

Author's Remarks

Sitting in the crowded Balboa Cafe on Fillmore Street that evening for those brief hours, I felt as if I were on the road again. In the company of these Australian travelers, how could I feel otherwise?

Peter and his mate, Bruce, aliases Passport and Fudge, were on the last leg of their round-the-world ski trip and would be in San Francisco for two days before returning to Sydney.

Our evening of catching up progressed with my pumping Peter with endless queries of overland travel and the whereabouts of past traveling companions . . . "Had the Sundowners' office in London truly 'gone bust'? Who was picking up the slack for the overlands now? Were Eka, Clap and Radar still conducting bus tours through Asia, Europe and North Africa?" I had long ago forgotten the real names of these Australian drivers and couriers, but their traveling aliases I would always remember.

The evening grew late and yet the travel yarns raved on. This was how it was with the serious Aussie traveler and his mates and this was how it would always be.

Eight years ago to the day, in our London-bound coach, Peter and I, along with 32 other travelers, were slowly making our way down a treacherous Himalayan road after a four-day Shangri-la experience in Kashmir, India. We had been on the road for nearly

Cochran

a month. Our common curiosity and need to experience faraway places and get to London had brought us together.

Although my bus travels with Sundowners had ended in 1977, my gypsy yearnings were still strong, taking me longer than the others to settle down. Memories of "The Alexander Overland" lingered long after my return to the United States. As a result, four years later I left the exhilaration and beauty of Washington, D.C., to return to the quiet and calm of the Kansas plains to chronicle this once in a lifetime experience.

How privileged I had been to be one of two American women accompanying this group of fine Australians; to observe and record their quest to discover their roots and link up with a part of the world from which they are so geographically isolated; and to share in this exciting slice of present-day Australiana.

Our westward journey from Sydney, Australia, to London, England, by plane and bus over bumpy narrow Asian roads and smooth wide European expressways revealed an old world of new friends and insights--a world brimming with exotic and marvelous histories reflecting civilizations of poverty and grandeur, overshadowed by the fervor of religious and political conviction.

Presented to us in a kaleidoscope of time capsules, this three-month odyssey became our world as we left the familiar behind. This was our time of exploration, introspection, development and decision--our time "to see the world."

Fran Cochran
San Francisco
March 21, 1984