

Episode Three

Around the world in 380 days-part one.

I sold my beloved Singer Gazelle car and bought what, I thought at the time, was an extremely expensive bus ticket. It was to take me all the way from Kingston Railway station to Delhi for the grand price of £90. When I arrived to catch my bus I discovered, to my horror, that it was an incredibly old coach in which I felt that we would even be lucky to reach Dover. I began to understand the cheap price for this trip and met an interesting diverse and motley crew on board. There were only two Brits on board apart from me, one was an old Etonian, and the other was a delightful guy whose family lived in Jersey. It should be added that in those days very few Brits ventured further than Calais! Our fellow passengers were made up mainly of American draft dodgers from the Vietnam War, together with Kiwis and Aussies returning home, having eventually spent all their money, and seen most of Europe.



I do not recall a great deal about crossing Europe, as in my youth, my mother and her friend had driven me around most countries. It all went very quickly except for visiting the Nazi death camp at Dachau. In my opinion every young

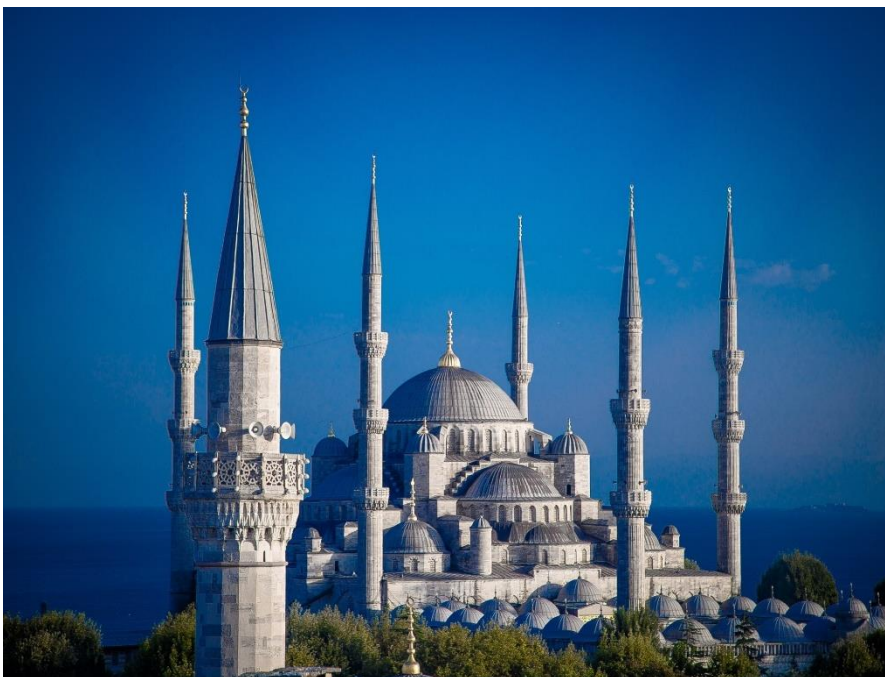
person should be exposed to a similar visit. Fortunately, this had been preceded by a visit to the Munich beer festival, both places were 'firsts' for me.

Shortly after we entered the first of the Russian bloc countries and the landscape disappeared into nothing but sunflowers for hundreds of miles through the centre of old Yugoslavia. On arrival at the Bulgarian border, I noticed for the first time, a bottle of Scotch whiskey exchanging hands, and finally understood why the driver was so protective of the case sat next to him. Bulgaria turned out to be a rather dull country with a very strange 'Russian' style architecture in Sofia. My only fond memory of the country was the excellent fizzy yogurt drink, which came from something closely resembling an English pub beer handle.

Our first major city, where we stayed for two or three days, has undoubtedly remained one of my favourite places anywhere in the world. I had visited Istanbul before whilst at King's school (and where I would run many events during my career in the future). It was also great to escape from the dreary communist cities of the past week.

I was already familiar with most of the tourist attractions but needed to find a way of funding my food and expenses for my trip from here to Delhi. I remembered from my earlier days of a visit, that market holders sold smuggled gold from Russia which they then made into puzzle rings. I set about negotiating, over a two-day period, for a set of gold puzzle rings which I wore on both of my hands and on all of my fingers. I was beginning to learn from my hippie friends on the coach and found myself fitting in more comfortably each day! The rings were to become my currency, hopefully, for the next thousand miles or so to come.

It was in Istanbul that I had the good luck to meet an Indian Professor, who preferred to travel in our coach rather than to drive his Minor 1000 car. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity to have more freedom to explore myself and I drove his car for most of the way to Delhi, meeting up with the coach each evening. A pretty trusting chap I thought!



After visiting once again the amazing battlefields of Gallipoli (where my grandfather had fought and survived), we headed off down the southern Turkish coast, visiting the glorious hot waterfalls of Pamukkale. In those days there was not a hotel to be seen, let alone any promenades or beautiful beaches for tourists. It was a fabulous unspoiled coastline of a few

isolated villages-but with a catch.

The area was a massive army camp. The Turkish army, I soon learnt, was one of the largest and best trained armies anywhere in the world. I was somewhat alarmed to notice large concentrations of landing boats and troops along part of the south coast. I began to realize that something was afoot, and these sightings were indeed an early sign of the imminent invasion of Cyprus. As a young army officer from the HAC, I was not too keen on anybody discovering my background (although I did manage to get in one call to a friend in the Intelligence Corps reporting on what I had seen).

Our journey through southern Turkey became almost biblical. Further along that Turkish coast we reached the small town of Tarsus (of St. Paul's fame). We headed due north for several hundred miles to the Anatolian plateau and the ancient Christian chapels of Goreme. This was a valley of extraordinary geographical features of sandstone pillars. 365 chapels had been carved in these pillars by the ancient Christians, which they had beautifully hand painted.

In those days, it looked as though nobody had ever been there and we slept in the chapels for three nights. We eventually spotted our first stranger, who turned out to be a local Turkish policeman with his dog. The police officer attempted to sell us all raw cannabis. My background, from having run youth clubs at home, made me violently anti any drugs. However, I eventually gave in under duress (yes, really) from a Pittsburgh Professor, who happened to have joined us in Istanbul. He eventually persuaded me that I could not criticize something if I had never tried it. I remember hearing the chain on the policeman's dog sounding like a vast orchestra. I also remember feeling violently sick for the whole of the next day. Never ever since, or will I ever, try that again!

My travels were about to get even more adventurous than usual. We headed our way across the northern plains and deserts of Turkey to Erzurum, where there was a very famous mosque which I was dying to see. I changed my mind very quickly, on discovering for the first time in my life, that somebody was spitting at me because of the colour of my skin -and that I was certainly not welcome here. I decided to miss out the mosque, but I suspect that this area of Turkey is now a lot more civilized.

It was time for us to cross the border into Iran and it became noticeably clear that this was not an altogether safe area. We were boarded on our bus by an armed Iranian soldier shortly before entering a mountain range and arriving at his border. Apparently, the Kurdish tribes very often attacked and robbed vehicles traveling along this only road between the two countries. I believe that even today the Turks continue to battle with these tribesmen. We were lucky enough at one stage to draw alongside a group of Kurdish tribesmen, all dressed in the most beautiful colourful clothes, while riding their horses through a mountain pass. Yes, they all had rifles slung over their shoulders, but luckily for us, none of them attempted to appear aggressive (perhaps because they noticed the Iranian soldier sitting in the front with his machine gun). I took a super picture of them -this time without getting arrested.

Crossing the border into Iran cost the driver yet another bottle of fine Scotch whiskey but saving us a couple of hours of border bureaucracy. It was not long before we arrived in Tehran. As the capital of Iran it was a big modern city, set at the foothills of some overly dramatic mountains. One of my flatmates had even been the roads engineer planning the city road network years before.

It was here that I made the first and the biggest mistake of my traveling days. I noticed a family cleaning their kitchen utensils in a gutter at the side of the main road of the city. Naturally, I took out my camera and took a quick picture. The next thing I knew was that I was lined up against a brick wall with two police officers holding submachine guns pointed at me. I thought perhaps this was the end of my travels. Although not speaking each other's languages, it became quite clear that they were demanding the film from my camera. I had after all committed the crime of photographing Muslim women!

I duly agreed and tried to appear to be taking the film out of my camera, whilst grabbing an unused one from my pocket, which I duly handed to the police officer. (Isn't it amazing how incredibly stupid you can be when young!) To my complete surprise, instead of spotting my risky trick they unwound my new unused film and holding it up to the sky looked for the picture that I had taken. Of course, there was nothing there, and luckily, they had no choice other than to let me go. This photo remains today as one of my most treasured and a reminder of how stupid I can be! And here it is!



Following this little wakeup call on etiquette in Muslim countries,

we first took a ride up to the Caspian Sea where we feasted on delicious sturgeon fish and caviar. We then headed south through Iran to the beautiful town of Isfahan, more famous for its Persian carpets than anything else. Although today, perhaps better known for a recent reprisal missile attack by the Israelis. The desert was spectacular with frequent dust storms and wonderful bleak terrain. I shall long remember Iran with great affection. The people were very kind to us, remembering of course, that in those days it was under the control of the Shah of Persia and not today's dangerous religious leaders. How incredibly sad to have befallen on harder and more challenging times for its population and to have made so many enemies around the world today.

It was around this time that I had seen the first major mountains of our travels just before crossing into Iran. Indeed, the snowcapped extinct Mount Ararat volcano that I saw near the border had many interesting stories about it. This was the mountaintop on which the Noah's Ark reportedly came to rest after the flooding of the world. It was also one which, in those days, you absolutely did not climb to the top. Its peak shared the border between Turkey and what was then a part of Russia, with great views across the Russian landscape. Those who did venture up there were frequently shot at by Russian soldiers protecting their border. Not a great place clearly for me to venture.

As we crossed the border into Afghanistan, yet another fine bottle of Scotch whiskey hit the dust as it was distributed to the guards. Once again, a long bureaucratic wait at the border was averted. In those days, there was only one decent road in Afghanistan. It crossed the country from East to West by going due south and then with a great curve traveling up to the northwest.

The road travelling due southwest from Herat was constructed of tarmac and funded by the Americans. As we turned the bottom corner to head up to Kabal the road turned into concrete, generously donated by the Russians. I must keep reminding myself that my visit to

Afghanistan even superseded the failed war between Russia and the Afghans-and that later no countries should have underestimated the warrior strengths of this nation.

It was along this initial stretch of road that I began to understand a little more about Afghanistan. We pulled into what looked like a modern hotel in the middle of the desert. I should have realized it was not all that it appeared to be on seeing an extremely green and slimy swimming pool in front of the hotel. I went into the hotel to try and arrange for a meal for everyone on the bus that night. There was no fine doorman to welcome me nor was the reception desk manned. On entering further into the hotel, I casually wandered through in the hope of finding somebody somewhere. Eventually, I entered the kitchens which were immaculately installed and of stainless steel. I was soon to find that, sadly having constructed the hotel, the Russians had omitted to teach any Afghans how to operate the kitchen equipment. I was promptly directed out of the hotel back door into a yard behind to select our menu for the evening.

There were several live animals wandering around the yard. A couple of sheep, two goats and a few chickens. Regrettably, I pointed to one of the goats that I thought would be sufficient to feed us all. It was duly slaughtered right in front of my eyes, skinned, and then placed in a very large boiling cauldron over an open fire in the backyard. It was not the finest meal that I had ever tasted, in fact, I've never eaten goat since. After one and a half hours of being boiled it still tasted like raw leather. I was not very popular with the other members of the coach that night for my menu selection.



As we journeyed further south, we came across the occasional small village. It was like moving through medieval times. Any food that was available was on display in very small shacks. Unwisely, my fellow passengers entrusted me yet again the following night to try and choose a menu. As I walked down through the shacks displaying their food, I was intrigued by a large black object hanging from the roof of one. I inquired, using my usual sign language, as to which delicacy I was viewing.

The shopkeeper promptly grabbed a stick and whacked the object hanging in front of me. It became evident very quickly that it was meat covered by a complete layer of black flies. I decided not to go for meat on the menu that night.



By this time, I had learned not to photograph Muslim women, but wanted a picture so badly. I decided to borrow a Yashmak from one kind and understanding local. He let me change in his modest home - and then took a photograph of me dressed in his wife's Yashmak. Don't believe me-then here is the proof!

The next major town that we arrived at was in the due south

of Afghanistan and was the very infamous Kandahar. Today, this is the stronghold of the Taliban in Afghanistan. For me it has a slightly different significance.

Despite having not eaten black flies on meat the night before, I fell violently ill from goodness knows what. The bus dropped me outside the hospital in Kandahar just as I collapsed. I awoke to find myself lying on a cot bed in a small mud walled room with a single 40-watt bulb hanging from the middle of the ceiling. As I came to, I noticed a rather strange apparition before me. It was my wonderful Afghan doctor dressed in an immaculate three-piece pinstriped suit. Held in one hand was the latest American drip feed system and in the other he held a hammer and nail. He promptly drove the nail into the wall above my cot, hanging up the drip feed system on the nail.

Yes, I did survive the experience and to my amazement, the following morning I was woken by a Kiwi nurse from the bus who promptly marched me to the waiting bus outside. The other unforgettable memory from this Kandahar hospital was the challenge which they seemed to find whilst ramming near blunt needles into me. To this day I cannot watch any injections or blood tests as needles enter my body once again. It turns out that I was a very lucky chap who owes this hospital a great vote of thanks-but I am not going back to deliver it!

We set off once again heading due northeast towards the capital, Kabul, crossing more fascinating and mysterious deserts and occasionally stopping at little villages where the most delightful people would invite me into their homes for a mug of Afghan tea. They were truly delightful people, and in fairness, their warm welcome and kindness might have been influenced by the fact that they all were chewing cannabis under their tongues and were effectively walking 6ft off the ground.

It was obvious where the cannabis had come from, because at each village we were inundated by young boys whose only words of English were "You like hashish mister" Fortunately, I didn't like cannabis, however I could have bought an 18-inch solid bar of this

dreadful stuff for a mere \$10! Many of my fellow companion travellers did however. The bus, for the rest of the journey through Afghanistan, was effectively a cannabis smoking den, whose smoke I think put everybody on a high.

Kabul turned out to be a bit like a 1920s town, but certainly far less medieval than much of what we had seen elsewhere in Afghanistan. I bought several maps of the city and set off exploring. For some reason I kept all these maps. Years later my flatmate, Patrick, who was serving in the Intelligence Corps, asked me to hand them over. I just so hope that they were put to beneficial use by the Allies.

The Khyber Pass was every bit as fascinating and exciting as in my wildest dreams. As I had anticipated, with my passion for looking at any weapons, I was delighted to find several tribesmen at the top of the pass, all with rifles slung over their shoulders. Several of these

were no doubt captured from General Roberts and the British troops who had fought in this region during the 1800 hundreds. My HAC safety drill had luckily made me cautious on removing the weapons from the shoulders of the tribesmen to inspect the rifles. Every single one of the tribesmen had a round up the spout!



By the time we arrived at the Khyber Pass I had begun to run a little short of money and had been enticed by some of the Afghan families to depart, initially with my jeans and later with all my western clothes. My jeans alone (a pair of which I have never replaced since) fetched me sufficient food to last a week. As you can imagine, I was happy to sell every stitch of clothing that I had in my luggage. I purchased a shirt and baggy trouser bottom from an Afghan that looked more like pyjamas, and which were a deep red colour. I wore these clothes until reaching Australia later. Nobody can be more surprised than I that they let me into the country like this.

The drive down from the Khyber Pass into Pakistan and towards Rawalpindi, dressed in my new finery, was again quite spectacular and a major contrast from the deserts of Afghanistan. To be honest, I have mixed memories from Pakistan. Our first expedition was to the north of Rawalpindi to visit a village next to the Chinese border. On arrival in the main square, we discovered an open-air film show for the locals provided by members of the Chinese Army. It was nothing short of a film on how to dig and develop secret military tunnels, from which to surprise an enemy! I now fully appreciate the influence that China has on this northern area of Pakistan.

My second memorable venture in Pakistan taught me yet again another big lesson. It was whilst I was trying to exchange Pakistan cash into Indian rupees on the black market. I foolishly handed over my passport to the 'gentleman' with whom I was doing business, only to find him disappearing out of the back door of the building, together with my passport. Naturally, I pursued him and eventually, with the help of some of my fellow travellers, we 'persuaded' him to return my passport. At which stage he wrought his revenge on me. It transpired that the Indian rupees exchanged for me turned out later to be nothing more than photocopied and hand watercolour fakes. Oh dear, yet another interesting learning curve and one which I knew I was going to have to overcome somehow soon.

After yet another two bottles of Scotch whiskey changing hands at the border we entered India. It was interesting to see just how many vehicles were abandoned at the border due to the swinging taxes incurred by anybody taking a vehicle from Pakistan into India. Thank goodness on that occasion I was not driving my good friend's car for him that day.

I loved India from the minute we arrived. As we travelled towards Delhi we would stop for meals at the railway stations, which of course had been built by the Victorians. Here you could buy a perfect English breakfast, beautifully cooked for literally a few rupees. I still was not drinking any water and continued my diet of Coca Cola for another month for fear of falling ill again.

One of my final expeditions in India took me north through the town of Jammu, where our coach driver refused to drive any further—we were soon to discover why. The local buses all set off for Srinagar in Kashmir at the same time in the morning. It was clearly a fun race for the drivers and a terrifying spectacle for anyone unfortunate, or unwise enough, to be traveling in their vehicle. At the deep ravines in the Himalayan foothills there would always be two bridges. One for traffic in one direction and the other for traffic in the opposite direction (I never did work out which was which). These bridges became the favourite overtaking places for those most anxious to win the race to Srinagar. Both bridges would somehow become one way traffic to the complete detriment of anybody unlucky enough to be coming in the opposite direction. There were several times during that journey that I heard screams coming from various quarters of our bus. At the bottom of each ravine would lie burned out wrecks of the unlucky losers. Luckily, somehow, we got there in one piece, but it had been nothing short of a suicidal driving experience.

Kashmir was stunningly beautiful, despite frequently becoming a war zone between India and Pakistan. The foothills of the Himalayas were covered with beautiful lakes set between majestic mountain ranges. On one such lake floated great barges built in the time of Queen Victoria, on which the British summered spending the hot summers escaping from the heat of the Indian plains in the time of the Maharajas. The bedrooms, dining and drawing rooms were filled with immaculate Victorian furniture. In one instance, even a picture of Queen Victoria hung on the walls. Each barge was run by a Chinese family who lived in a tethered small boat alongside. The family cooked wonderful meals for us each day, naturally starting with a full English breakfast. No further need for me to search for boiled goat or such delicacies again.

The days were filled gently cruising round the beautiful lakes in small rowing jiffs with the most picturesque mountain backgrounds. There was only one problem keeping me awake at nights. How was I going to get rid of my fake Indian rupees for me to buy my much-needed air ticket to bypass forbidden Myanmar. To my great good fortune, the owner of our barge

was heavily prone to excessive drinking, ably supported by my friends who knew of my dilemma. Our boat owner was horribly drunk the night before we departed, and the next morning was in no fit state to recognize my fake rupees. Yes, of course, I felt deeply guilty, but frankly he was only going to pass them on to the next dumb traveller that came his way. How on earth. was I to make it to Australia otherwise?

Perhaps one of the biggest bits of luck on my travels was when we arrived in Delhi. I had made good friends with a kiwi who was returning home. Ken was a radio broadcaster from Napier. By complete chance, we were walking along a street near the Red Fort, when Ken spotted his old flatmate from New Zealand. He was living with his family in Delhi and we were invited to his home. I say luck, because ‘daddy’ turned out to be the New Zealand Ambassador for India! We spent the next three days being chauffeured around all the highlights of the famous ‘golden triangle’, including visits to such places as the Taj Mahal, in the ambassadors immaculate Mercedes. What a luxurious difference from the bus trip through Iran and Afghanistan.

This was also a suitable time for me to recoup my health and regain my strength for the next stage of the journey, which had not been greatly helped by the fact that I had been selling my blood to raise funds across the last three countries. The ambassador insisted that I meet his doctor who pronounced that I had been suffering from Amoebic dysentery when hospitalized in Kandahar. Knowing what I now know about my blood, I do so worry about those to whom I had sold it.

It was sadly time for me to leave our bus and my travelling companions behind, as I ventured alone on the next steps to Australia. But that’s a tale for another episode and perhaps a change of topic.