

INTERTREK

London to Kathmandu February 1973



Canadian Jay Ross in djellabah and Intertrek leader on roof.

According to Rory Maclean in his book *Magic Bus* by 1973 there were 250,000 French nationals alone in India. I don't know where they all were but I remember seeing very few westerners once we got over past the Pudding Shop and over the Bosphorus. My purpose in writing is not so much to tell travel tales, which there are a plenty but maybe to gather info on what happened to some of my fellow travellers and describe the memories of every day life on an overland trip to India and Nepal, I hope someone from this trip will contact me. Each one of us overlanders have our own stories to tell and this is mine.

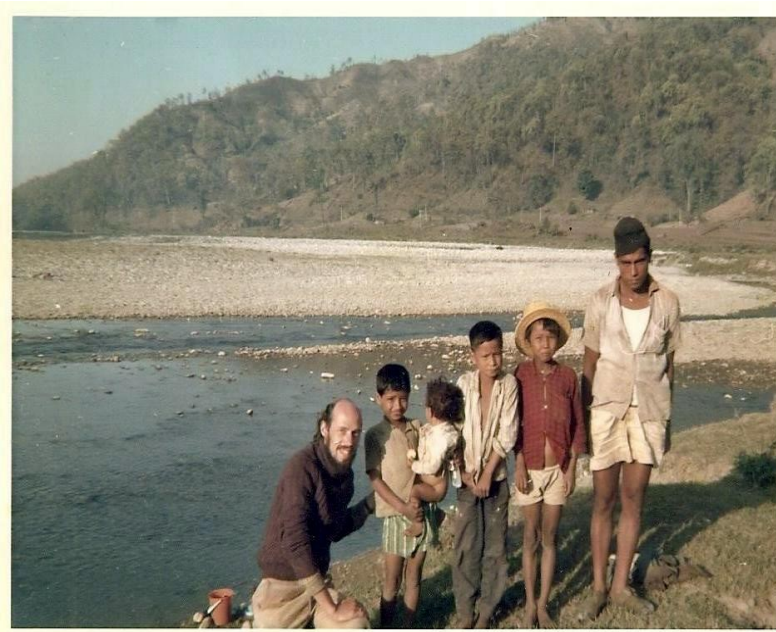
I was inspired to do this trip by my sister who had already in 1971 been with Asian Land Travel to India and at 19 couldn't wait to go myself. After working in a frozen pea factory in rural Lincolnshire for months to get the money together I decided to go for one of the more expensive

companies Intertrek in a Bedford truck from London to Kathmandu including a 2 week trek from Pokhara in the Annapurna range of mountains. This trip was 3 and half months and cost if I remember rightly about £300. Intertrek were well organised, travellers were sent a list of all the things and injections we would need and most of the items could be bought at Millets or the Army and Navy stores at a reasonable price. Most of us set off with 2 Navy duffel bags, ex army water bottle with a material cover which you could keep wet in the heat, mostly I remember drinking warm water and the taste of sterotabs which made the water safe (no bottled water then). I bought, as it was February when I set out, a good feather sleeping bag and had a washable removable lining made from an old sheet. Walking boots were a must, which I had foolishly passed on and tried to buy some 5th hand ones in Kathmandu which were massive and I ended up on the trek wearing out 2 pairs of Woolworths black and white bumper boots (10 bob). Intertrek provided tents, all cooking equipment dished out all our malaria tablets daily, provided food and paid for everything else so all we needed were 'spends' and to be sure we had all the right visas in our passports (these were gained weeks before travel embassy by embassy and I was very proud of all the stamps in mine by the time I got back to UK). We were all very well looked after and organised. The only time I felt afraid was going in convoy with local trucks over the Khyber Pass, we all were anxious and our leaders too.

There were 21 people on our trip, mostly young middle class Brits who were looking for adventure and in my case 'smoke' too! Several of us had been in boarding school or at university so used to community living in some form or other but not quite at such close quarters as we were rattling around in that old truck for days (and sometimes nights) on end. We had Canadians with us namely, Jay Ross and his sister, her boyfriend and another lone Canadian called Corey (Female). They were doing a gap year which was something that hadn't hit UK universities then, they had also done Morocco and came to Battersea to join the trip. Strangely, Jay

Ross met a guy on that scary chain bridge coming down from his trek in the hills who he had travelled with in Morocco, a coincidence but I guess we were all on the same path in those days.

There were 3 Americans, Maurice and Lena, a Jewish couple who were very brainy and knew everything about everywhere we were going before we even got there, who had no doubt spent months researching the trip. I remember Maurice being a bit of a stress head and getting furious when, with our British accents called him Morris. He would say 'my name is moor-eeice', teasing him, of course, gave us something to do and gave us a bit of entertainment. The other American was a guy called Greg Laing from New England. He was older than the rest of us, a gentle academic guy. He found a human skull in the river on our trek and insisted on taking it back with us, so there it rattled in his locker all the way back to England and then presumably on to New England if it didn't get confiscated by USA customs.



Here is Greg Laing with a Nepalese family

The Americans and Canadians had much better cameras and equipment than we did, mine being a Brownie 127 which worked better than it ever did in UK due to the sunlight. They also were more confident and better informed than the rest of us at the time (more like my kids generation here today). We had little knowledge of where we were going and didn't know what to expect. Some of the group came from army families who had travelled a bit, otherwise most of us hadn't gone further than Paris. One guy we called Col. Fang who came from a very very strict army family and who I think was sent to toughen him up, he was a bag of nerves and obviously not suitable for army life had the misfortune to have an Irish passport and thus wasn't allowed to travel in Iran. Poor bloke had to find his way through Iraq alone and meet up with us again. We couldn't believe it when he actually made it and he got lots of hugs kisses from us all, such was the camaraderie that had formed in the group. Another passenger a girl with blonde hair (name escapes me) came with her friend was terribly homesick and unhappy and wrote home. Letters took about 3 weeks and sometimes we missed our poste restante stops as the travel itinerary had to change for one reason or another, by the time this girl got her letter from her 'worried to death parents' who insisted she should get home as soon as she could by any means possible, she was having a whale of a time and it took another 3 weeks before her letter got back to them telling them she was staying.

There was also a very young Brazilian girl of 16 with us from Sao Paulo, who was supposed to have travelled with her twin brother but he got sick and couldn't come. I don't think her parents had any idea of what they were sending her on as the poor girl spoke no English at all and came from a very insular catholic background. No doubt she went back saying 'far out' and 'too f***ing much' as the basis of her spoken English. We were all very kind to her and she was cared for by us all. She was the only one with her dark skin that didn't get bitten to death by the mozzies specially on the night we slept out by the pond in the Taj Mahal gardens. The fireflies were amazing but so were our faces by the next day!

Other people who stick out in my mind were Monica Kendall because she was a cousin of the actress Felicity, a guy from Macclesfield because we had gone off for the day in Tehran, met some Iranian students went back to their place and got terribly stoned. The hospitality of these students

were enormous and as we got more stoned they got more drunk and talked less and less in English as the hours went by my Macclesfield friend became a gibbering mess. What do I do ? Here I am with a room full of drunken Iranians a paralysed Englishman with no idea where I was and only a time and place to meet the Intertrek bus, totally reliant on the good will of the students. They came up trumps and got us back to the bus, whatever became of them? That was the time of the Shah and we all know the story since. There was a girl who had just finished teacher training, I remember her as she was in my cooking group and I liked her. Then there was Charlie who 'saved the day'

Afghan Chai shop, left the blonde homesick girl, red coat the Brazilian girl, middle the Jewish American and right the teacher from Midlands. I don't remember the one with the red handbag.



Desert Afghanistan



We were in the desert in Afghanistan when Charlie saved the day. We were camping near some black nomad tents, as it was my groups turn to cook on the gas rings on the side of the truck we had bought veg at a market earlier in the day, not knowing what half the veg was we had turned out a bright red stew. By that time everyone just ate anything presented, food wasn't wonderful since we'd left those lovely stews behind in Turkey and Iran. When we stopped at roadside shacks you could go into the back and sample something from each massive stew pot then decide what you wanted. They were absolutely delicious and served with bread and chai, we tried to get the hang of sucking the chai though a sugar cube but thought better of it when you saw the state of the old guys' front teeth. After the red stew dinner that night in the desert, we had attracted a lot of interest by the local nomads, we went to their tents and were invited in. A large fire in the middle, all the nomad women sitting around the back of the tent and the men by the fire. We sat around the fire and were given food the situation was fine until our watches were spotted. The atmosphere changed and it was obvious they wanted the watches. A very tricky situation for at least 5 minutes when Charlie let out an enormous fart which resounded around the tent and all its occupants collapsed in laughter. A fart is a fart in any language. The watches were forgotten and so back to our Intertrek tents.

Our drive through Pakistan remained fairly uneventful except I was wearing sarong type affair and I recall a man rushing out of his shop with safety pins so I didn't show my legs. Really we had little understanding of different faiths and cultures, not like today where multi faiths are taught in schools on the National curriculum and really no wonder the hippies antics made local people's hair stand on end. On to India, one event stands out in Delhi having gone off for the day with my teacher friend and forgotten name of the campsite we were staying on, assuming that there would only be one in Delhi, the poor old rickshaw man having literally to run us half way round Delhi managed to find the right place. No auto rickshaw tuc tucs way back then. Next we headed off to Benares where Jay Ross contracted a nasty ear infection which festered for the rest of the trip, swimming in the Ganges, not a bright idea. Eventually we landed in Kathmandu just in time before the hash shops became illegal that year. We were like children in a sweetie shop!

Memories of our trek in Nepal are mostly around food as during our travels paraffin had leaked into the Vesta chow miens brought all the way because in those small villages in the mountains there was little extra food to cater for the extra 21 people plus our leaders and numerous porters and Sherpas. We were divided into 3 groups and trekked up to 20 miles off the Tibetan border. It was quite barren that far up and there was an old airfield with a crashed small plane sitting there. We were allowed to feast on the tin of Old Oak ham with that delicious jelly that had travelled all those miles, biggest food treat for us in that 2 weeks. Monica Kendall was our only vegetarian on the trip so how she faired throughout I'm not sure. Some villagers took pity on us and cooked eggs for a few rupees.

We had 3 Intertrek leader/drivers. The main man was small and bearded (he's the one on the truck roof in the picture) and I have forgotten his name. He was experienced and had done several trips, I think there was also Chris (Weeks?) and Dave. One was sandy haired guy and the other tall and dark, it was his first trip out and learning the ropes. Looking back they had a huge responsibility 24/7 and really they did everything for us. They kept the truck going, drove for hours, got through borders, found us places to sleep, took the ones who contracted amoebic dysentery to hospital, got money exchanged on the black market, hired porters and Sherpas and turned a blind eye to any monkey business we got up too! We had respect for them and for each other and so the trip was generally harmonious. They had a relax in Kashmir when we on the houseboats and the occasional hotel we stayed in.

None of us came back from this trip quite the same as we went and if nothing else we grew up. I recall it was emotional seeing the White cliffs of Dover when we returned to UK. It was also quite disappointing and difficult to settle when we returned as I found people were quite disinterested in my travels generally, the whole thing at the time was completely out of their remit. In fact now the kids travel so much themselves, they are much more interested in the stories and can't believe we went overland in 1973. I wonder how many others from my group have been back to India many times like myself.

I bet they did it the easy way like me ...by plane! Heather Piper
(Mossop)

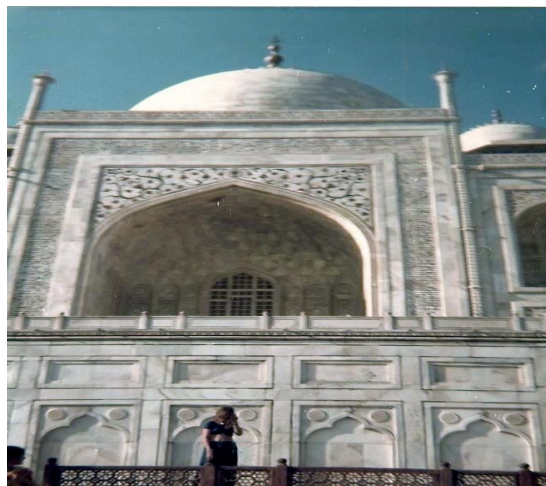


Shikara water taxi Dal lake Srinagar



Yin Yang restaurant Kathmandu

Me (Heather) at the Taj





Mountain Village.



Me arriving back at Market Rasen station in Jay Ross' djellabah which made a change from the old Afghan coat my mother used to suffer!