

AIMING HIGH

Overland to the Himalayas 1971

By

Dr John Winter

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Acknowledgement and thanks

All the photographic illustrations which are used in this book were taken by the author and other members of the Indrasan West Ridge Expedition 1971.

There is no information available to identify for certain which member of the team took each individual image. We were all using Olympus cameras to make a photographic record of the climb using Kodachrome film.

On our return to the UK the Kodachrome films were sent to a laboratory for development. Copies of the photographs, in the form of 35mm slides, were given to all the team members for their personal use in lectures and other activities.

The author has used a number of photographs which he took himself. In other cases the content of the image has made it possible to identify the team member who took a particular photograph. Where accreditation has been possible, the team member's initials have been added to the caption. All images without such initials should be regarded as being accredited to the team.

Should any team member consider that a particular photograph should be given individual accreditation to him in any future editions of this book I would be very pleased to look into adding the appropriate accreditation.

My sincere and grateful thanks are due to all the members of the team who took these photographs. Back in 1971, in the days before digital photography, producing such memorable images was not easy.

FOREWORD

In 1971, forty three years ago, I was fortunate enough to get the opportunity to travel by road along the 'Hippie Trail' from England, through Europe, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to India.

My companions and I were driving a lorry loaded, not with hallucinogenic drugs, but instead with a ton and a half of mountaineering equipment. We were heading for the Kulu Valley in the western part of the Himalayas and a mountain called Indrasan, known locally as The Throne of the Thunder God.

I kept a diary and, in 1972, after returning to England and resuming my career as a doctor, I wrote an account of my experiences.

The manuscript lay, unread and unpublished, upon a bookshelf in a spare bedroom until some American friends, encouraged by my wife, Susan, picked it up and read it. Their enthusiastic comments led me to read through it again for the first time since 1972. I have now reviewed and edited the manuscript, adding some of today's perspectives.

A great deal has changed since 1971. The overland journey through Iran and Afghanistan would now be very difficult, if not impossible. Mobile phones and satellite television have transformed communications and made our planet a much smaller place. In 1971 we spent many weeks out of touch with the outside world. Today it is possible to make a telephone call from the summit of Everest, and television pictures can be transmitted to and from almost anywhere on the globe.

Forty three years on, this is a historical, rather than a contemporary, document. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed preparing it for publication.

John Winter

Ormskirk, Liverpool

August 2014

To Susan, who kept telling me that I should write.

And to Jim and Karen, who persuaded me that she might be correct.

“To the south-east we had a majestic view of the almost unclimbable peak, Indrasan (6221 metres/20,410 ft). Alongside Indrasan, the flatter, snow-capped summit of Deo Tibba (6001 metres/ 19,687 ft) could also be seen.

And yes, we did not even think about going to that avalanche, rock-fall and landslide prone area. There would be a number of hidden crevasses. Climbing Indrasan is tougher than Everest.”

Quotation by the leader of an Indian Himalayan Association expedition to the region in 1994.

Glossary of Mountaineering Terms

Abseil – to descend a steep or vertical slope using a rope to control the descent

Arete – a sharp, steep ridge on a mountain

Ascender – a friction device which is used to ascend a fixed rope and reduce the risk of falling; also known as a Jumar which was one of the first designs

Belay – an attachment point, using a peg, a chock or a screw, on a rock or snow/ice face to reduce the danger of a fall

Bergschrund – a large crevasse between the upper part of a glacier and an ice cliff

Bouldering – climbing practice on large boulders at ground level

Buttress – a bulky, usually flat-surfaced outcrop forming a major part of a rock face

Carabiner (or ‘crab’) – a device for attaching a rope to a belay

Chock – a small metal block which can be jammed into a crack or crevice in a rock face to provide a belay point

Cornice – an overhanging ledge of snow, usually on a mountain ridge

Couloir – a steep gully, usually filled with snow and/or ice

Crampon – a spiked device which can be strapped onto the sole of a climbing boot to provide additional grip on hard-packed snow or ice slopes

Elvis legs – an uncontrollable shaking of the knees caused by fatigue, often worsened by panic

Etrier – a webbing loop which can be attached to a fixed rope and used by a climber as a ‘step’ in which he can place his boot and take his weight

Fixed rope – a rope which is attached to a section of a climb and left in position

Ice axe – a metal axe with a flattened end for cutting steps in snow slopes and a sharp point for digging into ice

Snow screw – a long metal screw, usually tubular, which can be used to provide a belay point in firm, packed snow

Mantel-shelf – a climbing manoeuvre which can be used to get up onto a flat ledge or shelf by reaching up and then pushing down with the arms on the flat surface of the ledge

Neve – crumbly, granular ice formed by repeated freeze-thaw cycles

Peg – a metal device which can be hammered into a crack in a rock face, or into an ice surface, to provide a secure belay point

Pitch – approximately one rope's length, or the distance between two belay points on a climb – i.e. about 150 feet.

Scree – a slope surfaced with small, loose rocks, often found at the base of a rock face or cliff

Snow anchor – a triangular, metal device which digs into a firm, snow surface to provide an anchoring point for a rope at the top of a climb

Step cutting – using an ice axe to cut deep steps for safety on a steep, snow slope

Step kicking - using climbing boots, usually with crampons attached, to kick shallow steps into a steep, snow slope

Technical climbing – climbing steep rock faces using ropes and belays – as opposed to scrambling up less steep slopes without using ropes or belays for safety and protection

Top rope – a rope which is attached to the highest point of a climb to provide additional safety

Traverse – a horizontal pitch across a rock or snow/ice face

One

DOCTOR ON A MOUNTAIN

Saturday 8th May 1971. We all looked on as the grim-faced customs officer at the road border between Pakistan and India counted rupee notes and added them to the growing number which already sat on the metal desk in front of him.

“Two thousand one hundred rupees,” he announced, as the last note was added to the pile. “You are aware that smuggling rupees into India is a serious offence? The penalties are severe.”

The two couples who had been ahead of us in the queue of vehicles, and whose camper van had just been very efficiently searched, looked frightened and pale despite the tans they had acquired during their long overland journey from Europe. They were from London, and we had spoken to them earlier while we were waiting in the long line of vehicles for the customs check. We had all watched as some of the large, commercial vehicles were nodded through without a search; but other, smaller wagons and vans were carefully searched.

It was obvious to anyone that the four Londoners were very nervous. They had told us that they had visited a money-changer in Kabul, where rupees could be purchased at a rate that was several times better than the official exchange rate. The notes were hidden in an envelope which was taped underneath the spare wheel and, as we watched, it was found. Successfully smuggling such illicitly obtained rupees into India greatly reduced the cost of a stay in the country in sterling or dollar terms, but the authorities were well aware of the temptations which the currency dealers in Afghanistan offered to impecunious, overland travellers. At the Indian border, the searches and investigations of people who had passed through Kabul were usually very thorough.

“You will come with me please. One of my officers will take your vehicle.”

A metal door closed behind them as the four, rather unhappy and dishevelled travellers disappeared from our view into a small, brick-built building. I thought I heard a couple of bolts slide into place after the door had closed but my imagination, heightened by the slight

apprehension that I was feeling, may have been playing tricks with me. An officer in military uniform climbed into the camper van and drove it away.

It was twenty-three days, and almost six thousand miles, since we had left England. We were driving to the Himalayas for an attempt upon the unclimbed west ridge of a peak known as Indrasan. This was the last border between us and our destination.

We all stood alongside the lorry and trailer which had safely transported us, and our vast collection of food and equipment, across Europe and part of Asia. In an effort to create a good impression we had changed into clean white shirts and smart trousers a few miles short of the border and all our paperwork was tidily collected in a small leather attaché case. As far as we were aware everything was in order. We had already passed through ten international borders without any serious problems, and we had stopped at Lahore, in Pakistan, to pick up the permits we would need to cross into India; but the taxes and regulations which covered the importation into India of foodstuffs, and other items deemed to be of commercial value, were so complex that we felt certain that we would be in breach of one or more of the many rules if our lorry was searched. Our worries were compounded by the fact that relations between India and Pakistan were at breaking point and war could break out at any time. Most of the land border crossings between the two countries had recently been closed, and we could sense that the heavily armed, army officers who were stationed at the one or two crossing points that were still open, such as this one at Ferozepore, were twitchy and tense.

Apart from a number of rifle-carrying troops, who were stationed alongside the barrier which marked the route into India, the area was now deserted. The heat was sweltering, and our smart attire was in danger of losing some of its positive impact as our shirts gradually became soaked with sweat. Along with some of the fine dust which swirled around the holding compound, they started to cling to our perspiring skin.

After about half an hour the metal door opened again and a large, luxuriantly moustached and red-turbaned Sikh appeared, beckoning us to move up to the desk as he walked towards us.

“Your papers please.”

The attaché case was handed to him and he unzipped it slowly before removing all the contents.

“While I look through these papers, you will please each fill out two forms for entry into India. All questions must be answered.”

He lifted his head and looked each of us in the eye.

“In full, please.”

In the official papers, which were about to be carefully studied, we had identified the contents of the lorry and trailer as being food and trekking equipment, for personal use only; and the purpose of our visit to India was stated as being to undertake a long, recreational trek in the Kulu Valley and surrounding hills. This was true, although we had deliberately failed to make any mention of Indrasan. The west ridge ran very close to the Inner Line, a restricted military zone in the mountains between India and China, and we did not want to run the risk of arousing suspicion in what was a tense military situation.

The Sikh officer eased himself gently into a wooden chair, with arms, which was behind the desk. He shuffled our papers around for about ten minutes, belching loudly every few moments as he did so. Then suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, as he was reading through our completed entry forms his face broke into a smile.

“Your papers indicate that you have driven here from Liverpool. That is right?”

We nodded.

“My brother has been to Liverpool,” he continued, between smiles and belches. He clearly wanted us to appreciate that he was a cultured man who had knowledge of the wider world outside Ferozepore. “He liked Liverpool very much. The river and the buildings. Very grand. Like Delhi.”

We suddenly realised that, sent to us like manna from heaven, we might have found a friend. And even better, he was a friend who appeared to be in a position of some authority. We enthusiastically agreed that Liverpool was indeed a very fine city. And Delhi too, even though none of us had ever been there. All was now smiles.

Our new friend studied each of our passports before placing them upon his desk.

“You are the doctor?” he asked, addressing me. The information had obviously come from my passport. He belched again, and raised his hand. “I must apologise. My digestion is very bad.”

He then gathered the papers and passports together and arranged them into a neat pile, before placing them carefully back inside the attaché case and zipping it up.

“Everything is in order.” He nodded his head several times before handing the case back to us. “You may go through. We do not need to search your lorry.”

He stood up and waved at the guards, who immediately lifted the barrier.

We all thanked him profusely.

“Give him something for his wind.” Tony, the leader of our expedition, whispered urgently into my ear.

As the others took their places in the lorry I presented our friend with a couple of packets of Alka-Seltzers from the medical kit.

“To help with your indigestion,” I explained. He placed his hands together, as if in prayer, and bowed his head slowly and gracefully. The small gift had been accepted.

I swiftly joined the others and we drove off, giving our friend a cheery wave as we passed through the barrier. As soon as we were clear it closed behind us, and we gave grateful thanks for our safe passage. We had arrived in India.

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The long journey to India had first started nine months earlier, in September 1970, when I had received, in the post, a small advertisement for inclusion in a local medical magazine on Merseyside which I edited. Sent in by a person called Tony Johnson, it asked for applications for the position of medical officer on a planned Himalayan climbing expedition.

Having qualified as a doctor in 1969, I had just finished work at one of Liverpool’s teaching hospitals. I was between jobs, and uncertain about exactly what I wanted to do next. The medical magazine was a small, part-time project which interested me, but I could not see it leading anywhere. I was spending my time doing a few part-time GP locums, which paid quite well, while I considered the future.

As I looked at the advertisement my imagination was fired. The Himalayas. Towering peaks. Incredible beauty. The drama of man against the elements. I had to admit to myself that I was tempted by the prospect. The only problem was that I had never as much as attempted the easy walk to the top of Snowden, at 3,560 feet the highest peak in England and Wales, let alone done any real climbing.

I began to prepare the advertisement for the printers but, try as I might, I could not drive the tantalising images that it provoked out of my mind. The whole idea of going on a Himalayan expedition would have been laughable, had it not been so obviously suicidal; but it would not be dismissed. I sat at my desk trying to decide what to do.

In desperation I tossed a coin into the air. If it came down heads, I would apply. What difference would it make anyway? They would certainly turn me down, and that would be that.

Thus it was that the following weekend I was sitting reading a photocopied brochure that had arrived through the post from the ‘Indrasan West Ridge Expedition 1971’. Accompanying it was a letter inviting me to get in touch if I was still interested after I had read the material they had sent.

On the front page was the proposed itinerary.

INDRASAN WEST RIDGE EXPEDITION - 1971

15th April Depart England. Travel overland with all equipment.

5th May E.T.A. West Pakistan/India border.

9th May E.T.A. Kulu Valley. Manali.

10th May Valley Base Camp outside Manali. Arrange hire of high altitude porters and coolie gang.

11th May Members of the expedition have a week to recover from overland travel and make acclimatisation and training climbs up to 12,000 feet.

19th May Start walk-in to Base Camp.

23rd May E.T.A. Base Camp in the region of Seri at 12,500 feet.

I became increasingly fascinated as I read on.

OVERLAND TO INDIA

We will travel overland to India as it will be cheaper and more interesting than going by sea. As we are carrying most of our food and equipment with us we are hoping to avoid usual shipping difficulties.

We shall leave England in April 1971 in a two ton lorry which will be needed to carry the seven expedition members plus the vast amount of equipment. The route will be through Europe to central Turkey, via Istanbul and Ankara. From there we will pass through spectacular mountain scenery and over 9,000 foot passes to the plains of Armenia and south of Mount Ararat, legendary resting place of The Ark. The next stage is desert, through Iran and into Afghanistan with its ancient capital of Kabul. On to the Khyber Pass and the old North-West Frontier. The names now ring of Kipling; Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Amritsar and Mandi. From Mandi, negotiation of a road cut out of the very rock face of a precipitous gorge will lead us into the Kulu Valley, where we will drive along the banks of the Beas River, passing Nagar, an ancient settlement from which the whole valley was once ruled. The distance from there to Manali is about twelve miles.

INDRASAN 20,410 FEET – THRONE OF THE THUNDER GOD

The mountain has so far received one brief skirmish and two serious assaults, but attempts on Deo Tibba, the Peak of the Gods at 19,687 feet, which forms the other side of the glacier col from Indrasan, have been numerous.

The first attempt to climb Deo Tibba was made in 1912 by Lt. Col. Bruce, followed in 1939 by a Lt. Roberts. In 1945 three Italian prisoners-of-war ascended as far as 18,000 feet but were foiled by the long approach. Further attempts were made in 1950 and 1952, the latter attempt, led by J. V. De Graaff, at last achieving the first successful ascent of the mountain.

The first tentative probe towards Indrasan was in 1958 when two members of an expedition, Bob Pettigrew and Basil Poff, reached the upper snow fields of the Malana Glacier, from which rises the summit cone of Indrasan. But this was a mere skirmish, too small scale to have any real hope of success.

The first serious assault was in 1961 and was made by the Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition, again with Bob Pettigrew as leader. This was a highly organised party which had other objectives, including the reconnaissance of peaks such as Ali Ratni Tibba and mapping the Kulu and Malana area. The expedition was based at the head of the Malana Nullah and began to seek a way onto the glacier. The plan was to put a camp on each of the three shelves of hard-packed snow which formed the approach route to Indrasan. Hopefully they would then be within striking distance of the summit.

On July 1st, two members of the team set off towards the west ridge of Indrasan, en route to the summit, but were forced to return, having reached no further than the crest of the ridge where the climbing was severe. They had found themselves switch-backing over numerous steep rock pinnacles, and they were exhausted.

The next day they repeated the attempt but once again, despite a swifter pace than on the previous day, they had to retreat, having halted at a point on the north face less than two thirds of the way along the ridge. Dennis Gray, in his book 'Rope Boy', explains that they had grossly underestimated the length and difficulty of the ridge in hoping that it would fall to a single Alpine-style assault. At the same time the two climbers felt that 'the climbing was of such difficulty that we could not envisage our Ladhaki porters, or even ourselves, carrying loads along it for additional camps or bivouacs.'

The second serious assault, and the one that reached the summit, was in the post-monsoon season in October 1962. A Japanese team from Kyoto University approached the mountain to the east of the route used by the British team. They regarded the west ridge as being too difficult to climb but, having established a camp at 18,045 feet, two members of the expedition, Y. Miyaki and K. Tomita, reached the summit by way of a snow field on the south-west face. The price they paid for their success was high. Oblivious to the time they had climbed on into the very late afternoon and nightfall forced them to bivouac near the summit with no tents or sleeping bags to protect them from the icy cold. In the sub-zero temperatures both sustained severe frostbite, losing fingers and toes, but somehow they managed to reach their camp again next day.

The impressive West Ridge of Indrasan is still unclimbed. This expedition hopes to make the first ascent by this route. Extreme difficulty is anticipated.

The members of the expedition will be:

Tony Johnson – Leader

Main Climbers - Geoff Arkless, John Brazinton, Roger Brook, Bryan Pooley and Geoff Taberner

The brochure went on to outline the assault plan which had been worked out for the ridge, and gave further details about the area of the Himalayas in which Indrasan is situated, but I did not need to read any more. I had made up my mind. If I could persuade them to take me as their medical officer, I would go.

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My car came to a halt outside a magnificent, but now rather faded, Georgian mansion, just to the south of Liverpool city centre. It was one of a terrace of similar houses, built in the middle of the nineteenth century when the merchants of the city had grown wealthy on the profits of trade with America and the British Empire. Now too large for single families, they had all been divided into flats for students and other temporary residents.

I rang the top bell, one of six that nestled beside a great stone pillar that marked the left hand side of the entrance to the building. After a brief interval the door opened to reveal a dark-haired, tousled and slightly-built person with glasses.

“Tony Johnson?” I enquired. He was not anything like the intrepid mountaineer that I had imagined.

“Yes,” he replied, smiling and shaking my hand. “It’s very good to meet you. You must be Doctor John Winter. We’re expecting you. Come on in. We’re upstairs.”

We climbed the stairs to a large room with a high ceiling. It had a comfortable and well lived in feel about it. In the middle of the room was a table, piled high with letters, brochures, files, folders and newspaper cuttings, plus an assortment of writing implements and rubber stamps. All the necessary paraphernalia of an expedition in the advanced stages of planning and organisation.

To the right of this disorganised mound of paper, on a couple of chairs and a settee, sat two men, and a young woman who was introduced to me as Laura, Tony’s wife.

The two men stood up and shook me by the hand.

“Hello, I’m John Brazinton. Good to meet you. And this is Roger Brook.”

John Brazinton was not tall, but he was obviously very strong in his arms and shoulders: a typical rock climber. He wore a tie-dyed tee shirt and a pair of purple Levis. Roger Brook was taller. He was quite slim, like myself, but he boasted a significantly more generous allowance of muscle than I could muster.

“Roger came up from Shrewsbury last night,” said Tony. “We’re just waiting for Geoff Tabbner. He’s driving from Coventry this morning. He should be here soon I think. Fancy a coffee while we’re waiting?”

Once the coffee was made we sat down to chat and get to know each other. I soon felt that I would have no problem getting on with the three who were present.

The sound of a bell in the hall downstairs announced Geoff Tabbner’s arrival. Tony went down to open the outside door and, a few moments later, a figure who was much more like the mountaineer of folk-lore joined us in the room. Of medium build and bearded, with a ready smile and a tanned complexion, he wore a pair of faded denim jeans and a heavy tartan climbing shirt. Under his right arm was a bulky document case which he unzipped as he sat down. We were quickly introduced, and the meeting began. Apparently the other two members of the team were not expected.

Things had moved very fast in the three weeks since I had received the advertisement. After reading the brochure I had contacted Tony and explained my situation. He had seemed undismayed by my total lack of experience and confident that, if I wanted to join them, I could pick up some basic mountaineering skills in Scotland before we were due to leave for the Himalayas. I was rather less sure but, having convinced myself that he was the expert, I had agreed to come along to the meeting at which I now found myself.

Tony opened the proceedings by going through the finances. Everyone seemed satisfied, although there were some doubts expressed about the rather large sum which was anticipated under the heading of ‘*Newspaper Support*’. Even without this, however, the expedition seemed to be solvent. Just.

Geoff’s turn next, and I learnt that the expedition lorry had not yet been purchased. He had, however, arranged to attend an auction of ex-military vehicles the following week and he was hoping to strike lucky there. It was agreed that he should be given a free hand to choose something suitable, as well as a blank cheque drawn on the expedition account.

‘*Food and Supplies*’ was John Brazinton’s area of responsibility. His was a long and tortuous tale of discounts and percentages on carabiners, etriers, cagoules, ascendeurs, and a hundred and one other items of equipment which meant little or nothing to me. All seemed to be on

track and within budget, however, and it was now just up to the suppliers to meet their promises.

“Right,” said Tony, “now for medical supplies. That’ll be your department John. Perhaps, since we’ve got two Johns, you’d better be ‘Doc’ from now on.”

They seemed to assume I was going. And I had decided. I was.

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For several weeks it was back to the everyday routine of medical work. I sought as many GP locums as I could find in an effort to build up some funds, and every evening was spent typing letters to pharmaceutical companies, requesting their support and assistance. Medical supplies are an expensive item on any budget. We would be a very long way from the services of hospitals or clinics and I had to try to beg or borrow sufficient drugs and equipment to cover the numerous medical problems and accidents that could arise in such an isolated situation. In return for any help which was given, I was more than happy to offer my services as a lecturer, on my return to England, at one or more of the medical meetings which pharmaceutical representatives arrange in order to liaise with the profession. Their feeling was that an illustrated lecture on mountain climbing, especially if given by a medically-qualified novice who had never previously been near a mountain, would certainly create plenty of interest. Several manufacturers therefore felt able to be very generous with donations and loans of the drug supplies and medical equipment which I would need to take with me to Indrasan.

Everything was going well when, quite suddenly, our plans were completely thrown off course by a postal strike. There were no e-mails in those days and, while we did what we could on the telephone and by making personal visits to prospective sponsors, mostly we just had to wait. And wait. It was six weeks before the strike ended, by which time there were just four weeks left before our planned departure date. If we worked hard, we would have just about enough time to complete our plans. Had the strike lasted even a few days longer it would almost certainly have spelt the end of the expedition. Such an outcome would have been ironic indeed for Tony Johnson; for he was an employee of the post office.

Two

SOME ROCK AND SNOW TRAINING

During the meeting in Tony's flat, John Brazinton had offered to take me to some sandstone cliffs, near Frodsham in Cheshire, to get some experience of rock climbing. So, on the following Saturday morning, clad as advised in a pair of worn-out cords and a couple of old pullovers which I did not mind ruining, I met John and one of his climbing pals outside his flat.

"I'm Pete." John's friend introduced himself as we walked towards his old Ford van. He was wearing a dark navy, roll top sweater which was well spattered with paint, and a pair of dirt-encrusted jeans that even a tramp might have discarded. The oldest of clothes were clearly the approved kit for rock climbing.

Pete slipped the van noisily into gear and we headed towards a dual carriageway which ran south out of Liverpool and which would take us over the Runcorn Bridge to Frodsham. With the accelerator pressed hard to the floor the van, which was at least as old and decrepit as Pete's trousers, trundled along at a steady sixty miles per hour, while our chauffeur seemed unconcerned by the periodic bangs and creaks that emanated from the chassis. He reassured us that he had wound an extra piece of chicken wire around the silencer before leaving the flat, so that item of equipment at least would not part company from our remarkable vehicle.

As we passed through Runcorn our driver suggested a brief detour to an old quarry.

"There are some great routes there. A hundred feet some of them are; and very exposed. It'd be fun."

I had done a little reading since agreeing to join the climbing fraternity and I had learnt that 'exposed', in climbing parlance, referred to the ability to see, from a perch on a rock face or mountain, the terrain far below onto which a climber might, in the event of a false move, be unceremoniously and painfully precipitated.

"I don't think so," said John after a moment's thought. "The holds there tend to be a bit flaky and loose, particularly towards the top. I think Frodsham'll be better for the Doc's first outing."

I nodded in full agreement and muttered a short prayer of thanks for his wisdom.

We reached Frodsham just as it started to rain. Not to be deterred, we parked the van and headed along a dirt track which led us uphill towards our objective for the day. The rain eased slightly as we were walking and I was able to see some red, sandstone cliffs through the trees and bushes which lined the track we were following. Although they were still a hundred feet or so above us, the cliffs looked encouragingly small.

We had been walking for about fifteen minutes when we came to a halt at the bottom of an overhanging sandstone bluff. A small group of girls, whose tee shirts announced that they were from a local youth club, were already swarming over a rock face to our right, and making it look very easy.

"If they can do it...." I thought to myself.

My two companions lowered their rucksacks and began to take out ropes and webbed safety harnesses. It all looked reassuringly competent and professional. Then, without any preamble, John reached up for a tiny hold above his head and pulled himself up the overhang using just his arms. As I watched, he lifted his legs and found a grip for his feet which were by then almost level with his shoulders. A couple more gymnastic contortions, during which the engorged veins on his arms betrayed the strength he was employing, and he was standing at the top, some thirty feet above me. His slightly taller friend then proceeded, perhaps a little less proficiently, to clamber up the same route.

"Throw us the rope, Doc, and we'll fix it at the top and guide you up."

I did as requested, and the two figures disappeared from view. A couple of minutes later they reappeared and the two ends of the rope snaked their way down the rock face, followed by the climbers. A couple of firm tugs reassured them that the rope was securely fixed.

"Okay Doc," said John. "The idea is that we keep that top rope tight and it stops you falling too far if you come off."

That sounded to me like a very sensible plan.

'*With a top rope,*' I had read somewhere, '*rock climbing is a very safe sport.*'

"Can you tie a bowline?"

The question from John was addressed to me.

My knowledge of knots was a little rusty but, with some assistance, I managed to tie the rope securely to the webbing belt and around my waist, using the recommended bowline. We then moved a few feet to the left of the overhang.

“You can do this chimney,” announced John, consulting his Guide to the Buttresses of Frodsham and Helsby. “It’s graded a 5A, but you should be fine. We’ll make sure you don’t fall off.”

The first few moves were obvious. Good solid hand-holds, and ledges which supported even my size eleven feet as I ascended. The rope to which I was attached was kept reassuringly taut by John, and I felt I was doing quite well. Then I reached the chimney proper and came to an abrupt halt. It was, quite literally, a square chimney with one side missing. There was not a hand-hold or crack to be seen.

“You’ll have to bridge it,” called John. “Put your feet on the rock to your left and then lean out to get your back against the right hand wall of the chimney. Then you should be able to work your way upwards. Don’t worry. If you slip you’ll just be dangling on the rope. There’s no danger of falling.”

Very slowly I bridged the chimney as recommended.

“That’s good.”

The shout came from below me. It did not feel good but as I inched my way slowly upwards I began to understand exactly what I was supposed to be doing. Gradually it became easier, and I reached the top with a definite sense of satisfaction as well as relief. I had completed my first route. Not spectacular, and certainly not graceful. But definitely a first.

My companions followed me up the chimney without the benefit of a top rope. John made it look ridiculously easy, but Pete seemed to struggle a little on the middle section. Perhaps things were not completely hopeless.

The three of us stood at the top. The rain had cleared and we had a magnificent view, over the rooftops of Frodsham to the Mersey Estuary, and beyond to the Wirral and Deeside. I was gazing out, identifying familiar landmarks, when John interrupted my reverie.

“Right. Now we’ll abseil down. We’ll go first to show you how it’s done, Doc. You wait here until we come back up again. I need to make sure you don’t damage yourself.”

With that he passed a doubled rope between his legs and over his right shoulder, before stepping backwards over the edge of the cliff. Pete followed as I watched, half-expecting disaster at any minute. If I expected disaster, it never materialised. Within a couple of minutes both John and Pete were back at the top.

“Your turn, Doc.”

John showed me how to wind the rope around myself and, having checked carefully that it would not emasculate me, I stepped gingerly backwards towards the precipice.

“Get your feet firmly on the edge and then lean back slowly on the rope until you’re almost horizontal. Then all you have to do is just walk down the cliff face, paying the rope out as you go. We’ll be doing plenty of abseiling in the Himalayas, so it’ll be useful if you can get the hang of it before we leave.”

Two small steps and I was almost horizontal. It felt fine until, without thinking, I looked down. The Frodsham cliffs are no more than forty feet high but below them the hillside drops away quite sharply. The sensation at the top of the cliff was of being suspended hundreds of feet above the surrounding flat countryside. Out of the corner of my eye I could see a new motorway, winding like a pale grey ribbon across the patchwork of green and brown fields.

Then, even as I felt myself starting to panic, I took another step backwards and I was on my way down. To my surprise, once I was over the lip and committed to the descent, the frightening sense of exposure completely disappeared and I found I was really enjoying it. I walked my way down to the bottom of the cliff, feeling as secure as a fly on a wall, and immediately wanted to repeat the experience. The climbing drug was taking a hold upon me.

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The third week in March saw the end of the postal strike and requests from some of our sponsors for pictures of the whole team. The logical place to get together was North Wales, in Snowdonia, where I would be able to meet the other two members of the expedition. Bryan Pooley was a New Zealander, who had been in England and Wales for the past few months, and Geoff Arkless, the oldest member of the team, was a professional mountain guide.

We gathered at Geoff’s house in Deiniolen, a small Welsh village which nestles at the foot of a peak known as Elidir Fawr, a few miles to the north-west of Snowdon. Geoff’s wife, Breda, had been a member of the women’s expedition to the Kashmir Himalayas during the previous climbing season, and our meeting dragged on into the early hours of the morning as every aspect of the plans we had made was discussed in the light of her valuable experience. The only member of our team with any previous Himalayan experience was Bryan Pooley, and he had been no higher than 19,000 feet.

Geoff Tabbner reported that we now had our transport, a sturdy Austin K9 lorry, an ex-military vehicle with a mere three thousand miles on the clock. Combined with a heavy duty

military trailer, which he had also acquired, it should serve our purpose well and hopefully carry us all the way to India.

Everything was gradually falling into place. Everything, that is, except the food supplies. A number of sponsors in the food industry had been very generous in donating provisions, but there were some worrying gaps in both quantity and quality. Some of our dwindling financial resources would have to be allocated to filling the gaps. John Brazinton would work out what was needed and organise the necessary purchases.

This final item settled we retired wearily to our sleeping bags, each one of us hoping that nothing had been forgotten. There would be no time to make good any omissions after this weekend.

The next morning we had a brief photography session, with an appropriately mountainous and snowy background for the benefit of our sponsors, after which Geoff Arkless and I left to drive up to Scotland. The second part of my crash course in climbing was about to begin, this time as a member of the Advanced Snow Climbing Course which Geoff and a colleague ran in Glencoe each winter. I would have seven days to learn as much as I possibly could about survival in the high mountains.

It was a long drive and, after the late night we had experienced at Geoff's house, we were both very tired as we humped our kit into the Glencoe Bunkhouse at ten o'clock that evening. The other course members had already retired to bed and, after a quick drink of hot chocolate, we followed suit.

I slept well and felt surprisingly fresh as I set off with the other five members of the course for what Richard Stanley, Geoff's colleague, described as a brisk walk to loosen up our limbs. It was a beautiful morning and we drove to the eastern end of the Pass of Glencoe in the climbing school's Bedford van. The River Coe bubbled and sparkled alongside us as we headed towards Rannoch Moor with three mighty peaks, the sisters of Glencoe, towering high above us on our right. We were making for Meall a Bhuiridh where, according to Richard, some useful snow slopes were to be found, near the Glencoe Ski Area.

The appearance of a chair lift, with its steel pylons glinting in the sun as they climbed towards a distant ridge, revealed that we were nearing our destination. Sure enough, a few minutes later, we turned off the smooth tarmac road onto a cinder track which took us to the foot of the chair lift. A brightly-clad skier was making a rapid and effortless ascent of the peak in one of the chairs.

Richard must have read my thoughts for, as we got out of the van, he pointed towards a grass and heather-covered slope to the right of the pylons. "Ignore that ski-lift. We're walking up."

Before we set off up the slope Richard supplied me with an ice axe, all the others already having their own. As it was not immediately needed, I clipped it safely to my belt.

There was no snow on the lower slopes and we were able to make quite quick time up the damp, peaty hillside. Despite the fact that I regarded myself as being quite fit I was struggling to keep up with the pace which Richard was setting. The sun was hot and my shirt was soon wet with perspiration. My rests were just starting to become embarrassingly frequent when the slope began to flatten out and a small plateau appeared ahead of us. Steep, snow-covered slopes rose from the plateau on three sides.

Richard gathered us around him.

“Okay. Today I want you all to get some practice at using your ice-axe to stop yourselves from sliding out of control down a snow slope.”

The snow was firm and, Richard having demonstrated how it was done, we spent much of the day climbing up the various steep slopes, kicking steps with our boots as we went, before throwing ourselves off the top and trying to arrest our fall by digging our ice axes into the snow. Achieving a rapid and effective stop was not as easy as it looked but I worked hard to master the technique, being well aware that, if it ever came to the real thing on a high mountain, it would be a very useful trick to have up my sleeve. By mid-afternoon I was satisfied that I was fully proficient on even the steepest of slopes and it was time to be heading back down.

The sun was setting behind the mountains in the west as we reached the van. We had not seen a cloud all day. The sky was a glorious blue and I was greatly looking forward to my next excursion into the mountains, being blissfully unaware of how relatively uncommon such perfect days are in Glencoe.

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The rain came at us in sheets, driven by a blustery wind from the bleak flatness of Rannoch Moor, as we made our way across the sodden, squelching surface of the valley below our objective for the day, Stob Dearg. Rising to 3345 feet, this was the north-eastern summit of the Buachaille Etive Mor.

The choice for the day had lain between climbing the Buachaille and doing a bit of technical rock climbing on a group of cliffs known as The Etive Slabs. On Geoff’s advice I had joined the party to the Buachaille. The Slabs involved rock work of a type I was very unlikely to come across in the Himalayas.

The path we were following wound around the contours of a slope which led to the beginning of a route up the Buchaille known as Curved Ridge. The rain continued to lash down upon us as we reached some vertical cliffs which rose, almost sheer, for what seemed to be a couple of thousand feet. This was our route. The top three or four hundred feet were completely lost in thick grey clouds which clung to the cliffs and reached out over the whole of the valley. I could not see how anyone could contemplate climbing them in the prevailing conditions. The rocky walls, glistening wet in the all-pervading dampness and cold, seemed to breathe out a mysterious and frightening air which created an atmosphere that rejected our presence.

Richard had stopped.

“We’d better get together in the shelter of this boulder and chat about the climb for a few minutes, I think.”

The four of us huddled in the lee of the rock to shelter from the torrential rain, which by this time had penetrated right through my waterproof hood and cagoule. The conditions meant that maintaining some speed was important, to avoid getting cold. It was therefore decided that we would climb Alpine-style, roped together in pairs. I would be with Richard, who would lead. I still had my reservations about the whole idea but, precise and methodical in everything he did, I was confident that Richard would get me up the Buachaille safely if anyone could.

He explained the basics of Alpine-style climbing.

“As we climb, each of us must keep a close eye on the person they are roped to. If it looks as though your partner is getting into trouble, and in danger of coming off, you must get your rope around a spike of rock or a ledge; anything that will do as a belay. If you’re on a ridge, the best thing is to throw yourself off the other side to act as a counter-weight and stop your partner’s fall. You must be prepared all the time for an emergency. Both your lives could depend on it because if you don’t react quickly enough you’ll both come off together.”

I listened very carefully as he spoke, trying to commit every instruction to memory.

“Right. Let’s get roped up and make a start on it. I think the weather might improve later.”

The comfort that can be squeezed out of a 150 foot length of climbing rope is quite remarkable. I found myself climbing with almost total confidence, secure in the knowledge that, whatever I did, Richard would be very unlikely to make a mistake. Up and up we went, the climbing becoming progressively more difficult as we gained height. I avoided downward glances as much as possible but, on the occasions when it was unavoidable, the reassuring presence of the rope helped to preserve my peace of mind.

As we got higher, the moor beneath us slowly merged into the mist and rain, and finally disappeared from view altogether. The clouds swirled about us and, while I was quite glad that the giddy drop was hidden from sight, I was slightly sorry that the magnificent prospect

across Rannoch Moor to the east was also lost with it. It seemed a pity to expend so much effort and see nothing.

We were now in a light-grey world of our own, completely surrounded by the thick clouds and mist. Time lost its meaning, and I had no idea how high up we were, or remotely how long we had been climbing. I just continued to pull myself automatically upwards, following where Richard led and all the time watching him closely in case of any slip. On his advice I stopped to belay myself around a convenient rock as he tackled what looked like a particularly tough section, feeding the rope out to him slowly as he ascended.

“Okay, John. You can come up now.”

I knew that Richard would have found a secure belay on to the ledge which he had reached, and a couple of slips on the trickier bits did not concern me too much. A few moves, and I was able to heave myself up alongside him.

The ledge was wider than I had expected. Above it was a white slope, indistinct in the mist. The rain had turned to snow which was falling quite heavily and I realised that we must be near the top. Richard confirmed our position.

“Only a couple of hundred more feet to go now. We’ll stop here for a rest and some lunch.”

There was just the snow slope to negotiate and we would be on our way down. My exertions had completely banished all feelings of coldness and damp and I felt a little disappointed that the climb would so soon be over. I was enjoying myself.

The other pair of climbers, who had been following close behind, soon joined us on the ledge, which easily accommodated the four of us, and we feasted upon a traditional climbers’ lunch of Mars Bars and apples; the former for their concentrated energy and the latter because they are easily eaten and light. We ate quickly for, within ten minutes, the warmth which our climb had generated was beginning to dissipate, and I was starting to shiver. It was time to move on.

The snow slope cannot have been steeper than fifty degrees at any point, but the prospect of losing our footing and sliding back over the precipice which we had just ascended made us extremely careful. The visibility was deteriorating by the minute, and white-out conditions soon prevailed. Visibility was down to just a few feet and, when the slope flattened out and Richard announced that we were on the summit, we had to take his word for it.

We did not stop, but carried on, still roped together, along the ridge which runs the length of the Buchaille Etive Mor, from the peak of Stob Dearg at 3345 feet, which we had just climbed, to the other main peak, Stob na Broige, at 3120 feet. A short walk along the crest of the ridge then brought us to an easy-angled gully which would take us back down to the moor.

At the top of the gully we removed our ropes. I watched as the others tried to glissade down the slope, and then followed their example. A glissade is like skiing, but sliding on the soles of one's boots rather than on skis. When it works it is a breath-taking experience which is all too quickly over. More often than not, however, it ends up as an uncontrollable slide and roll in which the soles of the boots play little or no part. On my first attempt I managed to stay upright for about fifty feet before hitting some softer snow and ploughing to an undignified halt. Subsequent attempts were little better.

As we reached the bottom of the gully, and began our walk back across the moor to the van, the clouds broke up to reveal a watery, late afternoon sun.

"I said it would turn out fine," said Richard.

None of us could honestly disagree. It had been a challenging day, climbing in the foulest of weather, but now that it was over there was a feeling of no little achievement, and very great satisfaction.

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The rest of the course passed quickly and without incident. The weather, true to form, continued to be wet and stormy and, on two of the remaining days, conditions were so bad that any thought of venturing into the mountains was out of the question. I had to be content with sitting inside and talking to Geoff about various aspects of mountain safety and climbing while, outside the bunkhouse, the low clouds hid the surrounding crags from sight and rain pelted down upon the valley.

It was still wet when I finally left the bunkhouse to travel back to Liverpool. As the peaks of Glencoe disappeared behind me I still felt far from confident about my ability to cope with what lay ahead, but I consoled myself with two thoughts. I now felt completely at home with the equipment which I would be using. And, even more importantly, I felt I had developed a much better understanding of how to look after myself in the mountains.

The statistics at that time indicated that one climber in eight failed to return from the Himalayas. I just hoped that I had learnt enough to make my personal odds a little more favourable.

Three

OVERLAND TO INDIA

We left Liverpool in our fully loaded lorry and trailer on a damp and foggy Friday morning in mid-April. Despite a tendency for the brakes to over-heat slightly we reached Dover without incident and caught the midnight ferry to Ostend. The ferry docked at four in the morning and, having snatched some sleep during the channel crossing, we headed straight off towards Brussels and the border between Belgium and Germany. After a very long day we finally reached Cologne, where we stopped for the night.

Early the next morning, while making steady progress along a fast autobahn, we were pulled in by the German traffic police, lights flashing, and told that it was illegal for a heavy goods vehicle to tow a trailer on a Sunday. Politely, but very firmly, we were instructed to pull in at the next service station and wait until after midnight before resuming our journey.

Those of us who had been doing the driving were, by this time, not at all certain about the safety and effectiveness of the lorry's braking system so we decided to make use of the unscheduled stop to replace the master brake cylinder with a spare which we were carrying with us. The task kept us busy for much of the day, after which we drove the lorry round the service station a few times to test the new system. It seemed to be slightly better, but the brake pedal was still soft with a tendency to lift slightly from time to time. Things were clearly not completely right but we were reluctant to waste more time by doing further work on the system, so we decided to see how things went.

Immediately after midnight we were on our way again. We crossed the border into Austria without any further problems and, having made up some time by means of another day of non-stop driving, we felt able to stop overnight just south of Salzburg.

Our route next day took us through spectacular, alpine scenery towards Villach, along winding mountain roads. The heavily-laden lorry struggled on the steep, uphill gradients, which reached one in five on some sections, and all of us except the driver were forced to get out and walk alongside the lorry to lighten the load. This did not slow us down much, for the

lorry could not manage much more than walking pace on such hills, and the opportunity to stretch our legs amidst such beautiful scenery was no hardship. During our stop to work on the brake system Roger Brook had cobbled together some large, wooden wheel chocks for use in emergency and, as we walked along, four of us kept close to the labouring vehicle at all times, chocks in hand, ready to jam them behind the wheels should the engine stall and the lorry start to roll backwards down the hill.

Just short of Villach we reached the top of the final pass and commenced our descent, along equally windy and precipitous roads. On one particularly steep section, the lorry continued to creep slowly forwards despite the brakes being full on. The wooden chocks brought it to a halt but, fearful that the brakes might fail altogether, we stopped in the next lay-by to replace the rest of the braking system. Fitting new cylinders to all the wheels took the best part of twelve hours but under the circumstances we all felt that it was time well spent.

With a completely refurbished system, the brakes at last felt fine but even so, when we discovered that our planned route out of the Alps along a series of minor roads into Yugoslavia involved descending a one in three hill, we took a detour along a more forgiving major road which brought us down into Italy instead. This added several hours to our journey, but it ensured that we were able to leave the mountains behind us without further mishap.

Once we had crossed the border from Italy into Northern Yugoslavia a very modern motorway led us uneventfully across the flat plains, past Zagreb and onwards to Belgrade. As we motored further east the roads deteriorated, the smooth tarmac being replaced by old cobbles with numerous potholes. There were few private cars. The other vehicles on the road were mainly old agricultural wagons which trundled along very slowly from farm to farm, and huge trans-continental lorries which thundered past us at high speed en route to Tehran and the booming, oil-based economy of Iran.

So far, the various border checks had gone smoothly, but we were now approaching Bulgaria. We had been warned that the border guards there could be difficult, especially with vehicles that did not fit into their standard categories. Sure enough, after passing through the Yugoslavian exit checks, we were waved into a large compound behind the Bulgarian customs post.

"You will take all your luggage out and place it alongside your vehicle."

The fact that it would take us at least an hour to comply with this terse instruction was clearly immaterial to the uniformed guard. He had a machine gun in his hand, and he looked as though he would not need to think for very long before using it. In the early nineteen seventies the cold war was still a very real fact of life, and Bulgaria was a totalitarian, Leninist dictatorship. We had reached Winston Churchill's 'Iron Curtain'.

Without any argument we unlocked the lorry and trailer and began the long task of unloading our gear as the guard looked on, fingering his weapon. Just over an hour later, all our

equipment and possessions were laid out on the ground, exactly as requested. The armed guard, and two others who had joined him, then climbed up into the empty lorry and began to kick and bang against the metal sides of the vehicle, before repeating the process with the trailer.

"They're checking for hidden compartments," whispered Bryan, who had crossed this border before. "They'll make us open the cases next."

Just as he had predicted, as soon as they had satisfied themselves that there was nothing hidden on the lorry and trailer the guards selected half a dozen of the wooden crates and indicated that they should be emptied of their contents. Four of the selected cases contained food, and two contained climbing equipment. After the contents had been tipped out, the guards tore open a couple of bags of our precious, dehydrated stew before pouring the contents out onto the dusty ground. Dry, shrivelled pieces of meat, potato and vegetable lay in a small mound until, using the toe of his boot, the man with the machine gun spread it out.

"Expedition, ya?"

We nodded.

"Okay. Now this. Open."

He kicked his foot against one of the large drums which contained our medical supplies.

I stepped forward, holding my passport open at the page which indicated that I was a doctor.

"Doctor," I said, pointing at myself, and then at the drum. "Medicines. For sickness."

Before opening the drum, I wanted to try and indicate that the numerous packs of pills, which he would see as soon as the lid was removed, were not illicit drugs being smuggled into his country.

His foot kicked the drum again.

"Open."

I prised the lid off the drum and the officer put his hand inside. He pulled out several packs of penicillin tablets and studied them for a few moments before looking at me and shrugging his shoulders quizzically.

"Antibiotics." I answered his implied question. "Antibiotics for infections. I am a medical doctor."

I again pointed at myself and held up my passport, hoping that words such as doctor and antibiotic were fairly universal and widely understood.

Without any hint of a smile, or any indication at all that he had understood me, the packets were returned to the drum unopened.

"Okay. Close."

The three men then indicated that we could begin the task of reloading all our equipment into the lorry and trailer. One of them held out his right hand.

"All passports, please."

We handed our passports to the men who turned on their heels and walked off into a nearby building without another word. Two hours later, with our equipment repacked and with our passports stamped with the necessary entry permits, we were ready to move on, somewhat apprehensively, into Bulgaria.

A newly-constructed highway, flanked by huge banners every couple of miles which announced that the road was a generous gift from the people of Russia to their communist comrades, took us across a dry and barren landscape, past Sofia, and on to Plovdiv. Most of the buildings we passed were functional and drab, but the citizens of every small town were making elaborate preparations for the parades and celebrations which were due to take place on the first of May to commemorate the revolution. Despite their obvious poverty, the people were expected to put on a good show. Grey concrete blocks of flats were festooned with bright red banners, many carrying pictures of Lenin, with the obligatory hammer and sickle. Huge posters, alongside the road and on every traffic island, depicted happy and smiling workers; the men with shirt-sleeves rolled up to show sun-tanned, rippling muscles, and the women with peasant clothing and fresh, healthy faces. The totalitarian images of state-enforced happiness were utterly depressing. It was a chilling, real-life version of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

By the time we reached the outskirts of Plovdiv we were running low on fuel. Geoff Arkless, who had just taken over the driving from Bryan Pooley, made the mistake of entering a petrol station the wrong way. Within minutes the local police arrived, having been alerted to Geoff's misdemeanour by the garage proprietor who had appeared from his office as soon as the police car drew up. After a brief conversation between the policemen and the garage owner, accompanied by a lot of gesticulating and pointing in our direction, Geoff was led off, to the accompaniment of perhaps slightly unwise shouts from Bryan Pooley, who was relieved not to be the one in trouble.

"Send us a post-card and let us know what the weather's like in Siberia, Geoff."

As we watched, Geoff was pushed into the back seat of the police car. We were half-expecting him to be driven off, leaving our expedition one climber short, but after a few minutes he emerged again, looking a little shaken.

"They said they'll arrest me unless we pay a fine," he announced as he approached. "And no more wisecracks about Siberia, or we'll all end up in jail. One of them speaks quite good English."

Tony hastily paid the requested fine, which turned out to be the equivalent of about fifteen shillings, and we left the petrol station without filling up. The policemen had simply pocketed the cash, and it seemed highly unlikely that it would reach any official destination. We assumed that the garage proprietor would probably be getting a cut of the cash once we had driven on, and we were certainly not going to give him our business as well. We were carrying some spare fuel in jerry cans, and we would use them if we were in danger of running out.

As it turned out the next garage was only about five miles on, and we spent all the rest of our Bulgarian currency on fuel. The cashier, who was friendly and spoke almost perfect English, told us that if we had purchased some state petrol coupons at the border we could have saved ourselves twenty percent on the cost. It was not a huge sum of money but it was annoying that the border officials had chosen not to let us know about this arrangement. On our tight budget every penny counted, and this latest news convinced us that Bulgaria was not a place where we should hang about. We would get out of the country, and across the border into Turkey, as quickly as possible.

We reached the Turkish border late at night. It was almost deserted and, apart from the need to enter the details of the vehicle and trailer into our passports to prevent us selling it while we were in Turkey, there were hardly any formalities. We were through, and on our way to Istanbul, in less than fifteen minutes, the border officials obviously having decided that getting back to sleep was preferable to taking apart our lorry.

We drove on and reached the outskirts of Istanbul just as the sun started to rise. We were sorely in need of some sleep and a good shower, and Bryan knew of a camp site called Mocamp BP, about eight miles outside the city, with washing facilities and a self-service laundry. He had stayed there the previous year, and he was confident that it would be a good place to stop for forty eight hours of rest and recreation.

The first leg of our long overland journey was nearly over. Soon we would be leaving Europe and crossing the Bosphorus into Asia. It felt as though the real adventure was just about to begin.

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