

Date of travel	from	19 August 1982	to	3 November 1982
Age at the time	24			
Full name	Jane Green			
Continent / country / name of your trip	The Backroads of Asia – London to Katmandhu			
Your connection with EO	Expedition member.			

My Encounter Overland Memories:

We had been married just two years, when we set off on the 'Backroads of Asia' EO trip from London to Katmandhu, on 19 August 1982. I remember my Dad getting very thrilled, when my Mum told him that I had something exciting to tell him. He was hugely disappointed, when I said we were going travelling and might be gone for over a year! I think he had been thinking that some grandchildren were on their way! We had an amazing trip and we are so glad that we travelled when we were young and didn't leave it until we were older. A lot of our peers have done just that and have had issues with ill health and now Covid. Covid has really changed the travelling landscape.



Group photo taken in Capadoccia, Turkey.

The day to day routine of the trip revolved around setting camp and mealtimes. We nearly always had early mornings, usually around 6.00am. Reading my diary now, I see that we did get up at 4.00/4.30am quite regularly! The tent setting up, taking down and the packing up got quicker and quicker as time progressed. The purchasing of carpets by various members of the group, caused some problems with packing the trailer a few times! We camped in various places, often in the middle of nowhere but sometimes in camp sites (with showers and toilets) and sometimes in hotel grounds. Occasionally some of the group would pay for a room at a guesthouse and often we might then share the facilities with other group members.



Camping in hotel grounds in Lahore, Pakistan.
One of the group woke up to find a huge coconut had fallen off the tree in the night and just missed his head!



Making the most of the local facilities. Gus having a hair wash in the grounds of the crusader castle at Marmaris, Turkey.

We cooked in pairs and the cooks normally shopped that day, in order that the food was fresh. That pair then washed up the following day. We decided initially to not cook as a couple, so that we could get to know the other group members. We later changed this because it was easier, when time allowed, to go off and explore together and then get the food whilst we were out. We also had group meals out from time to time.



First group meal in Fethiye, Turkey with driver John Simmons and co-driver/trainee Angus (Gus) Scott-Knight.



Washing up duty in Chitwan National Park, Nepal.

Breakfast usually consisted of porridge, cornflakes or All-Bran and bread and jam or sometimes pancakes. Truck lunches were normally bread/pitta/chappatis, cheese, egg and/or salad (if available). For the dinners you had to be inventive. On leaving London we had a full stock of dried and tinned goods. You could use these to supplement fresh goods but we were rationing these, in order that we would have some stock left once we hit Pakistan, India and Nepal. This plan did not come off, as in the end we had to fly over Iran (from Athens to Karachi) and swapped with a group coming in the opposite direction. That group inherited our well stocked truck and we inherited their truck, which was completely empty except for one coconut! Cooking for 20 was no mean feat, but you did gradually get used to the quantities. Buying meat and fish in Europe was not a problem, but once we got to Pakistan and India it was very different. Any meat had to be bought very early to avoid it having had too many flies on it. We then had to keep it cool. I can't remember how we did this. We certainly didn't have a fridge. Maybe we just put it in an insulated box.



At a butchers in Pakistan.
The reason you bought meat early in the day!

What you cooked was really dependant on what you could buy. This wasn't such a problem in Europe, but was a challenge in Pakistan and India, where we had a lot of vegetables and eggs. I remember the meals we cooked as a couple, that the group enjoyed most, were a cauliflower cheese dish (made with a cheese sauce, cauliflower and the addition of hard boiled eggs, boiled potatoes and tomatoes) and also spaghetti bolognese cooked on an open fire (as there was no gas) in the countryside near Lahore. At times a few of the meals, prepared by the group were very unappetising, with very tough meat. Dry goods often had weevil infestations and my husband threw up once when opening a tin of luncheon meat in India. It exploded and spread a foul smelling liquid everywhere!! Occasionally we would have run out of gas, with no alternative and then had to have salad for a few days.



Spaghetti Bolognese for 20 being prepared on an open fire.
Near Lahore – Pakistan.

The worst meal of the trip was when we were staying in a guest house in Chitral in the Hindu Kush. The meal looked lovely; rice, potatoes, tomatoes, chappatis and chicken in a curry sauce. We were all looking forward to it with great anticipation, however when we tasted it, it tasted of cow shit! Dried cow dung had been used as the fuel for the fire and had flavoured the entire meal. It was such a shame as it looked so good. This meal was referred to thereafter as 'cow shit chicken'!



'Cow shit chicken' being prepared in the guesthouse in Bumburet, Chitral Valley, northern Pakistan.

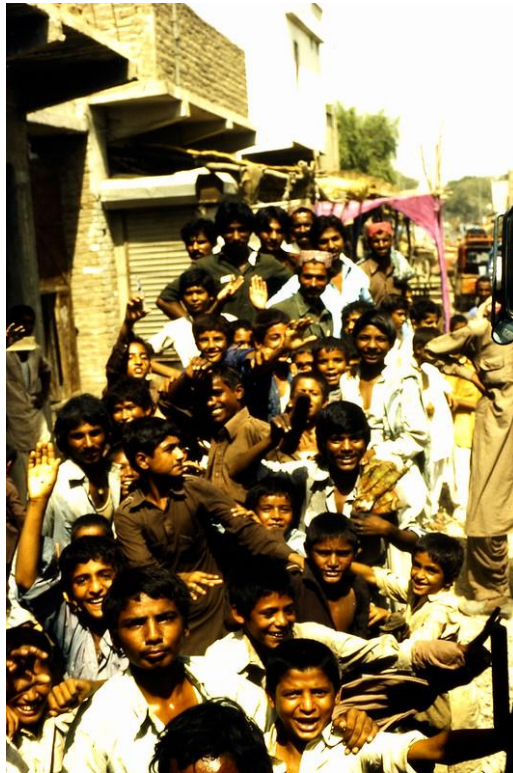
Inevitably there were members of the group, who were always last to pack up their tent in the mornings, didn't take their turns at chores, were slow at cooking and/or were always late back when we had a rendez-vous time. This also unavoidably caused some moments of friction. On the whole we got along very well with each-other and made some friends for life, who we still keep in touch with. Sharing the ups and downs of eleven weeks on the road together either makes you grow closer or further apart! We had some downs too. The group was very disappointed when we had to backtrack to Athens from central Turkey because we couldn't get our Iranian visas, but that is travel. We also had a major down, when we left Srinagar, in Northern India. We had had a few days on a houseboat, which was a major luxury for us. Sheets, rugs to walk on, sit on toilets and food provided! The trouble was, the food was being prepared using the water from the lake and any outflow from the numerous houseboats was going into that same lake! A large number of us were very ill on leaving Srinagar. There were lots of buzzes for emergency stops for the next few days and I even wrote in my diary that I threw up out of the side of the truck, not having had enough warning to buzz! I remember on one occasion, a member of the group unfortunately having his birthday on a day when he was suffering. There was an emergency stop for him and I mean emergency. There was nowhere to go, just next to the truck at the roadside. He was giving it both ends at once and we all leant over the side and sung Happy Birthday to him! We just got two fingers in response.

Conversations gradually became dominated by food and bowel movements. Being on such a trip you definitely lose all inhibitions and I remember one toilet stop, the day after leaving the fateful houseboats, where there was nowhere to go, so a few of us went into a culvert and literally leant back to back! Hard to imagine now! When you need to go, you just have to go! Also in Pakistan and India we would press for a loo stop and the landscape would be deserted, but you could bet your life that, within five minutes there would be a circle of people watching you! It was particularly unnerving when you had spent the night in the tent and when you unzipped there was a line of squatting men staring at you!



The onlookers outside our tent in the morning!

We also attracted large crowds of onlookers when we stopped in the more remote locations. Crowds would walk around following us and watching us and there would always be a circle of onlookers at the truck. For this reason we had a rota for guard duty on the truck, so that it was never left unattended.



A record crowd at the truck in a small village in Pakistan!



A few on guard duty in Landi Kotal, Khyber Pass, northern Pakistan and a fairly small crowd of onlookers. Note the armed guards watching on the rooves (not provided by EO)!

As we progressed into the Indian subcontinent we had many conversations about what we wanted to eat. We would spend hours talking about dishes that were never going to be available to us, making our stomachs rumble and trying to outdo each-other. We also had so many discussions/debates about when a meal was called lunch, tea, dinner or supper. The non-English group members found our English meal names very confusing.

Compared to today, our equipment was very basic. The tents were heavy and we slept on canvas beds. You provided your own sleeping bags and we made the mistake of buying some fairly cheap ones. The first night in Belgium was freezing. We later purchased blankets in Turkey, which we had to throw away eventually, as they became infested with little creatures. Our rucksacks were pretty heavy but fortunately were not those awful metal framed ones that were around previously. We didn't have the buying power to kit ourselves out with lightweight quick-dry travel clothing and I'm not sure that much of it was available then.

The major change with travelling now and back then was the communications. There were no mobile phones, so no-one really knew where we were at any given time. No google-tracking, Facebook, email or anything. All we could do was write letters and post them where we could. Our loved ones had a list of five Post Restantes and the rough dates we should reach there. The first two were in Turkey; Istanbul and Kayseri, then two in India; Srinagar and Delhi and then lastly one at the Katmandhu Guest House, our final destination. We think we received all the letters that were sent. They were often several weeks old, by the time we read them. It was lovely to read them though.

Photo taking was also totally different. Most of us had (standalone) cameras and would take photos, but not with the gay abandon of today. You couldn't look at it, check it and delete it, if it wasn't any good. In our case we didn't get to see our photos until eighteen months later. My husband would take the photos and then post the slide film to the Kodak Processing Centre in the UK, with the return address of his parents' house. His parents would later receive the slides and would have a list of slide numbers and where the photos were taken, which we had snail-mailed to them.

Travelling has changed a lot due to this almost constant ability to stay instantly in touch. We didn't have much of a clue about what was going on in the World. One of the group had a small radio and he would tune into the BBC World Service. We felt as if we were truly travelling into the unknown. You had to look at maps, to work out where we were going and help was never just a mobile call away. We had to solve the problems ourselves. This made us more self-reliant and, to some degree at times, reliant on the locals. This encouraged more interaction with them and the overwhelming majority of locals, that we met whilst travelling, were amazingly friendly and helpful. Their generosity was astounding. They would come and give us melons (the thing in Turkey) and their local food and drink. They would, at times, invite all of us into their houses or gardens and offer us chai and food. It was incredible and more often than not they would not expect anything in return, even if they did not have much themselves.

There were a few occasions on our trip, when this interaction was very memorable. Late one evening, we turned up and made camp deep in the Turkish mountains. Whilst dinner was being prepared on the truck, a group of us walked up a very steep hill to the nearby village. This is the extract from my diary:

'We found the Chai House. Tremendous reception. All stood up as we went in and packed up a sort of domino game they were playing, so we had room to sit down. Almost immediately we discovered that one of the locals, Ibrahim could speak French. Also one man, who could speak a little German and another who could speak a little English. Chai was served and we began talking. They were all very interested to know where we came from and our names. Heads kept popping around the door and you couldn't have had many more people in the room. Ibrahim had a ten day old baby, which we admired. Ibrahim had worked in Switzerland in a hotel, also in Italy and at the Club Med resort in Fethiye (Turkey). They asked us if we wanted to eat. We said thank you but we had to go back to the truck to eat. They seemed disappointed. We then made a group decision, that we should stay and suffer the consequences later. Table was shortly laid and food brought out; egg dish, yoghurt, onion, lots of round flat breads, cheese, a type of melon and water. In meantime they got musical instrument out and started playing and taking turns to dance. Each dancer picking the next, when they finished. Some rather shy but much laughter and joking. Girls were peeping through the window, very shy. Some boys in Chai House but there were no

women to be seen. Luckily we weren't chosen to dance. Two bald boys dancing - everyone laughed. Presented us with beers. Said we had to be back for ten because we had a meeting with our driver and had to be up at five next day. Thanked them for the meal and had to shake ALL their hands. Ibrahim and two of his brothers came back with us with their torches. Gave them coffee at the truck and a few sausages and some potatoes to eat.'

It was an incredible experience. Some of the group were very put out that we hadn't come back for dinner as promised, but you have to make the most of these experiences when they present themselves.

Another time, again in Turkey, we were camped beside a lake near Kayseri. The truck had some mechanical issues so we were stuck for a couple of days. My husband and I went down to the lake and had a swim. Some local boys approached in their rowing boat and invited us out for the day. They met up with another boat with two local fishermen in it. These guys spoke German, as the older one, Elvan had worked in Frankfurt for five years. They shared their melon with us but wouldn't accept any of our cheese, bread and tomatoes. They collected crayfish from their nets and also had some fish they had caught. My husband and one of the boys went in for another swim. We went back to shore and invited them back to our camp, but as the truck was away we couldn't offer them tea or water. They gutted the fish and gave it to us. We thanked them and offered to pay for it, but they wouldn't accept anything. We told them we would cook it later, when the truck came back. They then cooked some of the crayfish on a fire. We waved them off in their boat and promised to send Elvan some photos of them on their boats, when we got home to England. This we did.



Elvan and friends on their boat on the lake in Turkey.

Getting any cash was always time consuming and involved queuing in a bank or money changers for ages, filling in copious forms and giving numerous signatures. We took some sterling cash and US dollars and also American Express traveller's cheques.

The most frightening incidents we had were, for me, when we went over the Loweri Pass in northern Pakistan. I hated it on the way down because I was sitting at the back, so at times I was hanging over the massive drop! The truck was too long to make it around the hairpin bends in one go, so had to keep reversing up and manoeuvring. On the way back up it was even worse and I was so scared that I climbed into my sleeping bag and didn't look. If I was going to die, I didn't want to see it happening!



The Loweri Pass with its hairpins!

The other time I was scared witless, was when a group of us went on a walking safari in Chitwan National Park. We formed a long walking crocodile with the guide at the front. I ended up being at the back. We were walking through narrow tunnels, through the high grass with a few scrabby shrubs around. The guide signalled that we should be quiet and look over the tree trunk, that was lying across the tunnel. We looked. My husband was ready to take a photo and had his zoom lens on. Well, he couldn't possibly get the rhino in because it was literally right there, the other side of the trunk. On hearing the cameras clicking, it leapt to its feet and the ground shook. What a noise it made. We all ran away, but now I was in the front! I could hardly see because my glasses had steamed up and I suddenly I had the thought, that we all might run straight into another one coming along the tunnel, so we regrouped and slowly retreated back to camp.



The rhino we came across whilst walking.

It was an amazing trip. It wasn't easy and was by no means a holiday. We had full on long days. We saw some incredible places and met lovely friendly people, who often possessed very little. It taught us a great deal about the World and how fortunate we are to be born into a relatively wealthy western society. We made some lifelong friends, many of whom we have seen since.



Our last group breakfast, Chitwan National Park, Nepal
with Dave Walkley our driver for the second part of the trip.



Last group meal at the Katmandhu Guest House at the end of the trip.
Having drunk a little too much dark rum and coke!

Thanks EO for the experience.