced breakdown stop we had got to know our fellow passengers a little better. The four of us were, at twenty years old, the youngest and amongst the straightest in terms of what I will describe as hippy drop out culture. Gradually, we formed into several factions.

We sat near to an Australian couple, Bob and Rob (Robyn) Hughes from Sydney (who we unkindly christened Flob and Gob for no reason except that it amused us) – they were lovely people and as the journey progressed we formed a bit of a group with them and Dave Barrett and Don Larbey. Dave Barrett was travelling alone and was twenty-five years old. We shook our heads a bit regarding his great age and muttered amongst ourselves that he should have settled down by those advanced years. An electronics engineer by trade he had left England to go on a two year trip round the world. Although somewhat inclined to ‘exaggeration’ he was a first class guy who was a rock in the difficult days to come. He was also an experienced coach driver, a skill that became very useful later. We ended up sharing a flat and house with Dave and Lindy his girlfriend in Australia (although that is another story). Dave, like us, had somewhat over equipped for the journey and spent his time giving away extra items - I remember this even included a rubber mallet for knocking in tent pegs! Don Larbey, also travelling by himself, was a different character, a great sense of humour and all round good guy. He had not brought much money with him and although this was a cheap part of the world I doubted he would make Oz. (At one point, early in the journey, he mentioned that he had ‘a headache... a really bad headache’. From that point on he became known affectionately as Don ‘Two Headaches’ Larbey. Later still, after a desperate dose of the ‘Trotts’ he became known, equally affectionately, as Don ‘Two Sh**ts’ Larbey!) Peripheral to our group was Alan (later known as Boots) a large and usually quiet Australian guy but with a big temper, he always attracted trouble. Later in the trip he just wore shorts and a large pair of walking boots, hence the nickname.

Another main group formed with the main ‘way-out’ type characters, mostly junkies or people heading that way. They consisted of Chris (Bones due to his skeletal appearance) and his much too nice girlfriend Maureen. (On a bumpy road a Thermos flask bounced

from the parcel shelf over her head and caught Maureen a painful blow on the head – Bones angry reaction “Maureen, you might have broken it!”. Bela was an American junkie with large injection sores. Mike and Fred, two huge New Zealanders, covered with tattoos and told stories about time in Turkish prisons. Fred was very friendly, Mike less open. They had the over complicated plans of junkies, returning to NZ to train as mechanics so that they could go to Canada to make money and then buying a boat to sail the Caribbean! Two New Zealand girls, Liz (a stunning brunette) and Gay soon became their friends and part of that group although I don’t know if they also took hard drugs.

There were some more guys who were probably somewhere in between ‘us and them’. I don’t mean to give the impression that there was any animosity between the groups of passengers, simply a coming together of like-minded people.

Peter Morton

Gradually, as we drove through Europe that summer, we learned of Emil’s plan for the trip. He would be taking us as far as Istanbul and Peter, the young Australian guy, would be taking the bus on to Delhi. Peter had travelled with Emil back from Delhi on his last run and Emil had talked him into helping out with this trip. Peter was the only person on the bus younger than us. He was a friendly lad of nineteen and had trained as a commercial artist in Brisbane. He had no experience of driving a coach and, given his young age, probably had little experience of driving at all. I have to say that, looking back across the years, Peter did fairly well, given his lack of experience and the demanding situation he was in, but understandably he had little influence over the group as a whole.

Brummies

Another couple of other incidents from the German sector of the trip come to mind. We pulled into a motorway service station one evening and to our delight discovered slot machines that would take 5p coins! We managed to get a lot of strange products from these including packs of Brummies (nothing to do with Birmingham) which were small biscuits. On the back of each pack was a small cut out which could be assembled into the form of a tiny pack of Brummies. Hysteria set in. We went into the cafeteria and tried to buy really inexpensive food, the women behind the counters took an instant dislike to us and when we asked “Ist wasser frei?” they were disgusted at our cheapness!

Later we stopped at a public toilet but had no Germany money to pay the attendant and her cries of “Zehn pfennig bitte” haunt me to this day!

Salzberg

From Germany we crossed to Austria and headed to Salzburg where we had a pleasant evening in a bar. **Returning to the bus we all hung around in the car park near the centre of town. We continued drinking, pouring out large quantities of duty-free vodka, some of us drinking from aluminium mess cans. Things got pretty hazy at that point. Some people ‘crashed out’ in the car park. Others slept inside the bus. I do remember though, Tony holding a torch to assist Bela during her ‘fix’. The next morning dawned and the scene that awaited the early risers resembled a small-scale disaster zone. There were bodies scattered around in the car park and laid out in sleeping bags. There was evidence of**

sporadic vomiting and after a while several smartly dressed 'Polizei' paid us a visit. They looked on bemused and were then relieved to hear that we would shortly be on our way. Everyone needed a shower and so we set off to try to find one. Although in separate groups we all ended up at the local swimming pool and managed to wash for the first time since leaving home. Local swimmers looked on with varying degrees of consternation.



Hangover in Salzburg carpark. Me left, Tony, Mike, Bob, Rob kneeling. Note the stains!

Austria is a picturesque country to drive through and we promised ourselves we would return one day to see it more thoroughly. The bus was running smoothly, sun shining and the trip was going well.

Yugoslavia

We entered Yugoslavia and were handed brochures welcoming us. The information that quickly drew our attention was the section that described the main function of the police in Yugoslavia, which was 'to keep the traffic moving'! This struck us as a strange priority until we considered that the Yugoslav's would probably want to keep us moving as swiftly as possible... until we were over the border!

Whilst driving along the main dual carriageway, Emil decided it was time for Peter's first driving lesson. As passengers we may have felt uneasy about this but realistically if Peter was going to drive us from Istanbul to Delhi he was going to have to learn to drive at some stage. Moments after him taking the wheel a large articulated truck that was overtaking us began to sway closer to my window on the offside of the bus and a few seconds later it hit us with a glancing blow, flattening our front mirror. The driver of the truck was unaware(?) of this and carried on. Emil shouted "After him Peter!" and Peter caught up with him and hooted until the truck pulled over and stopped. A frank exchange of views between Emil and the driver (probably with no common language) followed and Emil made him pay some money for the damage caused. Beyond the bus windows it appeared as though we were passing through a medieval countryside. Oxen and horses struggled with ploughs and teams of women, bent double, were working in the fields.



Lunch stop, Me, Ian, Tony. Background far left Rob & Bob. Far right Adrian and Brian.

Greece

The next country to be graced with our presence was Greece and Emil drove us to Kavalla, a Mediterranean resort town. We stopped at a campsite somewhere near Thessalonica where he always stayed for a days rest. As the bus stopped the heavens opened and we watched for half an hour as tents and equipment were swept past us. One of the skylights in the bus leaked a bit but otherwise we observed this from the dry interior. Then the rain stopped, water quickly disappeared into the sandy ground and the sun came out. We disembarked to set up camp – there was plenty of choice where to pitch our tents as all others had been washed away!

That evening we gathered at the bar and Emil was quite chatty, buying bottles of Retzina and encouraging us all to have a few drinks and hold a bit of a party. **The weather had become bright and warm and we swam in the sea as the sun set. After that, once again, things became rather hazy but I do remember us running around in the dark on the beach and making a considerable amount of noise.** Graham and I were sharing a tent and as we climbed into our sleeping bags we became aware of banging and swearing from other tents around us. They had all been invaded by the “fighting spiders of Greece”, who were large and feisty and lying in wait for campers! We were spared this ordeal probably because I had persuaded my sister to sew fine netting into the front of the tent against insect attack and so there was no way in for them. She had also put Velcro across the tops of the pockets of my jacket, which kept things safe in dodgy places. This jacket served me well and had large pockets. In one of these I always kept a pack of individual sheet toilet paper which became very handy indeed as we headed east!

The following morning, probably quite late, we staggered out of the tents with ‘inexplicable’ headaches and stood looking out to sea. Somehow a considerable amount of beach ‘furniture’ had found it’s way into the sea! Upturned tables and chairs projected out of the shallow water. How this had come about no one seemed to remember! The retzina however had taken its’ toll on one or two of us. There was at least one quite serious case of alcohol poisoning although the sufferer insisted that it must have had

something to do with the local water! We spent the next day at the camp swimming in the clearest water we had ever seen and recovering from the night before.

Turkey

The following day we drove on towards Turkey, stopping on the way at a small town still within Greece for lunch. A large number of passengers were struck down with the dreaded shits during the next 24 hours! Our border crossing was at Edirne on the main international east-west route. We pressed on to Istanbul and once again Emil's local knowledge came to the fore as he drove us to another campsite on the edge of the city. As the bus pulled into the campsite (as was to become the case throughout the trip) a small gaggle of individuals were to be seen making a dash for the bus door carrying toilet rolls, even before Emil had released his grip on the handbrake. I was amongst this select group at the time and I can remember the feeling of sheer relief as I sat myself down in a vacant toilet cubicle. Little did I realise that this cubicle was to become my home for the following twelve hours. It wasn't as if I didn't attempt to make an exit, but every time I made for fresh air I had to do a quick 'about-turn' and shout 'Ruth' at the porcelain, before seating myself once again. However, this experience turned out to be some sort of 'baptism' as I didn't have stomach problems for the rest of the trip... all the way to Australia.



Istanbul backstreets

Istanbul

Emil drove us into Istanbul centre the next day. I can remember being in complete awe as we approached the city walls and the gate, which provided the main access to the town from the west. Those who had experienced Istanbul's bazaar on earlier occasions were very insistent that we take great care with our wallets and passports, describing techniques used by thieves to relieve visitors of their valuables. They suggested that we always stay in reasonably sized groups and kept a look out for each other. We bowed to their superior experience. The bazaar at this time was still a seemingly disorganised

collection of street and covered markets. It was a maze in which one soon lost one's sense of direction. (Nowadays a walk around the bazaar is no longer intimidating but this does allow one to view the merchandise more thoroughly.) Young men and children approached us constantly asking us where we were from. It soon became apparent that whatever answer you gave, be it France, Germany or Italy, etc., they were able to greet you and describe their merchandise and prices not only in the appropriate language but they were also able to give prices at the current exchange rate for the relevant currency! Astonishing! We didn't buy much but enjoyed the experience of haggling. We visited the Pudding Shop much frequented by young travellers and perused the traveller's noticeboard, requesting rides or travelling companions. Istanbul was a different experience to the European countries that we had just travelled through and is accurately called 'The Gateway to the East'.

While we were sightseeing Emil parked the bus and started advertising for additional passengers who wanted to travel onto Delhi by putting notices in the windows. He also had some work done on the bus by a local garage – shame he didn't get the boot lid fixed! After a couple of days spent in Istanbul it was time to move on again but this time without Emil who was returning to bring another bus out. The newly recruited passengers arrived, another 15 or so and the bus was now quite full. Emil did a disappearing act – one moment he was there, the next gone and he took the best of the toolkit with him. Peter was a bit stunned that there was no "Goodbye & Good Luck" for we certainly would need the luck! The tools would have been handy as well...

Peter's reign as driver started and he drove us down to the ferry over the Bosphorus but somehow he parked the bus onboard and then got off to get the tickets and was left behind! Dave (our passenger who also had coach driving experience, and even a licence) climbed into the driver's seat and drove the bus off when we reached the other side assuming that Peter would come on the next ferry, which he did. We started on the long journey across Turkey (Asia) towards Iran. It was interesting how the dynamics of the group changed that day, the original 20 of us had bonded into some kind of a group and having all the new faces aboard and less space was a bit strange at first. In fact I can still remember the original passengers a lot better than the later arrivals. I do remember Martha who we saw again on a bus in Sydney and her husband and their friend. There was a guy (another Brian) who had been a mechanic with the British forces in Germany and he fixed the bus when it stopped with a blocked carb. one day but I don't recall him ever mending anything else. There were a few passengers who claimed to have mechanical knowledge but when put to the test didn't seem to actually have much success. Graham and I were both practical people but we didn't push ourselves forward to try to be involved with the various mechanical problems until everyone else had failed during the big breakdown in Pakistan. There was a Dutch woman with an American boyfriend and young son Wessel. He was probably five or six years old and they told 'amusing' stories of him going to nursery school back home stoned from eating hash cookies.



*The coach in the safe hands of passenger now driver Dave.
Note the clock which swung open the entire trip and the feet (showing through the skylight) of someone sitting on the roof*

Gradually we made our way eastwards across Turkey. **We were struck by the number of bridges and flyovers that had been built adjacent to the main road. Each structure stood alone, disconnected. Evidently they were built in preparation for the construction of a new road that, at this time, had not even begun. This might have been the result of foreign aid, which had 'run dry'.** It was always difficult getting everyone up and moving, with people missing, toilet stops, fix stops and every other kind of stop, at times our progress became snail like. Dave shared quite a bit of the driving with Peter who quickly became a competent driver. Peter was a friendly guy and his biggest problem was that he wanted to keep everyone happy. Some groups wanted to go slower and sightsee, the druggies wanted to stop and score, some wanted to go faster as their money was running out... and so it went on. I don't think the four of us gave Peter too much of a hard time but progress was certainly frustratingly slow at times and, surprisingly, Peter seemed to be most influenced by the serious drug users.

One of the bus skylights was missing and the hole gave access to the roof while on the move and it was possible to sit off the roof rack and get a wonderful view and a bit of wind burn as well. I spent one morning up there but decided although fun it was insanely dangerous – any kind of accident or even a sudden stop would certainly result in an unexpected flying lesson. **To get up onto the roof one had to stand on one of the seats, put one foot on the top of the seat and push up putting both hands up through the skylight and heaving oneself through. It gave a magnificent view and we often noticed large birds following our progress along the quiet main roads. (Probably vultures!!)**

At one point we stopped and held a short conversation with two local men. They wanted to know how much we would sell Liz and Gay for? An attractive proposition, which would have afforded us a good meal all round!



Dave (our passenger/driver) through the missing skylight

The fuel gauge didn't work very well and a couple of times we ran out of petrol (the bus was an original diesel, converted to petrol) and I remember a small car stopping to help us one afternoon in a remote region when the tank was empty. These guys gave a few litres of petrol from their petrol tank and wanted to show us some risqué photos that turned out to be just ordinary portraits of young women, which they were obviously not supposed to have! **I remember sucking on the pipe, which had one end in the petrol tank in order to start a siphon. Inevitably I ended up with a mouthful of petrol and we didn't have any properly clean water for me to rinse my mouth out with. Everything I ate or drank tasted of petrol for the rest of the day, in fact, probably not a bad thing!**

We were stopped late one afternoon in a remote mountainous region by some earth works next to the narrow road and so we camped for the night – tents were rarely pitched now, people just slept in the open – and everyone spent the evening sitting round a large fire and passing round my bottle of duty free whiskey that had somehow survived that far.

Occasionally we would come across another overland tour run by Penn Intercontinental Travel, an upmarket coach travel company using smart new buses. We were stunned to observe the way their passengers were dressed, suits and ties in even the most remote destinations and that was only the women! When they stopped they set up trestle tables and were (probably) served food by lackeys. There was no communication between our group and them, I don't think we felt they were part of our experience.

Some of the remote small towns we travelled through were a long way from any regular tourist activity. As we did not speak even one word of Turkish or have any idea what their script meant and few people in these regions spoke a word of English, ordering any food at the small restaurants we encountered was a challenge. Usually once the communication problem was recognised we were invited to go into the kitchen to choose

from the various pans simmering on the stoves. Usually goat stew. Looking back on it I can't remember Tony, who was our fussiest eater, eating much during this period, in fact nothing much since the Wimpy (Wimpy) Bar in Istanbul! As we moved east the ubiquitous Shish Kebab became the most common meal that we could order and be understood by both sides.

We were held up one morning by a convoy of army vehicles that has stopped right along the road, blocking it off. We all left the coach and wandered around the trucks and jeeps. The soldiers were friendly despite us openly laughing at the condition of some of their jeeps. We noticed how they used nails instead of split pins and how repairs had been bodged. Rather like Budget Bus I suppose!



Peter trying out a Turkish army jeep.

Another incident in one of these towns happened when Don stepped down from the bus and put a cigarette to his lips. Before he could light it a lad jumped up and snatched it from his lips and ran off with his prize!

Iran

We crossed the border into Iran and headed for Tehran where we spent a couple of days at another campsite on the outskirts. The campsite had a large swimming pool and a holiday atmosphere emerged as we jumped and swam in the pool all afternoon glad to be away from the hot and dusty roads for a while.

We were not the luckiest of travellers and it was here that the first of the medical problems occurred that dogged us during the remains of the trip. Don pushed Graham into the pool and unfortunately he hit his knee on the edge. This remained painful for a long time and, many years later, resulted in surgery to try to correct the problems caused.

As an excursion we headed north to the Caspian Sea. As the journey progressed the atmosphere grew more and more clammy. By the time we arrived at the shore of the lake we were all dripping with sweat. The water looked very unattractive, reflecting the dull grey of the sky overhead. No one wanted to bathe because of the grey and rather scummy

surface. It was a case of 'not much to see here' and it wasn't long before we all climbed back on board, returning to Tehran.

We travelled into Tehran centre on the bus and found the driving crazy beyond belief, battered cars seemed to think little of ricocheting off each other and we had a few minor bumps as we drove through and resumed our journey. As we finally left Tehran a small car overtook us and hooting loudly forced us to pull over and stop. Two Iranian guys got out of the car and returned to us two rucksacks that had bounced out of the tied (not very) shut un-lockable boot! They belonged to the two New Zealand girls who were open mouthed at their luck in having all their stuff returned. They had even put their passports in their rucksacks and so the loss would have been catastrophic. Later on in the trip we realised we had lost some valuable spares parts from the boot as well, including a spare crankshaft. Bounced out or stolen we were not sure, but they were gone.



Derek, packing away a groundsheet after camping in a remote spot in Iran.

Pretty soon we were on the move again and we gradually travelled the long miles across Iran which was generally quite a desolate region. **Those of us who had not seen such a site before were intrigued to see harvested crops laid out across the tarmac road. It was a technique whereby passing traffic 'threshed' the crop, the wind blowing away the chaff.**



A chance to stretch legs in a remote part of Iran



*Early morning conversation after another nights camping.
Foreground Graham, Adrian, Ian.*

For some time the bus had refused to start using the started motor and this meant that a group of passengers would have to push the bus while it was in reverse gear until the engine fired. This problem came to a head later when we were driving along one night (which in itself was unwise and relatively unusual) when suddenly all the power in the bus failed and the engine stopped. It was a relatively easy problem to diagnose, we suspected a battery terminal had lost its contact but when we tried to undo the main connections the posts in the battery started moving. Fearing that we would pull them right out of the battery casing, which would have left us totally stranded, we backed off the repair. We set up a warning triangle back along the road 100 metres and a few of us took turns to sit near it and make sure it didn't fall over and so we could wave down cars. As we sat in the pitch dark night, with no local light pollution, the stars were a fantastic sight. The Milky Way blazed and we must have seen a million stars – I have never since seen such a celestial sight or appeared to be so close to the heavens. Later another overland bus pulled up to help us – can't remember which company, but it was a Ford coach, and the driver soon had the terminals off and cleaned up and our problems (including the starting) were fixed. I don't want to seem ungrateful but I don't think he was too worried if he did break the battery casing in the process!

Our next major stop was at Mashad, close to the Afghan border.



Mashad campsite, bags being unloaded from the roof rack

Again we stopped at a campsite and I remember us going into the town one day on a local bus but being unable to find our way back. We found a taxi but with no common language we ended up drawing sketches of tents to try and explain where we wanted to go! It worked, eventually. The bread in Iran is worth a mention, it is cooked in a large conical oven set into the floor and is delicious warm. It is unleavened and after an hour it is stale and like leather.



Ian, Derek, Tony in Mashad



Mashad - main road.

The following day we made for Afghanistan. At this time an unfortunate incident took place that still upsets me to this day. We were barreling along quite happily and approached an area where a village was sited close to the road. A herd of goats were gathered close to the road and started to wander into the path of the bus. A boy was waving and shouting but, although the bus slowed, it struck one or more of the goats with such a force as would certainly have resulted in a fatality. It would have been most unwise to stop under those circumstances but I know a number of us felt quite sick. Naturally, the goat would have been of considerable value and the boy herding them would, I am sure, have been severely punished for the loss.

The Afghanistan border was reached by dusk. We exited Iran and entered an area of 'no man's land' prior to entering Afghanistan. The immigration office was closed by this time and so we pulled up by a group of buildings for the night. There appeared to be quite a number of residents in this neutral strip and other local people travelling, but caught overnight like ourselves. We were settling down to sleep when we were interrupted by the arrival of two very large dogs. They were a real nuisance and those of us who wanted to sleep outside hauled ourselves, in our sleeping bags, under the bus. This was a most effective means of keeping the dogs away. However, it was upsetting to see the raw flesh of goat hanging from various parts of the underside of the chassis.

In the morning we 'smartened ourselves up' to go through immigration. This was, however, quite unnecessary as the 'office' was a concrete 'blockhouse' sort of affair with no doors and sandy earth piled up on the floor. The officials seemed in very good humour and stamped passports with what appeared to be a potato stamp! They seemed to be 'under the influence' and happily stamped our arms when requested.

We headed towards the first of the three large towns in Afghanistan, this being Herat. I believe it was on this stretch of the road, a good quality concrete road built with foreign aid, that we stopped for the night in a hotel of 'international' standard. Or it had at one time been intended to be! Again, this was built with foreign aid, from the Soviet Union. The hotel exterior was of a sort of 'universal generic' design, inasmuch as it would not have looked out of place in a top quality European resort. However, this was Afghanistan

and even though it contained huge drawing rooms and reception areas the rooms were mostly empty. We discovered a huge kitchen cram-packed with modern equipment, shiny stainless steel cookers and a wide variety of catering size saucepans, etc.. The entire kitchen appeared completely unused,,, and so it was! It did not seem possible to stay inside the hotel building for the night and discovered that the only cooking equipment available was a couple of portable gas burners. I seem to remember we all ordered omelettes, the only available warm food there. A couple of us decided to have a bit of a nose around and headed upstairs. The banister rails were made from top quality wood beautifully varnished. The long corridors were finely covered with thick pile red carpeting. All the fixtures and fittings were made to a very high standard. The doors to the rooms however were locked and so we didn't get to see if they were as opulently furnished. We slept, again, in a car park, next to the bus.

Everyone loved Herat, which was an amazing place with sidewalks and open fronted shops. Hotels were cheap some situated above the shops with a view of the main street below. Cannabis and other drugs were freely available. At a busy junction a policeman was standing in the centre of the junction on a raised platform directing traffic. One in-observant driver of a cart drove straight across the junction without stopping and the policeman leapt off of his platform and started whipping the offender with great gusto! An approach that, I am certain, would modify the miscreants behaviour in the future. Probably far more effective than issuing a ticket!

A group of us went to the local bank, astonished to see a small stream running through the building!

A conflict started between the various factions of passengers about our slow progress, the druggies wanted to stay a while (they were in drug heaven here) and Peter agreed until Alan (Boots) completely lost his temper and burst into the room where they were sitting round smoking and injecting and started shouting about 'getting a move on'. At that, Peter backtracked and said we would now carry on the next day.

We drove along metalled roads to Kandahar. I found the town quite intimidating, a huge contrast with Herat. It took some time to find a suitably healthy toilet. I remember feeling very grateful that I was a bloke! From Kandahar we headed for Kabul, the old bus overheating often on the mountainous roads. We camped for a night on the way at a high altitude. We rarely used tents but just slept out on the ground but about 4.30 in the morning I awoke to realise I was in pain. My legs were almost numb and then looking at my (rather cheap) sleeping bag I realised it was covered with a thin layer of ice. I remember being woken by the sound of chinking metal. In the early morning light a camel train was passing within a few feet of our frozen bodies. My face felt... well, sort of numb and immobile and I realised that this too was covered in a thin layer of ice. Even in September it could get very cold in the mountains! Suddenly everyone was waking up and loud cries of F**K were everywhere! We all bundled onto the bus and Peter started driving. Not much heat available on board and plenty of ventilation from the broken skylight. We shivered for a while but eventually the sun rose to warm us.

After stopping for a meal we continued to Kabul and checked into a cheap hotel near the centre of town, about 4-6 people to a room. The hotel was pretty run down but the food was fairly good.

Kabul was amazing – another new experience, and we spent a couple of days there sitting about and wandering about in a bit of a daze. One evening we went to a posh restaurant quite a distance from the hotel. One of us became rather ill and refused to come out of the cubicle for about an hour. We were sure that this hadn't been caused by the food he had eaten but by something else that he had taken. I mean... the tea served here was provided using Lipton's teabags. Eventually, he was bundled into a cab along with others. There wasn't sufficient room in the cab for two more and so Derek and I decided to make our way back to the hotel on foot. We were thus breaking one of the most stressed rules of conduct in Kabul. Not to walk the streets after dark. In fact, although a little apprehensive at first, we both enjoyed the experience, with local people calling out and greeting us in a most friendly fashion. The most hazardous element of the journey was avoiding the storm drains that were up to about three feet deep! Even in the daytime it was thought to be an unnecessary risk to walk the backstreets of Kabul and on a couple of occasions we changed our minds and back-tracked to a busy road.

My overall and lasting impression of the people of Kabul was of a friendly and good-humoured folk, ready to laugh easily. I remember bartering with a policeman for his impressive belt. Really, it was the only part of his uniform that denoted his authority and I wasn't surprised when our negotiations failed to convince him. Anyway, he was probably more concerned that his trousers would fall down without the belt! Not the sort of thing that would instil respect!

By this stage of the journey a few passengers had deserted the bus, deciding to make their own way after spending more time locally. Some left luggage on board and probably intended to catch up later.

We were heading for the Khyber Pass. Somewhere along the route we stopped at a 'gypsy' encampment, drinking 'chi' and smoking. We sat under canvas, paraffin lamps illuminating the area. I was tempted to take out my hurricane lamp but, on second thought decided against it as mine looked distinctly whimpish compared to the local models. Again, the sky was so clear it looked as though one could reach out and touch the stars. (Maybe I had been smoking a little too much!) One man in the encampment was in a far from rational state and entertained us all with a very credible impersonation of a truck engine climbing a steep hill. Dave, in particular, was very impressed with this and was laughing hysterically about it. I got to hear him tell the story of that incident many times in the future. It always resulted in his laughing beyond the state of agony!

When the journey continued the night was very dark and, when entering small settlements, it was difficult to determine the main route out. I recall Peter and others hanging their heads out of the windows and the sliding door, yelling out to the very few people still about in the streets, "Jalalabad... Jalalabad?" in the vain hope of getting directions to the border.

Pakistan

The Pakistan border post was situated in a small, beautifully green valley. The air was fresh and the little colonial buildings very picturesque. At this point of the journey we switched back to travelling on the left hand side of the road. It all seemed... more familiar.

We made our way across the border and stopped at a village a little further on. In this lawless part of the world, where most carry guns, a home grown arms industry had sprung up manufacturing and selling arms to anyone who required them. Strangely, Peter bought himself an old .303 British army issue rifle. Mike, one of the New Zealander junkies purchased an automatic pistol (as you would!). We stopped again further on for the proud owners to test their weapons. The automatic jammed with every bullet and the .303 had a bent barrel!

We drove on surrounded by rugged mountains and spotted a train on an amazingly engineered track nearby. Suddenly the window I was sitting next to turned into a shower of safety glass and crashed over my head. With so many guns around I started looking down at my side, next to the window, to see if I had been shot. Fortunately not – the window had been picked off by a gang of boys with a catapult! We cleared up the glass and I was a bit stunned, spending a while picking small shards of glass from my skin, but aware that things could have been worse.



Train in the Kyber pass

As we drove along the road to Peshawar and Islamabad the light faded and we pulled over to the side of the road to bed down for the night. As we had long since given up setting up tents we simply lay out sleeping bags on the ground and climbed in. A few minutes later we were confronted by a number of Pakistan soldiers who insisted we got back onto the bus along with them. One sat near me and as we bounced along he placed his chin on the upturned barrel of his rifle to rest his head. I prayed the safety catch was on!

The soldiers kept laughing and grinning, telling us that the bullets were for Indian soldiers. No one had the heart to ask them if they had ever heard of a man called General Custer! We had no idea where they were taking us but eventually Peter turned, as directed, down a driveway to a large white house set in immaculate grounds where we were allowed to spend the night. I presume that this was for our own safety, in this potentially dangerous part of the world. Who the house belonged to we never found out, although it was reputedly a government rest-house.

We arrived in the outskirts of Peshawar. There were a large number of police and soldiers on the streets and crowds milling around excitedly. Eventually a burly policeman stopped the coach in order to divert us away from the centre of town. There had been a number of shootings, part of a 'family' feud. It was anticipated that an armed uprising was about to occur and we gratefully accepted their request to take another route.

We stopped in Islamabad the following day for a meal and quick look around and then onto the bus really feeling that we were on the last leg of our journey at last. A very large American was travelling with us at the time. I mean, this guy was huge and covered in dark bodily hair. He sat bare-chested on the roof of the bus as we made our way through the town. We stopped at a junction briefly and were amused to hear some teenage boys sniggering and pointing up to the roof of the bus, one of them exclaiming in fits of laughter, "Man... or monkey?" It was fortunate that our fellow traveller had not heard the remark! Maybe it was the bodily hair in his ears!

The following day we were about 20 miles from Lahore, near a village called Muridke, when the bus (now with a seat wedged across the window with the missing glass) stopped. We had experienced quite a few breakdowns since parting company with Emil but this one was not difficult to diagnose but we still could not seem to fix it. We stayed on the bus and a large crowd from the local village, mostly made up of children, gathered round to stare at us as we sat and baked in the sun – we were probably the best entertainment they had ever had, these people from another planet with their weird hair and clothes. This all added to the tension of the situation, for instance it was difficult to slip away to go to the toilet as a crowd of followers would attach themselves to you to watch your every move!

After a few hours groups of passengers began to lose patience with the situation and started to leave to take public transport to Lahore. By the afternoon there were only 9 of us left onboard the bus, Peter, Graham, Ian, Tony, Dave, Don, Bob and Rob(yn) and myself. We had tracked the problem down to be the petrol feed to the carburettor. The engine would fire for a few seconds if we dribbled some fuel into the air intake, the tank had fuel and the pipe didn't seem blocked and logically that meant the petrol pump had failed, and when tested it did not seem to do much.

The following day Dave and I took a local bus to Lahore, taking the pump with us and went in search of a replacement. We found a 'fixer' who took us to a garage and purchased a fuel pump which was virtually identical and then changed some money to rupees in a dodgy upstairs room deal to pay for it. Next we went (sure that the part we

had would fix the problem) to the office to get exit permits for the nine of us to leave Pakistan and cross into India the following day.

Then back on the local bus to our stricken coach where we fitted the new pump. Apart from a slight difference with the drive lever the pump seemed perfect but it did not pump petrol to the carburettor as we had hoped it would. When we removed the pump again we could see the new drive lever, which would have been activated by a cam in the engine, was damaged. Peter was devastated, we had made him re-pay us for the new pump (about \$15, and his money was dwindling) which had not fixed the problem and general depression set in. Gradually we realised we had not eaten for over 24 hours. We raided the various boxes abandoned by our fellow passengers and cooked up a meal on the Calor Gas stove inside the bus (due to the crowds outside) and felt much better having had some food. However the situation (we had been broken down for two of days by then with no sign of resolving the problem and stress and exhaustion had set in) seemed insurmountable and so most of us decided we abandon the bus and Peter and go to Lahore to spend the night and then probably travel on to India by alternative means. It is to Graham's credit that he would not leave Peter by himself and appealed to me to stay with them. I agreed, a bit reluctantly, and the others left leaving only the three of us standing in the eerie emptiness of the bus. We needed a new plan and some time later Peter and Graham went to talk to a guy about a tow to Lahore and I sat in there by myself feeling vulnerable with the crowd peering through the windows.

A price was agreed for a truck that would tow us to Lahore and a very short cable was attached between the vehicles and Peter steered, it was quite exciting with such a short tow rope! We reached the outskirts of the town and stopped, here the towing guys left us in a pretty undesirable area, the tow cable was stolen as soon as it was unhitched and the radiator cap, which was mounted externally disappeared into the hands of a fast-moving passer-by almost as rapidly! Surely they should have taken us to a garage, I don't know why they didn't. We were not really any better off where we had been taken to than our previous parking spot, and a new crowd formed around us. The unsecurable coach boot became a problem again as people were trying to steal the remains of the contents and so we formed a chain of three to transfer the remaining items from the boot to store inside the bus. Eventually, quite exhausted, we went to sleep as by then it was late in the evening.

Graham and I have always been practical people. We had both tinkered with and repaired bikes and later motorbikes and cars but at twenty years old we were not experienced mechanics by any means. We had always been happy to stand back and let others deal with the various breakdowns until now, when it was left to us by default. When we awoke at about 5 am Graham suggested that, before the crowds reformed, we should crawl under the bus and remove the petrol tank, tie it to the front seat and make a gravity feed system to the carburettor thereby bypassing the dodgy pump problems. In fact this was quite easily accomplished as the tank, although large was only held by a couple of metal straps which were easily undone. Peter woke up and together we dragged it into the bus, tied it to the front seat and fixed the metal feed tube directly into the carburettor. When we pushed the starter the engine fired immediately! No music could have sounded

as sweet as that engine running again! It was still early and so we locked up and crossed the street to a small tea stall and sat down for a cup of tea, served in the unglazed disposable cups that are common in Pakistan and India. By then more people were about and a large crowd formed round us, they were so close that I could hardly lift the cup to drink the tea!

Back on the bus, Peter headed into the centre of town and found a hotel with an open area in the front where we could park. Our plans were to have some breakfast, take a room and have a shower and then look for our friends, who could be anywhere in the large city that surrounded us. We sat down in the dining room and but had barely started eating when in burst Tony, Ian, Dave, Bob & Rob and Don! They were staying nearby and could not believe their eyes when they spotted the bus. We retired to their hotel to shower and change into less filthy clothes and then got back on board for the drive to the Indian border. We had anticipated staying at a hotel for the night after the anxious hours we had spent sorting out the bus but we realised that the border permits that Dave and I had collected yesterday were valid for this day only and so it was best to head for the Indian border without delay. Dave drove and, as the day heated the bus up, we took turns to sit near the front with the fire extinguisher in case the tank went up in flames. We were not sure if the extinguisher actually worked but it was the only safety measure we could think of and if we tested it we probably wouldn't have been able to turn it off again!

Realistically the extinguisher looked like an original part and almost certainly nothing would have happened if we had set it off. When you shook it up nothing seemed to be sloshing around inside although it was quite heavy. It was a nice piece of kit though, made mainly from brass.

An amusing episode happened at the first petrol station we visited to fill the tank. We let the petrol guy peer into the flap where the tank should have been before beckoning him round to the front window to show him where the tank actually was now situated! The hose was put through the front passenger window to fill up!!

This was September 1971 and tensions were running high between India and Pakistan. War seemed to be brewing and we were heading in the same direction as hundreds of Pakistan army trucks and trains loaded with military vehicles. (War did erupt 3 months later, in December 1971). At one point a hitch-hiker was hauled away by the police, suspected of taking photographs of a bridge, nobody was sure who he was or what happened to him.

Dave was following a military truck which was going very slowly, the obstinate driver, would not let us overtake and eventually Dave floored the power(!) to get past. The truck deliberately pulled out to force us off the road. Fortunately Dave had deliberately picked a good spot to overtake as there was a parallel dirt track beside the road and he was able to take the bus right off the main road and complete the manoeuvre 'off-road'! We, his passengers, were a bit traumatised as I remember...

There were now only the nine survivors still aboard the bus, although most of the others who had deserted earlier had left their luggage inside. We were aware that there might be

items within their baggage that we would not want to take through customs but we were so happy to be on the move that this was forgotten. Using our exit visas we left through Pakistan border controls. A custom official entered the coach and addressed us in a serious manner. "You are good men but I want to make it clear that you may not export from Pakistan any flour based products or fishing nets". Bit of a stunned silence here and we thought about the chances of us having fishing nets on board! **Robyn didn't seem to be the kind of girl who would wear that sort of thing!**

India

We drove a short distance to the Indian customs where we were invited to leave the bus and sit in the cool of the custom house. A large Sikh customs officer sat behind a desk and regarded us sternly. There was a list of items on the wall that you could not bring into India and, when I studied it, realised with horror that we had everything on that list onboard the bus.

Firearms
Illegal currency
Cannabis
Heroin
and on it went...

We sat there unable to confer about the best course of action to take, but really there was only one and that was to sit smile, look innocent and hope for the best. The customs officer decided he would go with us and inspect the bus but fortunately nobody cracked as we walked with him and opened the door. This was actually the first time we had been searched on the whole journey. Quite remarkable, considering our appearance! The officer looked into one cardboard box on the overhead parcel shelf. Under the box was the automatic pistol. He looked under another box. Inside was a quantity of cannabis. Then he lost interest and let us through into India.

We drove along silently each lost in their own thoughts, probably mostly concerning Indian prisons. The countryside changed in this part of the Punjab and India quickly became a more green and pleasant land than Pakistan. People came up to us and said "It is alright, you are in India now" and in a way I knew what they meant. **I was thinking about the poor misinformed members of the Pakistan army we had met earlier.**

We stopped that night in a pleasant country hotel and the next morning, after making some adjustments to the gravity feed petrol system with a rubber tube from our airbed pump, we drove on through the heat of the day until in the early afternoon we spotted a sign "Ice cold beer". Brakes went on and we enjoyed a bottle each, maybe we felt we had earned it.

The driving was shared by Peter, Dave and for the first time Bob who had some experience of driving large vehicles. A rota of people with the fire extinguisher sat near the front and the rest of us at the back as far from the petrol hazard as we could get. **By**

now the bus engine had begun to run somewhat rougher than before, possibly an incorrect mixture. Backfires became regular followed by showers of sparks from the leaking exhaust system.

By evening we were in the outskirts of old Delhi and gradually we noticed a change in the sound of the engine and a loss of power. Eventually we could go no further and stopped in a back-street, outside a building with a sign BROTHEL in red letters, for what was to be our last night sleeping in the bus. In the morning the engine now cool, re-started and we limped into modern Connaught Place, New Delhi and parked outside the YMCA. We had arrived! In fact, we decided not to stay at the YMCA, it was relatively expensive and the reception guys looked us up and down with obvious distaste and we all, except Peter, took rooms at the Airlines Hotel while we made our plans to move on.



View from the Airlines Hotel, Delhi.

We didn't see much more of Peter after we moved to the Airlines Hotel – although we had helped him get to his destination he was very much on his own now. His instructions were to recruit new passengers for the return leg back to the UK. With the coach's mechanical problems and the fact his funds were running low he seemed unable to cope and we heard that he had approached the authorities to seek permission to abandon the bus in India and leave the country. Unfortunately when arriving in India with a vehicle it is marked in your passport and you are not allowed to leave without it, so he was effectively stuck until he could get the bus mended and take it with him. The bus looked a mess with the broken windows and ex-passengers luggage scattered throughout the interior. At nineteen years of age Peter, now on his own understandably lacked the maturity to be able to deal with the situation he now found himself in. We never found out what became of him or the bus and in fact there was no goodbye we just drifted off to continue our journey... but the question of the fate of the bus was answered recently. Thanks to the India Overland website JCH found out some more info about the fate of the 102 HPH from Emil's wife Wende:-

Hi John

Yes, that was the trip that Peter Morton took on from Istanbul as Emil had to come back to take

out the next tour. It was a Plaxton 1959 that Emil converted to a Petrol engine. Nice motor but sadly never made it back to England after that trip - it was sold in Afghanistan to a tribesman and we saw it running around in Kabul for many years, a little worse for wear!

Wende does not tell us who actually sold it in Afghanistan, although putting two and two together (and possibly coming up with five!) I would guess Peter managed to get it fixed and back to Afghanistan which would have been the nearest place he could sell it. With or without Emil's approval would be my next question, but anyway good for you, Peter... I hope the old thing is still working, although it would be 50 years old now!

Travelling on

When I started to try to document our 1971 journey to India on Budget Bus there were on plans to extent the story beyond New Delhi but having started I feel compelled to attempt to tell the story of our travels onwards to Australia and the year spent there.

We had taken a couple of rooms at the not very posh but clean Airlines Hotel. Dave, Don, Bob & Rob, Ian, Tony, Graham and I were the 8 surviving passengers from the Budget Bus trip to New Delhi. By now it the end of September but the weather was still scorching hot, some of our energy had gone, along with a substantial part of our money. The original plan had been for us to travel to Madras and get a ship to SE Asia. At this time there were many young people travelling in both directions, to and from many destinations including Australia and London. When groups met up information was swapped about the best places to stay and difficulties encountered. We doubted how reliable this information exchange was as the info was often second or third hand! However we began to realise that the Madras plan was probably a non-starter and that few ships sailed those routes any more. Bob & Rob were going to take the train to Calcutta and then fly to Bangkok and take the train down the peninsula through Malaya to Singapore and then fly home to Sydney. This seemed a good idea to the four of us and we joined forces with them for the next leg of the trip.

Dave decided he would go to Madras and try for a boat and we waved him off on the train. Don also went his own way after meeting up with an ex-army guy who had been on Budget Bus and deciding to travel with him to SE Asia. (Don was eventually repatriated from KL due to lack of funds. I saw eventually him again in London). The six of us booked our train tickets to Calcutta, 3rd class reserve to save our dwindling resources. The train journey was long and hot and the comforts minimal. We managed to get a compartment exclusively for the six of us and slept as best we could on the wooden shelves that acted as bunks. We purchased chi in the unglazed, disposable cups the shattered remains of which littered the railway lines, especially at the stations. We were able to order trays of quite good food en-route, probably collected at stations en-route. The train was steam driven and the windows in third class had metal bars at them but no glass and from time to time cinders blew in through the windows. It was all an adventure to us and it was very cheap and we gradually made our way to Calcutta, it took 33 hours.

Calcutta

When we reached Calcutta we went in search of a reasonably priced hotel and found one in a backstreet ran by a fat dodgy guy who would probably rip us off if he got a chance. The heat and humidity of Calcutta in September and exhaustion following the journey seemed to hit us all at that point. We booked flights on Thai Airways to Bangkok at quite a good price and settled down to wait a few days until we could be on our way. We did not do much sightseeing but located a Chinese Restaurant nearby that had a vast array of air-conditioners and lingered over meals in this haven of cool for as long as we could. The plumbing at the hotel was erratic in the extreme, taps functioned in some bathrooms and then stopped and worked elsewhere for a while. We seemed to be the only guests and several times a lathered up member of our group was forced to run round the hotel looking for a bathroom with water to wash off the soap!

When we checked out the dodgy hotel owner was so busy trying to think of a way to overcharge us for our stay that he lost a day somewhere and undercharged us instead... Bob had forgotten his jacket and was forced to return for it worrying that the owner might have realised his mistake, but fortunately he hadn't!

Bangkok

Thai Airways was a dream of cool comfort and pretty hostesses and we landed in Bangkok late in the evening and cleared customs and immigration quickly. Outside a man was touting for customers for their hotels but, experienced travellers that we were, we walked past him and found us a taxi to take us to a cheap hotel. He took us to the Atlanta Club which was a hostel, (it seemed to be a hotel that had not been finished, although we were pleased to find the pool was useable), where young travellers could stay for \$1 a night. There we met the guy from the airport who laughed and told us he would have brought us to the hotel for nothing!

Bangkok and Thailand were another revelation to us, and yet another complete culture shock although a pleasant one. We ate at 'John's' (we called it that as pronunciation was impossible!) café near the Atlanta Club where there was an English translation of the menu on the wall and customers pointed with a stick to the dish of their choice. Few Thai's outside the hotels spoke English in those days.

I remember that about this time Ian began to develop a sore eye but as it didn't seem serious we did not seek out a doctor, in spite of having medical insurance, or worry about it too much. That was a big mistake.

The next phase of our journey involved taking the train from Bangkok south through Malaysia to Singapore and the six of us booked tickets for the sleeper train which had fold down beds in the compartments. The first major stop was Butterworth in Malaysia and we changed trains there before proceeding to Kuala Lumpur. As we sat in the restaurant car and rattled through the countryside and looked out at the paddy fields racing by, we found it difficult to believe that we were actually visiting such an exotic place.

K.L. railway station was and still is amazing, a complete throw back to the days of the Raj, and a contained a restaurant with silver service. (The station is still in use but only for local trains – the intercity trains use the new KL Central station). We did have a limited breakfast there but were unable to find much local money. Later Graham discovered some more tucked away in his money belt – I expect that one day we will forgive him for costing us the rest of our meal!

Singapore

We returned to the train and sped south towards Singapore eventually crossing the causeway. At that time Singapore had a policy of no long hair and as we all had quite long hair and it was a relief to us to get allowed in without any problem, like an enforced haircut.

We found a cheap Chinese hotel near Race Course Road where there were some similar travelling types staying and spent the next few days looking around and trying to find out about ships to take us to Australia. We gravitated to Cliffords Pier most days, it was another new experience for us to see the junks in the harbour and see a small part of the life of such an exotic place. There were plenty of duty free goods for sale but unfortunately we had no spare cash for them. Some shop keepers were annoyingly persistent with their sales pitches and when we had time on our hands we would go to their shop and make them show us all their stock before leaving empty handed! We also discovered a restaurant with huge plate glass windows overlooking the harbour and used to go there to discuss how to save money – somewhat counter productive as it wasn't the cheapest place to eat, but the views over the harbour were stunning!



Clifford's Pier

One evening we were sorting out our gear and discovered that one of our quilt covered metal water bottles would not stand up. Closer inspect revealed a lump of hashish hidden in the cover! We threw it away and heaved a sign of relief that it had not been discovered by customs.

Bob and Rob left for Sydney by air (we did see them again many months later) and it was back to just the four of us. Money was now becoming our main worry, we approached one or two shipping offices without any luck and discussed the possibility of 'island hopping' down through Indonesia to Northern Australia. There were many traveller's tales available and advice given about various routes but they always seemed to be second hand and very complex. Before long we realised that attempting this journey without sufficient funds would not be realistic.

We received a telex message from Dave B. via the AmEx office saying that he had not had any luck with ships from Madras and was flying on to Australia. We began to realise at this point that flying was our only option and that by pooling our funds could just about afford four air tickets to Darwin, we could not afford the fare to Brisbane, our Australian destination. This was quite an expensive air route but we chased around and managed to get slightly cheaper tickets, checked out of the hotel and set out for the airport. The old Singapore airport was chaos with long lines of passengers and we queued for a long time to try to get on our Qantas flight to Darwin. Our cheaper tickets were only booked 'standby' and we began to lose any hope on getting on board that evening. We were almost at the check-in desk but the aircraft was just about full. Then we had a little luck when the family in front discovered their passports were out of date. We would not have wished this upon them, they had quite young children, but it meant that we did get onboard and were the last four passengers to do so. Inside the aircraft was crammed and we had no chance of sitting together. Tony and Graham were put into First Class for the take off but after we were airborne they were swapped for more respectable passengers!

Darwin

We landed at Darwin late at night and queued up to go through customs. Every time we approached the customs desk they waved us back until all the other passengers had gone and then the officers went through our bags and pockets very thoroughly. Fortunately there was nothing to find (phew!) and eventually we were released into the now empty terminal building. We had made it to Australia, fantastic, our troubles were over! Or so we thought... There was a lone taxi outside and we asked the driver if he could take us to a beach or somewhere we could spend the night and so he drove us to Lameroo beach, near the town where all the, mostly young, broke homeless people went. We were used to sleeping rough and bedded down for the night.

In the morning the euphoria of arriving in Oz had evaporated slightly and we reviewed our financial position. Ian had a small amount of money left and I had about £70. Tony and Graham were broke. The beach was pretty dirty and the people rough sleeping there were a different sort to the friendly travellers we had met and talked to on our earlier

travels. We went along to the labour exchange and spoke to the staff about the prospect of work. At home Tony was in life assurance, Graham local government, Ian a diamond sorter(!) and I worked for a company who undertook geophysical surveys. Much to my surprise I was offered an interview for a company surveying for uranium out in the bush but there was nothing for the others.

Ian's eye was now causing him some pain and he decided to take the Pioneer overland bus to Brisbane (when I had a contact) he had enough money for the fare and would get in touch with my old family friend Helen when he got there. I went to my interview with Noranda and got the job which paid about \$70 a week and provided tent style accommodation, which was perfect. We slept that night in a cheap hotel and in the morning we split up, Ian to Brisbane, I got on the company truck to Jim-Jim Creek and Graham and Tony started hitch-hiking south along the Stuart Highway. I lent them a small amount of money but knew it was inadequate, leaving myself about enough for the bus fare if things didn't work out with my job.

As I sat in the truck with the driver and another guy who worked for Noranda I could see G&T hitching. I felt pretty bad. My new colleagues were trying to wind me up about something, Aussie style, but I didn't take any notice. It was about 250 km or so out to the survey camp and took all day to get there. The rains had started and there were several rivers to cross, one of them quite major and in flood. The technique was to stop and wait for the engine to cool, removed the fan belt to stop the fan twisting into the radiator, drape a tarpaulin over the engine to stop water splashing over the engine electrics and slowly drive across. Plenty of crocs in those parts! We eventually reached the camp in the dark, long past meal time but the cook had kept meals for us which were very welcome by now. I shared a tent with a young guy, Phil who was a land surveyor of sorts and my early work was to be his assistant and hold the staff for his measurements. A large test drilling programme was taking place over a wide area and his job was to survey in the well heads to eventually correlate the data from the wells. I must admit my energy levels were low, possibly due to the humid weather or maybe the early stages of malaria, or perhaps the anticlimax of getting to Oz and finding work. Some worry about my travelling companions was also a factor. On my first day we were surveying past a tree when Phil spotted a frilly necked lizard in its upper branches. Not wanting to work under it he scared it down from the tree and much to my amazement it ran away on its hind legs! I was so surprised that I felt the hairs on my head stand on end! This woke me up and somehow I got through the day.



The Noranda survey camp.

Life in the camp settled down and I made a few friends. Most people were only employed until the start of the wet season although a handful of staff would be retained until the next year. Most of the guys were friendly and the camp was well organised with a large corrugated iron building serving as the kitchen/mess and social centre. You could buy a case of beer or soft drinks and tobacco for rolling your own cigarettes. I did not buy beer as I wanted to save my money. We worked six days a weeks and had Sunday off, that day was mostly spent doing laundry and going on trips in one of the fleet of Land Cruiser utilities. We were near Arnhem Land, a traditional Aboriginal area and I went there with a couple of the guys to see cave paintings. Another day we went and swam in a billabong, which had water so polluted by buffalo dung that we came out almost black! I remember the driver was quite mad and sitting in the open back of the pickup was a dangerous place to be.

I preferred to drive the Land Cruiser to most other tasks. Unfortunately my sense of direction is not very good and I got pretty lost one day but managed to follow the escarpment back to camp! I skidded and hit a tree on one occasion, the tracks were very rough, and damaged the truck slightly but gradually got more used to driving on bush tracks.

Phil and I were sent to collect the hessian bags of the drilling material and bring them back to camp but we soon discovered that this was a dangerous job. The hessian was damp from early rains and steaming in the sun and attracting all those nasty creatures that Oz is famous for. We tried to poke at the bags with a stick first to see what would crawl out but Phil did get stung by a scorpion one day. The crew had a huge bulldozer and dug large trenches in the soil. We then hand cut samples from the yellow clay to be tested. On the third week I was sent to the core shed to split drilled cores for analysis. This was a good job with friendly guys and easy work but I was still struggling with low energy levels and the days were long and hot.

After about four weeks the camp boss came to me and told me they were going to start laying off workers as the wet season was starting. I, and a French guy who worked in the office were to be the first to go and we left the next day in the supplies truck. I was quite happy to be away as I had earned some dollars and wanted to get on with the next leg of my journey.

I recently noticed while studying a map of Australia that the survey camp where I had worked in 1971 eventually became the Ranger Uranium Mine, infamous for a very bad safety record.

Back in Darwin I found a cheap hostel to spend the night and enjoyed the return to civilisation with a milk shake! Anyone who visited Darwin around that era will understand the exclamation mark. Our fundamental mistake when we arrived in Darwin was to assume that we were now in a relatively safe western society where we would get by as we understood the rules of such a place. This was not the case.

Brisbane

The following day I was on the Pioneer Bus to Brisbane some 2100 miles (3500km) away by road and about 48 hours in time. It was a different experience to Budget Bus and very efficient and quite boring! Every 7-8 hours the bus would stop for a change of driver and they all seemed very competent and I did not have to get involved with any mechanical problems...!! A short break every few hours, but otherwise keeping moving night and day first along the Stuart Highway and then a stretch on un-metalled road before hitting the tarmac again in Queensland. After about 30 hours I could hardly sit still anymore but gradually the signposts counted down the distance to Brisbane. It was mid afternoon when I very thankfully stepped off the bus near Brisbane city centre and found a local bus to Wellington Point where friend of the family Helen and her husband John lived. It was good to see them again after many years, but the news they had for me was devastating. Ian had arrived in Brisbane about 4 weeks earlier, checked into the YMCA and then gone to casualty with a terrible pain in his eye. They admitted him straight into hospital where he was unconscious for some time. It appeared that the cornea of his eye had been badly damaged by an infection and although that had been arrested (by the unpleasant experience of an injection into his eyeball while still awake) the damage was serious. Ian had contacted Helen and she and John and their friends were terrific and visited him every day, brought him food and cheered him up. Truly this was Australian hospitality at its best. The hospital could not undertake a cornea graft as that technology was not yet available in Queensland and initially they wanted to remove his eye. As it happened we were both under 21 and could not sign a consent form and so they decided on a better and less permanent treatment involving operating to pull a section of the white sheath of the eye over his pupil and cover the hole. It worked well as a temporary arrangement and allowed him to leave hospital about 10 days after I arrived.

Helen and her husband John were great and gave me somewhere to sleep, introduced me to their friends and lent me a VW Beetle, but I soon felt the need to be independent. Ian would be out of hospital eventually and so I returned the car and found a two bedroom

flat in the West End area of the city. With my money from the recent field work I was able to find a great little flat and it was bliss to have a place to myself for a while, after all the communal living, and I set out unsuccessfully to find some work. Before leaving England I had sent some letters to the local survey companies to ask about the possibility of work, only one had answered and so I visited QASCO (Queensland Air Survey Company) and they were friendly but there was not much work around and they could not offer me anything. I also tried the French company CGG and undertook a test interpolating contours on a map and received an offer of temporary work. Unfortunately this came to nothing and I lost valuable time on my job search waiting for them to confirm my starting date.

Ian was released, looking pale and weak, from hospital and Helen brought him to the flat.

We still had no idea where Tony and Graham were and this question could not be answered for a long time but we did hear eventually via a letter from the UK that they had met two guys travelling round Oz in a VW Combi and were gradually heading to Brisbane.

We were sitting in the flat one evening a few days later when in rushed Graham, Tony and their two new friends, Dick and Graham (known as Chumley). They had had a difficult time to say the least, close to starving in Darwin and sleeping on the beach when they managed to get some casual work at the brewery. Here they met Dick & Chumley who realised if they shared expenses they would not have to work at the brewery for so long! They travelled on to Alice Springs (where they worked in a brick yard), Ayres Rock, and then up to the north of the Queensland coast before travelling south to Brisbane.



High jinx at the flat in West End, Dick, Graham, Chumley and Ian in a very bright shirt. Note the posters, mostly free from the Communist bookshop!

It was great to be reunited but now there were six of us in a small flat and it was crowded. The landlord who had moved into a flat upstairs was not too pleased either! We were all pretty broke and we set out to find work, applying for all the jobs we could find in the local paper. It soon became apparent that there were not very many jobs available, one

delivery job had seventeen applicants by the time I called. We even applied for jobs selling encyclopaedias and attended mass interviews. An element of farce was achieved as we had very few respectable clothes and arrangements had to be timed so that an interviewee had to be back at the flat in time to pass on the good clothes to someone else! We did not get work as encyclopaedia salesmen... Christmas was approaching and our money was very low.

We became friendly with the two girls in the next flat, Liz and Shirley. Liz managed to get four of us work at the factory she worked at as a secretary, but they would not employ Ian in dangerous industrial surroundings due to his eyesight problems. Dick who was a carpenter and able to find employment easily, did not want work there but the rest of us started a few weeks before Christmas at Rheems who made 44 gallon drums and other containers.

Working at Rheems was quite grim and totally boring but we were relieved and grateful to be earning some money. Dick was very good about driving us to work in the Combi which we appreciated as it was a tricky journey by public transport.



Me, Ian and Tony lounging around – Note the chest X-ray (required by immigration) in the window!

The work was partly on the 44 gallon assembly line and the rest ‘process’ work, where the machine operator did the same process over and over again! The factory was very safety conscious but many of the workers had fingers missing – the machines were mostly quite old and the monotony of the work could induce you to make mistakes. One of the safety rules which I read and enjoyed was ‘No swinging billys of tea’. Only in Australia, where tea when made in open metal cooking pots was swung at arms length to force the tea leaves to the bottom, would you find that particular rule!

By the time we started at Rheems it was nearly December and as Christmas approached we decided we should have a party jointly with Liz and Shirley. As we didn’t know many people we invited those we did, which amounted to Andre, who was a teacher spending his holiday operating ‘The Stripper’ on the production line at the factory and Helen and John who we hadn’t seen much of since the others arrived. We then asked our neighbours including the landlord, Karl and the ‘ladies upstairs’ who we had met when their bath overflowed into our flat! Chumley and I went to the local disco and asked some girls to

come, including (rather cheekily) the bouncers girlfriend (he said “she’s not coming, but she did!). Word must have spread as there was quite a crowd and the flat took a bit of a beating.



The party...



The 'lovely' ladies from upstairs with their admirers, Chumley and Andre.



The bouncers girlfriend



Morning after...

What with one thing and another I didn't make it into work the next day, Christmas Eve and so missed my Christmas pay which wasn't too clever.

Christmas day lunch was a bit of a disaster as we forgot to defrost the turkey, but the company was great as always – the first Christmas we had spent away from home.

Before the New Year Chumley and Dick headed south to Sydney on the next leg of their journey and it was back to just the four of us.

Brisbane at that time was in some ways quite different to the more cosmopolitan cities of Australia and certainly England in terms awareness of class and social standing. Every morning we walked past Liz's car outside the flat and took two buses and a long walk to Rheems in the already hot Queensland sun to arrive tired and hot at the factory gates only to walk past Liz's car now parked outside her office. She told us she could not give us a lift to work as she was an office worker and we worked on the factory floor!

Dave B. from the Budget Bus journey arrived after hitching from Sydney. He had come to see us all but especially Ian after hearing about his eye trouble. Dave was a down to earth guy, coincidentally working at Rheems in Sydney and he told us that we ought to get our acts together and save some money by working overtime and stopping taking days off for interviews and any other excuse. He had a point and we followed his advice but upping our working days to 10+ hours and at the same time planning our escape from Brisbane. Ian had a eye hospital check-up in a couple of months and we decided to move to Sydney after that. We wanted to get better jobs (in Ian's case get a job at all) and move to where we hoped there would be more opportunity.

Our money grew, especially mine as Graham and Tony paid me back every penny that they had borrowed in Singapore, and I spent this cash on a VW Beetle. It was a poor buy as cars go but it was fantastic to have our own transport to get to work and go sightseeing at the weekend to the Gold Coast and other destinations.

We rented a TV to keep us in during the evenings to economise, not that we had much energy left after the hours we worked.

I spent my 21st birthday in Brisbane working in the factory and spoke to my family in England on the phone from Brisbane central post office (we had no phone in the flat), and we celebrated with a rare meal out.

Liz came into the flat one evening, the others were out at a concert, somewhat shocked. She had collected her car from a service at the garage but when she came to the first corner a front wheel came off! The garage lent her a new car while they sorted out hers and determined to put some miles on it she took me for a drive round Brisbane and up into the hills for a view of the city by night.

A few days before we were due to leave my VW Beetle started to sound a bit rough and I took it into the local garage (not Liz's garage!) to have some work done. They discovered that the cylinder studs were coming away from the engine block and started work to get it repaired, at considerable expense, before our departure date. I collected it late at night the day before we left and we packed all our gear into it and onto the second-hand roof rack I had bought. We learnt the art of packing a car that day, every nook and cranny was filled with items. It was back on the road as we left the flat and started travelling again, it felt good. The car had no power at all (it had never had much!) and after a few miles we stopped and tinkered with the engine timing which seemed to be out. Then we went a couple more miles and another adjustment and so it went on. Eventually we must have got it right and the power improved and the miles began to grind by. It is about 650 miles

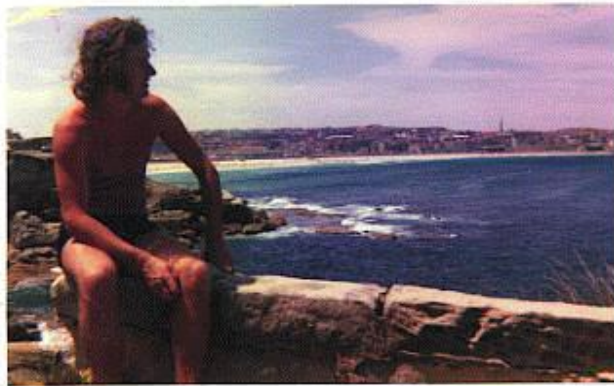
from Brisbane to Sydney and we managed to cover about half of that before stopping for the night in a cheap motel room. The next day we continued south and gradually the country roads become more urban as we reached the northern suburbs of Sydney. We stopped there and found a boarding house for the night. I was not feeling very well, headache and flu like symptoms and the following morning I felt worse.

Sydney

We bought a Sydney paper and looked at the flats to let page. A large number of these were in Bondi and so we decided to drive there and see what we could find. I managed to force myself to drive through the centre of Sydney and parked near the sea front at Bondi. There I sat in the car while Graham, Tony and Ian visited various letting agencies and went and inspected flats, there were plenty available. I went along to view one flat which was excellent (we did not like the landlord who reminded us of our old geography teacher(!) and so we decided not to proceed with it) but mostly I sat in the car and the others did an excellent job of finding a place. Eventually we decided on a flat in Hastings Parade, North Bondi, two bedrooms, balcony with a view of the sea and the harbour bridge (just about). We revisited the agent to put down a deposit and sign the agreement and were told we could move in next week when it had been cleaned and the power switched on. We insisted that we wanted in now and would clean it ourselves and sit in the dark until the lights came on! Fortunately they agreed to that and we moved straight in – what a good days work! I was feeling better by the evening and so we went to visit Bob and Rob from Budget Bus who lived in Sydney. It was so good to move to a place where we had already got some friends and, probably because we never been very keen on Brisbane, we loved Sydney. Bob and Rob were great as ever and we spent the evening with them and returned to the flat to find the electricity was on.

The next day we started to clean the place up (it was pretty disgusting) and travelled into the city centre to look for work. One of the first places we went to was the Post Office who we had heard were recruiting staff and Ian signed up immediately. He needed money badly and was given a city postal round. Rather than spend the money on the bus fare he walked the 4 miles into town and then did his round on foot before walking back! He used to get up at 4.00am, I know - I shared a room with him!

A few days later he came home with good news, he had met Chumley at an office he visited – meaning another friend in the area. He and Dick had spent some time in Sydney and then moved on to Canberra where they had found work in a wood workshop. Dick met a girl, a theatre nurse and Chumley had decided the trip was over and returned home to Perth. Some time later he drove back to Sydney (~3000 miles) to work as a draughtsman.



Graham at Bondi

Our other great friend in Sydney was Dave from Budget Bus who had moved from staying with relatives in Parramatta into the Paddington area, he imported Lindy, his girlfriend from England, and they were sharing a house with a Canadian couple. They had an old Ford Consul someone had donated him and soon they made the trip to visit us in Bondi.



Tony at Bondi

About this time I took my VW in for an MOT test and it seriously failed on a number of major items. As it was still registered in Queensland (where they did not have such tests). I took the decision to drive it back up north to try to re-sell it and set off early one afternoon for the long drive back which took 17 hours to do the 650 miles. I arrived back in Brisbane during the morning and went straight to the first used car yard I saw and agreed a fairly low price with them, on the premise that some money back was better than nothing. Then onto a Pioneer bus and back to Sydney – makes me feel tired to think of that round trip now!

Work, other than manual, was still quite difficult to find. I had contacted Adastra Airways at Mascot Airport, who were associates of Hunting Surveys whom I had worked for in England, while we were still in Brisbane. They had suggested I came to see them after arrival in Sydney and I soon got in touch and visited them for a chat about work prospects. It was great to be back in a survey company environment again, to smell the film processing chemicals and to see all the maps and air photos laid out on huge tables. My interview with the geophysics manager went quite well – he had bid for two airborne contracts and hoped to get at least one of them but not for a couple of months. We discussed the salary I would want for a 2-3 month contract and agreed on \$80 per week. This was not a fortune (Ian was earning \$70 at the post office) but I was looking for this sort of opportunity and agreed to do the work when it was awarded. I did make some more calls but generally survey work was quiet and as I still had some money left and could sign on for unemployment benefit, the beach beckoned and I enjoyed next few weeks not working.

I had some friends of the family, including my Godfather, Jack in Melbourne and made arrangements to visit them. The day I was due to leave on this trip I felt unwell again and postponed to the next day when I felt better. I caught the Pioneer Bus to Melbourne and spent a few days visiting. The second day Jack was driving me around the area when I once again felt unwell, very cold and begged them to put the car heater on but also very thirsty and bought a cold drink. They began to look at me a bit strangely and took me home for a sleep after which I was back to my old self.

When I arrived back at the flat in Bondi I took to my bed and started feeling much worse, with little energy, constantly cold and thirsty. Graham suggested they asked a doctor to come and see me and at first I refused but eventually realised that this was necessary. The doctor came twice and told me that I was to be admitted to hospital for tests. He did not want me to go by public transport(!) and called an ambulance.

I was admitted into the Royal Prince Alfred hospital and put into an isolation room. When my friends visited they have to be gowned and masked – by then I was unable to stand without help and my ‘friends’ took great delight in sticking Playboy photos up on the walls knowing I would be embarrassed when the nurses came in and was unable to get them down again! In fact I remember the nurses coming in to tease me saying “Who’s a little Playboy then!”

After many blood tests (they suspect Hepatitis initially) malaria was diagnosed and suitable medicine prescribed. I was in that room for over a week and so bored but also very weak. I asked to go home and they told me that if able to walk to the taxi rank I could go and I managed to stagger that far, just. It was great to be back in the flat but a few days later I received a message from Adastra that the work was about to start. I bought a cheap Bridgestone motorcycle to get me to work, it was rubbish!

My work with Adastra got off to a bad start when, on the first day, the geophysics manager approached me and said we should talk about my salary. He claimed to have no

knowledge that we had agreed during my interview that I should be paid \$80 per week and denied that this had happened. Eventually I had to agree to \$70 per week instead! As I had committed myself to this work for so long I had little choice but to accept, but it did leave me feeling somewhat resentful. I settled down to work, using a corner of Kevin Murray's room. He was a great guy, rather like the 'oldest swinger in Town' and very skilled at photo mosaic assembly. The three Hunting personnel arrived (Dave Richards-Geophysicist, Bob Taylor-Electronics, Tony Putman-Data Compiler) to complete the team and the next day we all set off for Halls Creek in the survey aircraft, a DC-3, Dave Brennan flying and Bob Cousins standing in as navigator until John Messenger could join us later. Our first night was spent at Bathurst only about 150 miles away - we had only left that afternoon so the client could be told we had started - it was too late to go far! The next day after a delayed start due to mist we flew to Broken Hill. The following day it was on to Alice Springs for fuel, and then to Halls Creek.

The Hotel Kimberley was great, clean rooms, good food and helpful staff who found us a small room to use as an office. I set up a darkroom for tracker film developing at the airport and we started to fly.

Halls Creek was different to any town I had stayed in before, I remember the Met. man also drove the towns only taxi, rented out rooms in his house, helped behind the bar and hoped to retire after this posting! My hair was getting very long (even for those days) - [see the photo of me sitting on the steps of VH-AGU with long hair and still very thin from malaria] and as there was no barber in town, Ruth the barmaid, cut it for me sitting there in the pub!



Me on the steps of DC3 VH-AGU at Halls Creek



White-knuckle low level survey flying

We worked hard and the days passed. Mine started with an early morning film developing session at about 6am (the chemicals were too warm during the rest of the day) and then most of the day working on flight path recovery onto photo mosaics which

proved to be pretty tricky in places. When the magnetic and spectrometer records arrived back from the sortie, we checked them and also produced flight path overlays - often working late into the night. This had the 'advantage' of limiting the amount of time spent in the bar!

About ten weeks passed and we gradually finished the job and a few extensions to the area. Operationally all went smoothly with no aircraft and only one electronic breakdown that I recall. On the rare days that I wasn't busy a day out in the plane was about all the entertainment available. In the evening we played pool in the bar and went weekly to the open air cinema, it always seemed to be cowboy films.

The day came to leave Halls Creek and as I made my way to the DC-3 for the transit back to Sydney I discovered that the crew had an extra 3 members. The aircraft engineer had a small dingo puppy under his arm, apparently someone had shot the mother and this kind hearted guy had agreed to adopt it. On the tarmac beside the aircraft was a large metal cage and inside were two baby donkeys. Dave Brennan had arranged for these to be captured so that he could fly them back to Sydney for his children! Oh joy of joys we were going to spend many hours shut in the aircraft in the company of these wild creatures!



*AGU in the hanger at Mascot
(taken by Dave Richards our geophysicist)*



*Captain Dave Brennan with one of his
donkeys. Sadly Dave was killed in a flying
accident a couple of years later.
(by Dave Richards)*



*The Dingo pup
(by Dave Richards)*



Fuel stop at Alice Springs

The moment came when the cage and its cargo had to be lifted in through the open cargo doors of the DC-3. A few volunteers came forward and we all lifted, it was quite heavy but up came the cage off the tarmac. Of course the donkeys, already pretty stressed, emptied the contents of their bowels (and very full they must have been!) all over the tarmac and us below in the lifting party... we were all covered in green manure which of course is much the best way to begin a flight across Australia!

Eventually all was stowed away and we left Halls Creek with all manner of God's own creatures aboard. The flight remained uneventful if somewhat smelly until we were getting near NSW and Dave radioed ahead to air traffic control to tell them the good news - we were on our way back and had some delightful pets on board. Soon a message came back telling him that if we landed in NSW with the donkeys on board they would be shot and the aircraft impounded! It was decided that we would divert to Oodnadatta (the donkeys could be taken into SA without problem, or maybe he just didn't tell them!) and we would spend the night there while a new plan was formulated.

We checked into the hotel and the couple who ran the place agreed to take the donkeys off our hands. I guess they must have taken the dog as well as the next morning we flew back to Mascot a little less like Noah's Ark!

The Hunting personnel departed for the UK and I spent the next couple of weeks finishing off the work, back in Kevin Murray's office, uncertain of what my future might hold. Eventually my boss came to talk to me and asked if I would be interested in staying on with Adastra, working on the geophysics side when that work was available and helping Kevin with his air photo mosaics when geophysics was slack. This was exactly what I had hoped for until he told me that they couldn't pay me so much if I became a full time, and could only justify \$60 per week! When I would not agree to another reduction in money he asked if I would return and work on future geophysics contacts when and if

they were awarded them, although I agreed I knew it was unlikely to happen.

Looking back - I had a good time at Adastra, enjoyed the work and the people I worked with were great. Less sure about the management but ain't that the same the whole world over...

While I had been away in Halls Creek the Dave and Lindy had moved in to share with with the boys and later they all moved from Bondi to a small house in Darlinghurst, to be nearer the city. Bondi was a bit depressing in the winter and being nearer to Sydney city centre was a big advantage. Dave and Lindy had decided to head back to England and had been working hard to get some money together. Dave was an electronics engineer and had found a good job and even managed to get Graham some temporary work in the same field. Graham was currently working as a bus conductor when I arrived back and hated the work and also the split shifts involved. About this time he applied for and was accepted to work in the reprographics department of the army at nearby Paddington Barracks. This job suited him very well and he worked there for the rest of his stay in Sydney.



The house in Darlinghurst



Mad hour at the house



Lunatics invade Darlinghurst



Lindy preparing for the party (with her helpers!) Ian and Tony.

Tony had managed to get a job at an insurance office, which had been his line of work in England. Although his long term ambitions lay elsewhere this was a fairly good job compared to most of the work that was around.

Ian was still working as a postman and he always seemed to quite enjoy his round and although he still had to get up very early it wasn't quite as bad as his early rising in Bondi. He had managed to save some money and needed to go back to London for an eye operation.

When my Adastra work had stopped and Dave and Lindy had gone home I decided to leave with Ian to travel back home via Thailand and Malaysia, to have a better look at this area of the world that had unexpectedly fascinated us on the trip out. My reasons were twofold. I was disappointed that the job I was offered was so badly paid that I could not contemplate accepting it and also considerable concern about Ian travelling back alone with limited eyesight.

Graham and Tony waved us goodbye from Mascot airport. They stayed in Sydney until they had enough money saved for a trip to the USA where they bought a van and travelled extensively round North America.

If anyone has managed to read this far they obviously deserve a prize – maybe an overland trip to India or something!

* * * *

The four of us still meet up with other friends a few times a year for a rather drunken lunch. My over riding memories of the trip we did together is perhaps less of the places we visited together but of our constant laughter and good, and sometimes insane, humour even when times were difficult.