

AUSSIE TRAIL TO LONDON
A Journal by an American

by
Fran Cochran

Assisted
by
Lois Cochran

Cochran

Dedication

To the 1975-76 men and women of Sundowners Limited and Christian Youth Travel Association who made it happen.

And to The Group who experienced the happening.

Cochran

Note

Most of the names of the characters in this story have been changed. In some instances for ease of writing, I have combined some of the personalities and personal happenings to fit one person. Although this is a true account, there are some inaccuracies due to lapse of memory and incomplete journal entries. As for the historical accounts, I have made use of the library to ensure the accuracy of what we learned on this journey.

CONTENTS

	Acknowledgements	
	Author's Remarks	
	Preface	
1	Australia--An Adventure Begins	11
2	Singapore--Island Melting Pot	16
3	Thailand--Temples and GIS	29
4	Nepal--Away from the Maddening Crowd	44
5	India--Cultural Potpourri	71
6	Pakistan--Sitting This One Out	128
7	Afghanistan--Assorted Crises	142
8	Iran--Glorious Past, Changing Future	174
9	Turkey--A Fabulous Crossroads	210
10	Greece--Back to the Western Beat	253
11	Yugoslavia--Making Up Time	272
12	Italy--A Peek into the Boot	279
13	Austria--Tranquil Idyll	288
14	West Germany--A Modern Phoenix	296
15	England--Home Away from Home	306

Cochran

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to my Australian friends:

- * Judith Mauger for contributing her delightful character sketches of some of our traveling companions and for her revealing description of the exotic Istanbul Turkish Bath experience.
- * Nicholas Barbarino, Kay Bunt May and Kay Crawford for contributing certain photos and needed information.

My sincere thanks also to countless others for their encouragement and suggestions.

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 questions regarding overland travel and with the whereabouts of past traveling companions . . . "Had the Sun-downers' office in London truly 'gone bust'? Who was picking up the slack for the overland now? Were Eka, Clap and Radar still conducting bus tours through Asia, Europe and North Africa?" I had long since 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 stories 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

Cochran

Shangri-la experience in Kashmir, India. We had been on the road for nearly 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 excitement and beauty of Washington, D.C., to return to the quiet and calm of the Kansas plains to chronicle this, for me, once in a lifetime journey.

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

Our westward journey from Sydney, Australia, to London, England, by plane and bus over narrow Asian roads and smooth European expressways revealed an old world of new friends and insights--a world full of exotic and marvelous histories reflecting civilizations of poverty and grandeur, all overshadowed by the fervor of religious 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, development, thought and decision--our time "to see the world."

Fran Cochran
San Francisco
March 21, 1984

Preface

When first asked to lead an Overland Tour from the United Kingdom to Nepal in 1975 I was somewhat alarmed at the prospect of leaving the well-trodden routes of Europe that I knew so well to travel by coach through this unfamiliar and difficult part of the world.

Stories I had heard from colleagues in London had led me to wonder why anyone would want to venture all this way through these strange and mystical countries of Asia en route from London to Katmandu.

How wrong I was! As I sit here having read the words to follow, I wonder how many intended travelers have had the same doubts as I had initially, and have let this opportunity of adventure slip by.

This is a story of a group of young people who took this journey (Katmandu to London). Over the many weeks we were to be together it was my privilege to watch these people from all walks of life develop friendships and share experiences previously unimagined.

Unhappily, a lot of places mentioned here can no longer be visited because of political strife. However, to those who are contemplating the Overland route of today I'm sure these words will give you an idea of this uniquely rewarding experience.