

MOTORBIKE TRIP EUROPE-ASIA-AUSTRALIA.

AUGUST 1977 – DECEMBER 1978

By Frans van Schaik

With some minor contributions by Jan van Kruijsbergen

PRELUDE

Is it a feeling of dissatisfaction with the daily chores? A kind of unsettledness, or maybe restlessness? Lying on my back in a meadow on a summer's afternoon I can see the clouds drift over, slowly moving into the far distance to disappear behind the horizon

The far distance..... For me, there is magic in that expression. The unknown far distance. Of course, you can get on a plane and get off in an unknown place, far from home, but that is not what I mean!

It was in the autumn of 1973, near the end of a tedious and lengthy study, that these feelings began to crystallize into an idea. An idea that stood in stark contrast to my then dreary daily existence: reading and studying chemistry and physics books in a small attic room in Utrecht, The Netherlands, where the feelings of restlessness made me often feel desperate, looking longingly at the free gulls floating, seemingly without any attachments, over the canal. The seminal moment happened on October the 21st, 1973 in the so-called "Alley", a tiny little alleyway off the Jutfase weg in Utrecht, in the little house where Jan van Kruijsbergen lived.

I had known Jan for several years, since we both lived in rooms in the attic of the ill-famous landlady "Vrouw Nout", in a house on the Kanaalweg. Jan had moved to the "Alley" with his fiancée Maria. (By the way, the other reason the "Alley" was noteworthy was because it was home to a most ugly dog, which had become (in)famous as "The Pig".)

Anyway, on that night, over a glass of wine, we were discussing life and what to do with it, when an idea started to crystallize: in May 1977, when Jan would have finished his physics studies, we would go on a pushbike trip through Europe and Asia.

That night I went to bed with a feeling of great enthusiasm! We had a plan, and this was a dream that wasn't going to go up in smoke!

The idea of going by bicycle was mostly mine. The bicycle was my great friend: I covered large distances with it and I took all kinds of luggage "on board"! I didn't have a light bicycle then, but a real, heavy black Dutch "clunker".

In November 1973, after working many weeks at the "Centraal Boekhuis" in Culemborg, I bought the first version of a Travel Bike: a "Locomotief Sprinter". This was my first pushbike with a derailleur gear system. With this bicycle I would make my first trial journey in 1974,

In the meantime, the study was being completed in a frenzy. Studying 6 1/2 days per week was normal and on April 24, 1974 I completed my last exam.

As it happened, a little earlier my dream had received a severe blow: it seemed very likely that I would have to make the trip on my own. Jan had let me know that he couldn't go with me because of personal reasons.

Never mind. I had made my decision; I was determined to go. Alone and lonely maybe, but go I would!

PREPARATIONS (AND COMPLICATIONS)

September 1974: The first bicycle trip

This was to be the first practice for The Big Trip!

In the beginning the Gods were against me: pouring rain during the first leg of the trip from Woerden via Noorden to Utrecht. After only 4 km I stood resigned on the Van Teylingenweg in Kamerik, staring at the leaden skies, getting wetter and wetter. Next to me was my upturned bicycle, the luggage around it. With a lot of moaning and swearing I was trying to mend a punctured tyre. Every time I bent my head, water dripped from my forehead ruining the spot that I had just dried for the glue.

When I eventually reached Noorden I borrowed rain pants from Nico Leliveld, one of the workers in the rose nursery of my sister and brother in law. The trip became somehow more bearable and with fresh courage I went on to Utrecht, to my room at the Kanaalweg. "Vrouw Nout", the landlady, looked pityingly at my dripping figure and suggested that I should give up. Give up? Never! My drive was too great. After a long trip I arrived the next day in the evening in Nijmegen, where I enjoyed a good meal made by the mother of Maarten Tromp, a friend from the amateur rocket club.

The next day I went into the unknown: Germany.

Many images of the time in Germany are still with me, even after 5 years (I am writing this journal in 1979): The birches growing in the sandstone of the crags of Dorente on a misty morning in the Teutoburger forest, writing a letter in the town-square in Tecklenburg, the campsite in Kohlstadt where I met for the first time a real world-traveller, the 28-year-old Japanese Takafumi Ogasawara. He was there on a pushbike, borrowed from a friend in Dortmund, but in reality, he had already been travelling for four years on a unicycle.

At the time I had a hard time believing this; so he showed me his album full of Polaroid pictures. He was on some kind of crusade against the unlimited use of cars. His luggage was really minimal; everything had to fit in a small rucksack.

Now, after my own trip, I can't possibly imagine that I would make a trip with so little luggage. He filled his time mainly with talking, drinking beer and shooting with a catapult. Later that afternoon a German cyclist arrived on the campsite, back from a trip to Sweden. That evening we had an enthusiastic "meeting of minds" in the Bierstube at the campsite. Full of melancholy I watched them leave the next morning, each going their own way. Whereto I didn't know. There are so many farewells during an adventurous trip.

I continued on my way to Karlshafen via the famous rat catcher town of Hameln (Hamelin). I remember buzzards floating high up in the air; I used the binoculars, but unfortunately my little camera, the first one I ever owned, proved hopelessly inadequate.

A silent trip on a misty morning through the Reichswald forests followed and after that the relentless rise to the Harz mountains. It is remarkable that, especially during a strenuous mountain trip on a heavy bicycle, simple pleasures like a cup of coffee or a cheese sandwich are so valuable. I remember swerving from left to right on the rising roads, unable to hold a straight line.

During one such a toilsome day a surprising encounter: A car stopped besides me and I was greeted enthusiastically by a German man whom I had been talking to on a campsite before Kohlstadt.

Later followed the time visiting my sister Meta and her husband Heino in Bookholzberg; their surprise that I came on a bicycle (Germans are notoriously car-oriented); the difficult conversations with Heino, who had great trouble accepting my way of life.

I also remember one day on my way back from Bremen: A solid one hundred kilometres of rain, then seeing a piece of blue in the sky, in the far distance. Oh, the joy I felt!

-And the city of Osterode, somewhere in the western part of the Harz, which had a church

tower with a strange green roof.

-Or that cold and lonely night on the campsite of Prahjjust. But oh, that starry sky!

Involuntary, I always end up looking at the Andromeda Nebula. Looking at it, I never fail to be astonished by that little fuzzy spot, 2 million light years away. Inspiring!

During that journey my enthusiasm for stargazing became very lively again: I spent hours in my tent reading a book about starry night photography by the light of a candle, or thinking about the telescopes that I planned to make.

30 September 1974. Back in the Netherlands. My enthusiasm was still alive, enough to construct a wooden telescope house that could be unfolded. My brother Heinz helped me with the work.

1975: A change of plan.

The inheritance of my father made possible the acquisition of a 125 mm Celestron telescope. This would be the main instrument of my observatory on the premises of my brother in law Cor Leliveld in Noorden, where I had moved to from my room in Utrecht after my studies were finished.

The dream of the great bicycle trip lived on, just as my cycling habit. Every day I cycled to Utrecht and back. It took me 3 hours each day, 3 months in a row. Then I tired of it and in July 1975 I bought a second hand motorized cycle or moped (called a “brommer” in Dutch). I wanted to do some other things besides cycling and working and, to be honest, I was exhausted at work and exhausted at home.

The summer of 1975 went on. That summer was a summer of water: Many canoe trips on the Nieuwkoopse Plassen (lakes), close to where I lived, canoe trips on the Masurian Lakes in East Poland which I visited with my friends John Koster and Maarten Tromp.

Then, one Sunday towards the end of September 1975, Jan visited me in my little house in Noorden. He and Maria had split up. Hesitatingly he formulated his proposal: “I can’t see myself doing it by bicycle, but how about making the trip with a motorcycle?”

Well, I must say that took me by surprise. But, to be honest, I also felt a great joy! Making such a big trip on my own into the unknown seemed a bit depressing to me. And I did get along with Jan quite well.

So.....

The motorbike driving lessons in Utrecht were a disaster: It seemed I had no talent at all for participating in fast motorized city traffic. I now had to take into account numerous (road) rules that I happened to forget over and over again. On a bicycle the rules are so much easier. I decided it was a better idea to practise on my own motorbike, in my own town. Fortunately, at that time it was possible to obtain a practice license that would allow one to drive around in your own area without having passed the proper exam.

Together with my friend Bert van Mourik I went to Gouda to buy an old Triumph T6 (650 cc). With the owner we had a trial run in a silent street in Gouda and it was like all hell had broken loose! What a noise! (It had racing exhausts!). I began to doubt my plans.

No insurance company wanted to insure the thing before it passed a roadworthy test by a mechanic in a garage! The test was a joke: The Triumph was old and it was riddled with problems that were solved for the most part by Bert.

1976: More preparations.

February 1976: I looked longingly at a blue BMW R75/5 that I had discovered in the “Vianen” motorcycle shop in the Vossegatselaan in Utrecht. Only 33.000 km on the clock and I got it for f4250.

But I still didn’t have a license. I rode around Woerden (and surroundings) on practice

licenses but it couldn't go on like this.

In October 1975 I applied for a driving exam, but after waiting for a long time it turned out that the driving school failed to process my application. Then, disaster: My second application resulted in an exam date, set for July 10, but alas, I had already booked a plane flight for July 7 to Vancouver to visit my friends Ron and Lidy in Canada. Sh.....!!

My desperate attempts to get an earlier exam failed, thanks to the fact that my driving instructor didn't respond.

Never say die. The second day in Vancouver, British Columbia, after asking around a bit, it became clear that I could succeed in this country!

The town of Haney, 10 km east of Port Coquitlam, will always give me fond memories. Here I finally got my motorcycle license. First I had to hire a motorbike in the city of Vancouver for 80 dollars per week.

In the theoretical part I had to answer questions on paper and verbally. I made some mistakes but the examination officer was open to reason. Still, I found out that many people didn't pass that exam. The morale: However easy you make a task, the willingness of people to make an effort decreases even more!

The practical test was a joke: Accelerating and braking, wriggling around posts and finally, a drive around the square. The candidates (about 15) were chased through the exam. I lent my bike, a Yamaha 100, to a Canadian guy to do his test!

July 24, 1976: With Ron to the Rocky Mountains. We camped next to a mountain lake close to the mighty Mt. Robson. An icy cold glacier river thundered along next to us. Mosquitos were driven away by a campfire. In the night we heard the ominous creaking of the glacier. The valley was covered in many places by a flaming cover of the Indian Paintbrush plant. Next day we mounted the Robson glacier with ice-axe and crampons. It was a world of ice and stone; nothing sweet about it. We met a couple with a dog that carried his own rucksack with food and water. The dachshund in my youth wouldn't have dreamed of doing such a stupid thing! She would have insisted to be carried, and her food as well!

Mt. Robson is slightly higher than the Erciyes Dagi, the extinct volcano that we climbed in Turkey later on during the Big Trip, but more difficult because of steepness, snow and ice. At the campsite we looked in awe at the steep side of the mountain.

Back in Holland I exchanged my Canadian license (cost 2 dollars only!) for a Dutch one. They charged me 25 guilders for that swap! How about that!

August 20, 1976: The first meeting about the Trip with Jan. We enjoyed a good cigar, thus my plan to stop smoking ended after 7 weeks...

We had the motorbikes. Jan spent a lot of time and money to overhaul his 1968 BMW R50. That was done in the attic at the house of two friends of us, Ronald and Erik, in the Nassaustraat in Utrecht.

I was an interested spectator, with a very small but increasing knowledge of motorbikes.

Winter 1976/1977. Stupid work as a quality controller of fat in a fat refining factory in Zwijndrecht. Long, lonely nightshifts. You had to have chemistry knowledge to do the analysing. I treated the regular workers in the tanker-loading department to beer and sausages. They wouldn't bother me then in the middle of the night so I could have a sleep. I kept sane by working on a scrapbook about the starry night sky that I intended to use on the Big Trip for interested people, together with a number of slides that I would take along (Indeed, I used them in a suburb of Sydney!). Trying to learn Spanish was also a useful occupation.

1977: A trial trip to Spain (and more complications).

The bike was prepared for the trip: rack and panniers appeared, first on paper and later, with the help of Bert van Mourik and a company in Barwoutswaarder, in physical form.

Jan made a similar rack with his old friend Piet Oostendorp in Tiel. Doing it on the cheap he found the panniers in a military dump in Benschop. They were in fact old army food containers!

My cases were beauties made from aluminium plate and stainless steel. Countless hours I worked on them.

In the meantime, I had acquired a “Glaser” fairing “to protect me against the cold winds in Asia”. (To be honest, it also came in very handy during the 65 km drive from Noorden to my work in Zwijndrecht at the time!).

April 1977: A final overhaul of the bike in the workshop of Van Donselaar in Hilversum: I got them to fit new shock absorbers and a new distribution chain.

- Trip meetings became more frequent and Jan still had to finish his studies.

- A program of vaccinations at the GGD in Utrecht.

- A personal talk with 2 ladies from the ANWB (Dutch road association) in The Hague looking for advice.

- Writing to shipping companies enquiring about fares for the bike in Southeast Asia. (“How much does it cost to transport a motorbike from Sydney to Buenos Aires?”)

At the end of May the equipment of the bike was ready and it was time for some trial trips with the complete luggage. The first one was on the Veenweg in Noorden on a Sunday evening: It seemed totally incomprehensible that I would be able to steer a juggernaut like this across difficult roads! It required a Hercules to do that!

Well, I tried it anyway.

We had planned the next trial with the three of us: Bert, Jan and me. But Jan had work to do for his study so he didn't join. On June 6 Bert and I left; direction Wuppertal for our first stop at the place of Dieter Kruschedt, an acquaintance from the German amateur rocket club.

We made it finally to Barcelona, where my brother Jan lived. He wasn't at home.

That trial ride, (to Barcelona and back), was a great success: Cruising the French highways, climbing the steep secondary roads in the imposing Pyrenees, drinking coffee along a Spanish coastal road, looking dreamily at the hazy Mediterranean sea.

But still, I thought that fate played a mean trick on Bert: His precious 2 week's holiday was spoiled by the leaden sky and almost continuous rain. Admittedly the showers were free of charge (which is something that is always appreciated by Dutch people), but still....

Only the beaches near Badalona (Costa Brava) and Biarritz gave some enjoyment with good weather, warmth and sea. We had the waves to ourselves because the majority of the tourists found the water still too cold.

On the way back, Bert had trouble with the drive of his R50. With a groan the bike came to a halt on a deserted road 100 km south of Clermont-Ferrand. I towed his bike to the nearest reasonably big town (St.Flour) where we found a motorcycle shop with a friendly owner who was kind enough to let us use his workshop. He phoned a repair shop in Clermont-Ferrand and I drove the next day to that city to buy the parts. I would have had no idea how to ask for the necessary parts in French but thankfully the St.Flour man had informed the shop about our needs! Bert fixed the problem that afternoon and then we drove in the direction of Clermont-Ferrand, where a merciless downpour took us by surprise, forcing us to pull over by the side of the road during peak hour to get into our rain gear.

We found a campsite in Royat where we were greeted by well meaning, “decent caravan tourists”. We were the only ones pitching a tent. They were full of pity for us, travelling in

this uncomfortable way. Well, we just nodded and stayed polite. Comfort is one thing, but what about adventure?

The Puy de Dome rose like an enormous molehill in the morning mist. The road, decorated with names of Tour de France cyclists written in chalk, spiralled around the mountain to the top. There, of course, as you expect, was a café with a souvenir shop.

The last stage home went from Montargue (100 km south of Paris) to Woerden. We were accompanied by another Dutchman: He had packed his bike so clumsily that he had to look behind him all the time and his bike went in a kind of swerving movement as a result.

I remember riding behind him and noticing his sleeping bag starting to come off. Maybe it was intuition, but in the nick of time his hand appeared suddenly and came to the rescue, resulting in another swerve of the bike.

And all the time the rain fell incessantly.

July 1977: Complications: The last paperwork; 3 visits to the ANWB head office to organise a necessary travel document known as a “Carnet de Passage”.

For a long time we had been planning in blissful ignorance of this requirement. Until one day I read about it in the booklet “Reistips voor Azie” (*Travel Advice for Asia*) from the couple Broeckx-Vaassen.

It mentioned a travel document that was required for India which would cost 150% of the day-value of the motor vehicle. That is, you had to leave behind a bank guarantee for that amount. We were dumbstruck and didn't really believe it. However, during the first talk with the ANWB we soon learned that we were wrong!

In July we were left in no doubt when the (otherwise really nice) ANWB girls Jacqueline and Annelies carried out some preliminary calculations and determined that we would require a bank guarantee of 300 % of the day value of the bikes to get our Carnet de Passage!

DAWK!

Later it was set at 400%! We stopped questioning it and resigned, feeling devastated and really depressed. But before long, resignation gave way to justified anger and we started to object! After another appointment and nearly an hour “yakking” at a “high level” it was settled at 300%. Of course, we had stated a low day-value for our bikes: f2500 and f1500 resp. for the R75 and the R50, but still, this was a substantial amount of money that had to be left behind. (Later we learned from other travellers (from Germany) that they had acquired their carnet much cheaper, namely for 100-200 % of the day value).

The intention of this “Carnet de Passage” was to prevent (West) Europeans selling their vehicle in India without paying the import duty (about 200%). When you sell the vehicle or it gets stolen, the export stamp in the Carnet cannot be secured on leaving the country and you lose your bank guarantee. (By the way, this was also the reason that later during the trip we would see hundreds of car wrecks at the border crossings. These were all vehicles from tourists, written off after accidents in India, or simply broken down, and then exported to the nearest border to at least get this export stamp in the Carnet, and then promptly left at the border!)

However, there was something else of interest in the ANWB-head office. In the centre was a large fountain with a statue of a woman. In the wall of the fountain some lines of a poem were engraved: “*De ruimte zwelt en mindert. Verwonder U om alles wat bestaat. Ga ver op reis. Gij wordt alleen gehinderd door het wereldlot wanneer uw geest geen verre reis verstaat.*”

(Translated in probably rather poor English: “*The space swells and shrinks. Be amazed by everything that exists. Travel far. You will only be bothered by world's fate if your soul knows no distant journey*”.)

At the time, these lines awoke a deep longing for the unknown in us.

Last preparations.

Jan completed his master's degree in physics at the end of June, which once more resulted in a drinking binge.

A last visit to our friends Frans and Gerda in Ottersum. They would develop our photo negatives and we had arranged with them a number of exact, pre-set dates and times to write to each other, simultaneously, irrespective of where we would be during our travels, in order to test the existence of ESP!

Many goodbyes which sometimes filled me with a sense of melancholy and left me sad and depressed.

I had already left the amateur rocket club a few months earlier, feeling unable to express my feelings. Later on I would seriously miss those activities, but at that time I just wanted to leave.



The eve of the departure in Noorden.

THE BIG TRIP

FROM UTRECHT TO THE FRENCH RIVIERA

August 15, 1977. Finally, the big day had arrived! Farewell to my cat Sjef, who stayed behind in Noorden and would be taken care of by my neighbours Ted and Lia Leliveld. Farewell to Cor and Annelies in Noorden, where I had had a good time during the last 3 years.

And then on my way to “The Alley”, off the Jutfaseweg in Utrecht, where I would meet up with Jan and from where we would depart together.

There, a last goodbye to our friends from Utrecht: Roel Visser even had a banner that he brought along, swaying on his pushbike along the Jutfaseweg.

12 Noon: Now it was really going to happen.

I was aware of a totally unreal feeling; the call of the distance within me was loud and strong: A combination of fear, excitement and disbelief that it was finally happening. One is unable to express those feelings to others. There is a kind of brake on your tongue.

But it in your head and your heart you feel it, and there was no brake there!



Packing up the bikes

Harro (Jan’s neighbour from The Alley) decided to accompany us for a while on the first day. Well, we didn’t get far that day; bad luck stopped us quite early. After no more than 40 km we stopped at a road-side restaurant for a cup of coffee, just to settle our nerves and calm down a bit after the emotional departure from Utrecht. When we re-emerged I found my bike had toppled over. In spite of the massive load the three of us managed to upright the bike again, but as I took off, following the other two, it became painfully obvious that things were not right: It was impossible to steer in a straight line and the bike wobbled like crazy. Closer inspection revealed a bend rear frame. It would be impossible to continue! What a disaster!



Start of the trip near the Alley in Utrecht.

We spent some time trying to figure out where we could go to repair the damage. We seriously considered returning to Utrecht where we knew where to get the repair done, but the thought alone was too much! How could we possibly face all our friends again who only



Harro rides with us for a while.

hours earlier had waved us goodbye and wished us good luck for our trip around the world, thinking they wouldn't see us again for a year or so... There had to be another solution! After much deliberation it dawned on us that Jan's brother Gerard lived in Oss, which was not far away and we decided to go there. We were in luck: Later that afternoon and night, Jan's brother Gerard managed to repair the damage and also welded two stiffening strips to the frame. Nevertheless, it was clear that my bike was heavily overloaded and that night I handed my C5 telescope over to Harro to take back to Utrecht.

The loss of the telescope depressed me. The next day we drove to Wuppertal where we received a warm welcome from Jurgen, Dieter and Annchen. They lived on a kind of farm that also functioned as the work shed for the German amateur rocket club DGLR (division Wuppertal). Dieter was a starting geography teacher and also very handy with tools. There he had working room enough! It was Dieter who tried to put my mind at rest about our heavy load of luggage: *"Macht nichts; du verlierst ein drittel, ein drittel wird geklaut und dann ist alles gut."* (Doesn't

matter: You will lose a third, a third will get stolen and then all will be OK!)

(Later, when we were in Calcutta, I received a quite depressing letter from him; he expressed his bad feelings about his lack of freedom because of his heavy attachment to all that stuff around him. He really envied us for our freedom.)

The Rhine valley was enveloped in a sad fog, the day after the visit to Dieter. But the Mosel valley made up for that.

We didn't get to France in one day. Our first camping place was Bernkastel-Kues in the Hunsrueck. It became a real sociable evening with a Dutch "moped tourist" and a few German motor bikers. There was a lot of beer and wine and the Germans complained about the aloofness of French girls.

We free-camped two times in France, close to a creek. It was such a joy: A nice place near the water, making a meal, a big mug of coffee, red wine, talking a bit, or just staring into the distance. At night, lying in your tent and listening to the babbling brook.

I remember a spot near the edge of a village, about 12 km south of Fontaine-Francaise.

Behind the group of trees where we were camping a dirt road ran towards, and then through, a seemingly endless field. It was a very quiet night; there was no artificial light but the sandy road was extremely bright in the moonlight that was softened a bit by clouds. Funny that such an image remains in your memory for such a long time.

France was a bit more dilapidated than West-Germany, but somehow I found it more liveable. Maybe it has to do with the "savoir vivre" of the French (that is: the rural people) and their language sounds nice to the ears.

The bustle of the Ardeche was irritating and made us long for the quiet of Eastern Europe. Of course, we had arrived at the wrong time, namely the annual holiday time of the French!



On our way



Rain in Wuppertal



In a cafe in France we hear about the death of Elvis Presley



Free Camping in the Bourgogne.



Freedom!

Monday August 22, 1977.

On the packing of some vitamised glucose that I bought in Germany I read that the fitness or performance curve of humans has a peak in the morning and a dip in the afternoon.

Here I feel personally addressed: How I love the mornings, when the world is so new and fresh and how tired I feel in the afternoon, after a few hundred km of bike driving... Even the quite impressive Ardeche canyon failed to impress me yesterday afternoon at the end of our day trip. I believe tiredness and bustle have a disastrous influence on my "spirit" and my ability to appreciate my surroundings.

At this moment, (11.15 in the morning), sitting alone on a mountain slope close to the road I feel really alive again! My drawing is going well and the soaring rock faces around me have a special influence on my feelings.

The trip is now a week old. What can I say about it so far? On the first day I sent my C5 telescope back with Harro who had accompanied us for the first 60 km. My bike had been clearly overloaded and the back frame of the bike was bent after a fall. The loss of the telescope depresses me.

I had been thinking for months about the stargazing equipment I would take on the trip and I had worked for months on an astronomy picture book to show to others. Now all that work seems for nothing. But, on the other hand, I also feel it as a relief. Taking along my stargazer's stuff meant taking along my own world and that was never the purpose of this trip. On day 2, in Wuppertal in Germany, I bought a pair of binoculars (9x63) as a replacement for the C5, to have at least something to enjoy the starry sky with. At the time I thought that this would be a rather shabby substitution.

It turned out different however. Yesterday evening Jan and I had a good look at the starry sky, lying on our backs on a campsite near the Ardeche river (5 km from Vallon Pont d' Arc). It turned out that this is a wonderful way to get to know the constellations better and to relax after the fatigues of the day.



The Ardeche river



A hot August day in the Provence



Somewhere in the south of France.



One of the goals I have set for this trip was an extended knowledge of nature. Now, after one week I already think that this is an impossible task and this gives me an undefined sense of melancholy and depression.

The last couple of days the trip has been a lot like the trip with Bert: A continuum of rushing, eating and sleeping, resulting in a feeling of emptiness due to a lack of “spiritual” satisfaction. I haven’t been able to do anything creative.

But resting days like today are a real relief for me. Now I can get busy creatively (an important need for me) with drawing and painting.

(NOTE: It is remarkable how Jan and I were different in these aspects. He could have a really good time talking to other people (local inhabitants or fellow travellers), but those things hold only limited interest for me. Personally, I have developed a number of solitary interests during my childhood. During the trip I have often felt bad when engaged in those solitary activities, simply because a part of me (that part formed by social pressure and the need to conform) felt that I should be engaging with other people, instead of enjoying things on my own. This inward battle has resulted in me completing far less drawings and paintings than I had hoped for. Now, after the trip, I regret that very much.

And the many illusions I had had about the trip! The loss of the majority of them was maybe the main reason for my frequent bad moods. More about that later, First a few more words on the issue of being “social”.

Part of a human being longs for the warmness of human contact. But I am not just a baby who has to be caressed by Mommy! Just being busy relating to other people is too superficial for me. I don’t need God in a church either, nor Allah or any other Big Brother. My inspiration comes from the high mountains and the starry sky: I feel a direct

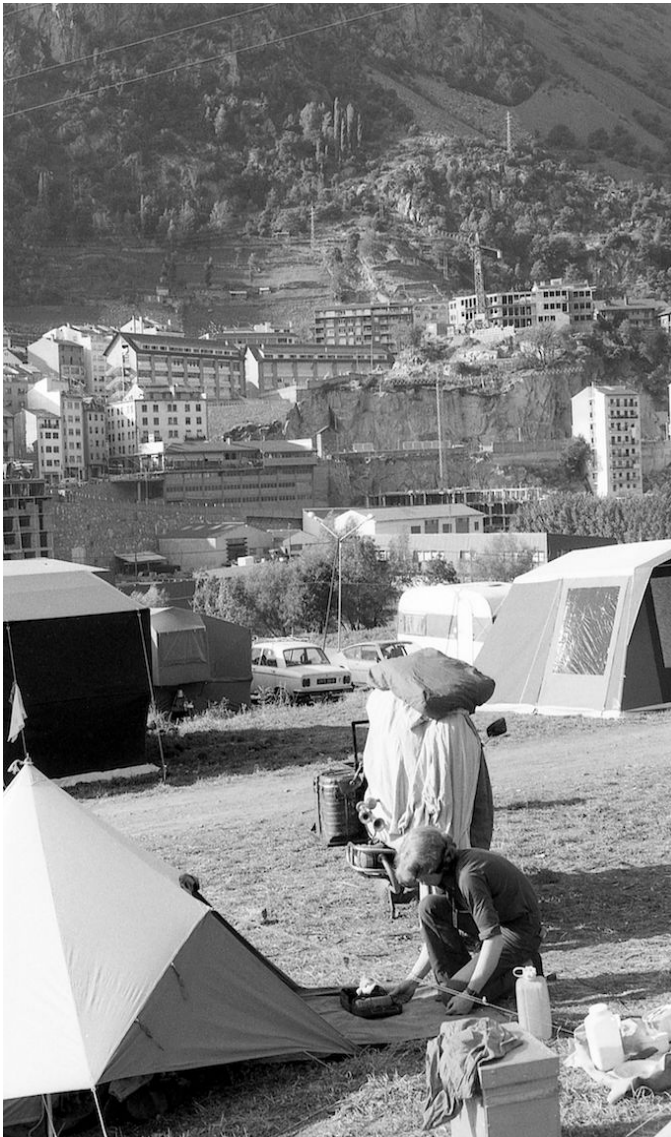
communication between my spirit and the mysterious and the timeless. At such moments I can't engage in communication with other people; it destroys something then.

Unworldly, I hear someone say.....?

(Of course, you first have to be safe in order to experience those feelings! During my trips as a leader on the ropes in the Alps, the awe for the grand was often set aside by pure fear for my life!)

Everything the human spirit touches comes alive, even though we can't touch it with our hands. And then my drawing and painting: Ideally a fluent combination of hand, eyes and mind. An activity that often gives me great feelings of joy. It is my experience that most people simply don't like solitary activities. (Except maybe in the Northern countries.)

It has been said that familiarity breeds contempt: An abundance of human contact, like in a city or in a house with too many people is destructive for my regard for people. Working together on some kind of project on the other hand, that I can see as a positive thing. Now, in 1979, I can say that the ascent of the Erciyes Dagi in Turkey, with the other bikers, was for me the most enjoyable experience in fellowship during the trip. We didn't make it to the top but that doesn't matter. We had three days of adventure and comradeship.)



Camping in Andorra

August 24, 1977: Arrival in Andorra, on our way to Barcelona to visit my brother Jan. Soaring past endless queues of cars, which were crawling behind a big lorry that had great trouble ascending the steep road. We were really glad to be on a bike! The city of Andorra la Vella looked like Utrecht at the rush hour. Only the policemen looked a bit more colourful. I experienced it as really irritating and almost offensive, such large numbers of cars packed together in the confines of a city. *(Only later that year in Teheran it became so absurd that it was comical!)* Anyway, the surroundings of Andorra are most certainly not offensive: The town is closely surrounded by the mountain giants of the Pyrenees. I find it incomprehensible that the inhabitants don't become claustrophobic: The steep mountain slopes start to soar skywards almost in their back yard! Today we crossed the Pass de la Case, the 2407 m high mountain pass that the lorries have to conquer if they want to pass through the Pyrenees. Earlier, in the beginning of June, Bert and I could throw snowballs in that place. Now, in summer, the snow had retreated to a powdery haze on the high peaks.



Pyrenees

August 25, early morning. In the cool silence I see Venus, Jupiter and Mars blinking in the eastern sky. Soon it is time to leave: We go on our way to Barcelona, to visit my brother Jan and his wife Marion.

We followed the fascinating mountain road between Seo de Urgel and Puigcerda, full of potholes and flanked by enormous abysses. Gradually the Pyrenees Mountains disappeared in the distance. We were now on the motorway to Barcelona.

Barcelona.

The time with Jan and Marion and little Patrick has been a nice time! An oasis of rest after that stressful drive through the Spanish Pyrenees. When we entered the flat in the Calle de Ferran, I initially felt like a pig in a palace. The luxurious flat even had two flat-servants, who for seven days a week and 10 hours a day opened doors, cleaned up the flat and maintained the garden and the swimming pool. And then **we** arrived, in our dusty bike suits!

Barcelona; in fact, it looks like an American metropolis. The old part, the Barrio Gotico, dwindles into insignificance compared to the modern, rectangular new part; typical is that all street corners are cut off.

The memory of the walk on Ramblas, (the “river of life” as my brother referred to it), on August 28 will stay with us for a long time! Pushy shoe shiners who first ask for a cigarette and then take the chance to grab your leg and shine your shoes, (not for free, of course). One of them really took Jan for a ride and fitted him with a kind of horseshoes. He then insisted Jan pay 100 pesetas. Jan hadn’t asked for it and we didn’t give in to his demands. Soon the shoe shiner ripped off the horseshoes again!



Ramblas in Barcelona

Another trick was carried out by girls who sold carnations. They stuck one in my pocket and asked for 1 peseta. Now I am not a total miser, so I fished 5P out of my wallet and handed it to her. No no, that wasn't the idea! It had to be 1P and she started to grope around in my wallet. I was taken by surprise, being of the opinion that 5P was more than 1P and that she should have been grateful. Cursing I closed my wallet; she took back my flower and left angrily.

My brother told me those girls were professional thieves: They help unsuspecting tourists with finding the right money. What more is there to say!

Because I missed a reasonably large telescope I phoned my sister in Holland from Barcelona and I asked if she could send my 14x100 binoculars to Nice. And that's where we were heading the next day.



Fish market in Barcelona





Barcelona



Monday August 29. Today we left Barcelona, on our way to Nice. The first leg: Barcelona to Narbonne: storm and too many cars. It looked like the infamous Gulf of Biscay had sent, specially for us, a storm along the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean! Strong gusts threatened to throw us from the road, or in the way of a car. Really scary! An accident had caused an enormous traffic jam, but that was no problem for us bikers. When we had a coffee next to the road at the end of the car queue, another accident happened: 4 French bumped into each other! Wham! Well, they shouldn't drive that fast! They drive over the mountain roads as if chased by the Devil!

Jan's journal:

29-8-'77. Monday, *A village a couple of kms north of Narbonne. Camping next to a railway line. Radio Andorra; popular music; a small 15 Watt light bulb; Spanish wine.*

Today we left Barcelona. Clouded skies. Only a few days in Barcelona. Received with great hospitality. Unexpectedly connected well and easily.

North of the Pyrenees a very strong wind at right angles across the road. Accidents, traffic jams. Bikes an advantage.

Strange thoughts driving through a French town. I became aware that for some reason I seem to feel more relaxed and more confident now, than I have done so far on the trip. Less anxious. After some thoughts, a question: "Why would this be? Isn't it strange, that I am now starting to feel a bit more confident about what we are doing, about this "big trip". Could it be simply the "release" from the hospitality in Barcelona? The feeling of freedom; the sense that really only now the BIG TRIP has begun? Or could it be because we are "backtracking" a little bit, because we already have been further away from home than this

It can't be familiarity, because the region here is new to me. It is typical Southern France.

Maybe it is always the case that the way "back", heading in the direction of home rather than in the direction of the unknown, is done with more confidence. (In that case it will only be temporary, because tomorrow we will follow the curve of the Mediterranean and then we will once more increase the separation between us and our home, Utrecht and The Netherlands. Will this feeling of confidence disappear then?

Frans' journal:

Menton, August 31. Today we rode over the N202 through the foothills of the French Alps: Apt-Digne-Barme-Entrevaux; after that via Nice to Menton. At 21.30 we finally found a campsite after we had become quite upset and annoyed that it was so difficult to find a campsite in this luxurious area. *(This campsite became memorable (for me) because there were 2 dachshunds (a fat one and a thin one) that tried to grab Jan on several occasions.)* However, during the day the outlook on the Mediterranean was brilliant! In the far distance the intense blue of the sea merged with the deep-blue dome of the sky through a distant misty area. It all made a deep impression on me.

The starry sky is becoming good as well. In the north I can see Andromeda rise above the trees. The tiredness and the frustration of the ride through Nice and the curvy coastal road have disappeared completely! (That is, after a big mug of coffee and a sandwich meal). Now it is time for a pipe and some strong liquor (well, a bottle of wine).

Let us not forget yesterday: Free camping near a creek in the Provence, about 15 km east of Apt. Fabulous! For me it had been a very tiring day, although we only had driven 270 km. Only 270 km! But this existence is quite exhausting. Between getting up and leaving you spend about 2 to 2 ½ hours. Breaking down the tent, packing everything on the bike, etc, etc. Out of sheer tiredness we have both let the bike fall over a couple of times. But I have noticed that tiredness doesn't always have to break your spirit, especially when something interesting happens or can be seen. For me it was the sight of the strange rock formations a few km before Apt. I think they were the result of wind erosion.

The mountains in the Provence are not that high (typically less than 2000 metres), but quite impressive because of their shape. It looks like the layers of the Earth's crust have been turned upside down and compressed again. The folds are very conspicuous here and there. Those enormous slices of rock really show (more so than the high tops of the Pyrenees) the impressive movements in the Earth's crust.



Tilted Rock layers in the South of France

Menton, Thursday September 1. Every day I drive to Nice to find out if the 14x100 binoculars have arrived. I won't say much about that conceited place on the Mediterranean coast. A family has arrived on the campsite with a fat dachshund which immediately considered half the campsite as his territory. He attacked Jan, but was friendlier to me (rightly so).

Friday September 2. Another day of mild boredom at the Cote d'Azur. The binoculars haven't arrived yet. Yesterday I spent the evening eating, drinking and smoking, together with Jan and a Dutch couple. I must admit I didn't enjoy it: I don't need a lot of company. The idea that I have given up smoking and drinking today, in order to be fit for the Himalayas, and a brisk walk, have made me feel better again!

When I look at those families around me, busily occupied, then I am really put off. At this time, I feel inclined to be alone a lot.

Now, in the late afternoon I am chewing a piece of baguette, just out of boredom. I have the feeling (and I have thought this for a while), that this trip is only going to be worth the trouble for me if I will learn a lot. The things I had in mind are:

- learning minerals
- learning to draw
- making a book, recording my observation of the stars with the big binoculars.



Camping in Menton

Staying calm in the hectic traffic is also important I guess. To be honest, I only find the early morning wonderful, also for riding the bike. Later in the afternoon my gusto diminishes at a fast rate. So you see, recognising your biological rhythm is an important issue. Too often have I given in to my typical afternoon depressions.

Of course, Jan's biological rhythm is totally different.

Wednesday, September 7. 12.45 The sun is burning above the campsite. At last I had an early rise again (6.15). Feels better than lying in the sleeping bag until late in the morning.

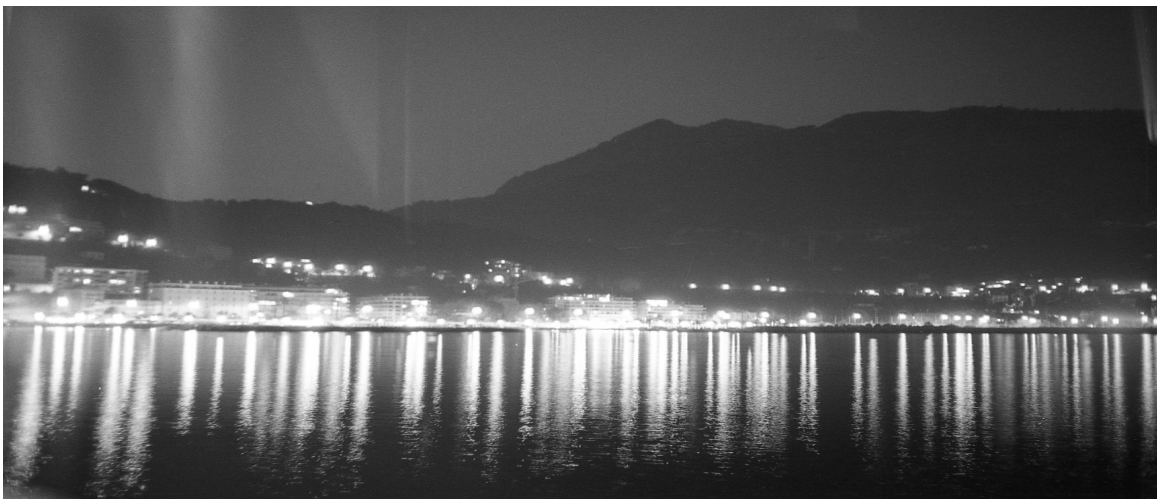
Once more a futile ride to Nice and back. I phoned my brother Jan in Barcelona: A letter from Ron Kok (from Canada) had arrived a day after our departure. Murphy's law again.



The city of Nice, France

This afternoon I am going to fiddle with the motorbike and go to Menton to find out if they can improve the stand. Jan has already been busy with his bike for a long time. His piston rings are stuck and have to be cleaned. Next to us is a tent with English boys. They probably don't realise that we understand English. Either that, or they don't care about

the image of the British. They swear and they curse each other in loud voices. Conversation with the French speaking neighbours is difficult. It asks for complete concentration. French women always keep on yakking like a machinegun! I worry about the stand of my bike. The bike is so heavy that I fear the stand could collapse at any time, especially when I roll the bike off its stationary position. I visit several repair shops in Menton. Finally I have success with a small business on a mountain road. Price: 10 Francs. You see: Just stick with it, keep asking around and generally you will succeed!



Evening in Menton

14.15 The binoculars haven't arrived again. This morning I phoned my sister Annelies; Sjors Fransen, the boy from my neighbours in Noorden, is upset because I didn't send him a card yet. Well, I better do that straightaway!

This afternoon: Work on the bike and reading the books of Minnaert: "Physics of the open field". Jan brought the three volumes along, but I read those books more than he does.

16.30 Sitting in the tent. It's better to make a work program for each day: that gives me something to hold on to.

21.15: Now about stargazing: It seems to me that I should look at it more as some kind of aesthetic experience rather than a scientific one: Searching the starry sky, looking for objects of interest (mainly Messier objects and double-stars) without any pretention of doing scientific research can be a fun and relaxing experience. The desire for creativity is not really satisfied that way. That will probably take the building of telescopes or doing astrophotography (or possibly scientific research).



Our rubbish on the campsite in Menton



Friday, September 9. 7.15. We photographed the sunrise. In the 9x63 binoculars the sun looks like a boiling red ball. While we were busy with the cameras and the tripod, a dachshund comes out of the house behind us. He vents his anger towards us. Now a woman comes outside and together they disappear behind a curve in the path near the palm trees. A few minutes later the dachshund returns and again shows his disapproval of us. Completely daunted we leave the place. Luckily we were finished taking photographs.

Once more have I been to Nice. No binoculars. But this time I went to the main station where the international trains arrive, to ask the customs officers. They told me that a package like this would normally take one month!

Well, this would be far too long so I scratched together the money for 20x80 binoculars and tripod (*which has proved to be great for star gazing*). The people in the shop where I bought them were convinced these were only going to be used for peeping at women at the beach. I also bought a big aluminium trunk to get more order on the back of my bike.

After a difficult conversation with the customs I was satisfied that the binoculars would be returned to Holland.

Our British neighbours have sneaked out of the campsite without paying. After a last unfriendly meeting with the two dachshunds we leave the campsite. Tomorrow we will be in Italy.



The French Riviera

FROM THE FRENCH RIVIERA TO TURKEY

Saturday, September 10. 18.30 Italy. On a grassy field next to a side road of the Parma-Mantova route. The Po-valley is densely populated, that is clear. After some bungling but hilarious conversation with an Italian farm family we have chosen a grassy field under some poplars. “Poppo terrano propertorio di governo!” or something like that.

Italy: A smell of sulphur on entering. That was probably not just caused by the heaps of sulphur on the industrial estates alongside the Autostrada, but also stimulated by the thoughts of (and desire to see) the volcanoes in the deep south of Italy. But I am afraid that the first live volcano we’ll see will be in Indonesia. Suddenly, we are in a hurry! In October we want to be in Nepal!

Those Autostrada! I take my hat off for those road builders! It is a succession of tunnels and flyovers. I find those flyovers just fantastic; enormous but slender at the same time, grey and monotonous concrete, but impressive because of their purpose.

That aluminium trunk I bought in Nice comes in really handy! Only the overall weight now has increased by 10 kg. And I haven’t thrown away anything yet. That has to happen in Yugoslavia; otherwise I am bound to get trouble with the shock absorbers.

We had hoped to get through Italy today (without buying a map). Haha! Well, we already got lost in Genoa. Genoa: Grubby flats, a grubby harbour area, backstreets with washing hanging to dry from the windows.

The Apennines range keeps the rain-bearing westerly winds away. We are now behind the mountains in the Po valley and the temperature is quite high. In the dark evening I try my new binoculars and observe the globulars M13 and M92 in Hercules and the planetary nebula M27 in Vulpecula.

Sunday, September 11. 04 .00 The day begins in a brilliant way: The starry night is breath taking! It is much more impressive than the evening before (at 22.30).

The R50 has a leaking rubber cuff or seal. We have fixed it for the time being with a rubber from the set for repairing a flat tire.

It is Sunday and we don’t have any liras (Italian currency). In Italy, being strictly catholic, that is a problem. We come to a village, walk into a pub and just call out “Niente Lira!”.

After some incomprehensible talk with the Italians we finally arrive at the railway station of Parma. Here we can buy the Liras.

In the evening we arrive on a rocky campsite in Trieste, near the border with Yugoslavia. The Chianti is cheap and delightful. The whole evening, we hear “I feel love”, sung by Donna Summer.

Monday, September 12. Trieste-Opicina-Postojna-Pivka Jama (campsite).

No problems at the border, just surprised looks at our luggage.

Yugoslavia: A charming green landscape, meadows, pine tree woods, hills and now and then a light grey rock face. We are in the Karst, the area of the limestone caves with stalagmites and stalactites.

On the campsite: A sign that says “Belvedere” and suddenly: A bottomless abyss, hidden between the green pine trees. In the depth lies the entrance of Pivka Jama caves. Caves always make a sinister impression on me. As if something unknown and ominous lies hidden in their cool and dark depths.

Soldiers are everywhere; one of them jumped on the road in front of me holding up a sign so I wouldn’t drive on. An army truck passed. Then he stepped aside and, with a sheepish grin on his face, allowed me to continue.

-I still remember the main office of the ANWB in The Hague, the fountain at the centre of the entrance hall and the words engraved in its walls. I have forgotten them now, but they were a couple of lines from a poem that seemed to call for travel and discovery and made a deep



impression on me. (*Jan sent me the exact wording in Dec 2015, while we were working on the Dutch to English translation of this travel journal, see page 6.*) Why did those words always make me think of beautiful cool, lonely waters with a hazy silhouette of land in the distance? Or of a bright, sparkling sun in a cool blue sky? Instead, the 5000 km we have done so far have consisted for a considerable part out of crowded cities with traffic jams, chrome, glass and concrete: Montpellier, Barcelona, Genoa, Parma, Trieste: They look a lot like each other to me. But I suppose that is all part of the bargain. 17.30 Just back from a trip through the caves of Pivka Jama. Amazing, unbelievable, impressive! Those are the impressions that remain! It must have taken millions of years for the water to make all those caves and limestone shapes. I believe speleology would make an exciting pastime: Crawling in the deep darkness and, importantly, without being bothered by irritating tourists.

Wednesday Sept.14, 1977. 05.45- 07.30 A walk in the forest near Postojna.

A deliciously cool morning, I can see the broad rays of the rising sun piercing through the pinewoods. Wrens, a robin. Everywhere piles of boulders and, protruding through the green, light-grey rock formations. Their colour reminds me of bones.

I liked this a lot more than the visit to the enormous caves of Postojna. Together with hundreds of other tourists we boarded a little train that took us 5 km inside the caves. The main cave was 23 km long... The large group was split up in a number of smaller ones and you had to walk to a sign indicating your language. Of course no Dutch. We chose English and were treated to a woman guide that had little to say, and that in a tone as if she had just swallowed a lemon.

The magic of the caves was further totally destroyed by the presence of large numbers of loudmouthed tourists. I am convinced that one can only enjoy the wonders of nature in silence. That's how I feel about it anyway.



Night on the campsite



A night with wine

Thursday Sept. 15 My father's birthday. He made this trip possible for a large part. I hope he rests in peace.

We camp between Split and Dubrovnik at the Adriatic coast. Along the way we had a



Cave in Karst area

delightful swim in the crystal clear sea. For the first time I have been able to study the submarine flora with diving goggles and a snorkel: You fold your knees against your belly, hold your hands against your shins and with your face downwards you just float on, gazing at the fantastic underwater life.

The coastal mountains are very rough. An enormous grey wall rises up almost straight from the sea. Yesterday the islands close to the coast looked like blueish mirages in the backlight of the sparkling sun. For the first time in my life I have been able to study my own constellation Sagittarius. In Holland it is too low in the sky. Truly fantastic to look at this through the 20x80 binoculars. The star clouds like M24, the Lagoon nebula M8 and the nebula M16 and the globular star cluster M22 are striking!

At night, a fierce storm. I hardly slept fearing the tent would blow away; 5 times I went out to secure the tent pegs.

Saturday Sept. 17, 1977 17.15 We actually found a piece of grassland! For days we have been struggling with the aluminium pegs in the rocky ground but now we have found a nice little camping spot near a small river between Ivangrad and Andrijevica. We have entered a non-tourist region, which we already noticed in Titograd. Unbelievable curiosity from young boys (sometimes also grown ups). Before Dubrovnik we hardly encountered that.

The rocky landscapes of Montenegro and Macedonia impress me quite a bit. Enormous layers of sediment stone that are clearly exposed where the road cuts through the mountains.



Road in South-East Yugoslavia

This afternoon we were having lunch somewhere along the road in a seemingly deserted area. Around the bend of the road appears a family; man, woman and child. The man points in our direction with a yell whereupon the child makes his way to us and mumbles in a pitiful voice: "Dinare, dinare.. We have already experienced this several times in the south of this country: The beginning of another world. We give a few dinars and some bread to relieve our sense of guilt.

Yugoslavia has made a favourable impression on me, despite the great number of tourists. Many friendly people who are often very helpful. In Titograd we bought 30 large nails for use as tent pegs. The shopkeeper even showed us a washing basin for washing our hands. They had become a bit dirty from the nails (although they were already quite dirty from working on the bike).

19.30 It is fully dark; dinner is over and we are drinking coffee. Darkness all around us; barking dogs, eerie singing in the distance; it sounds like Gregorian church singing.

Earlier today, on the way to Titograd, we passed along and over (ie via a dam) a large lake with a neighbouring marsh. A surreal landscape, compared to what we have seen until now: Reeds, grass, willows, water lilies, storks and around that, a grey mountain range. On the (invisible) south side of the lake lies Albania: Symbol of inaccessibility? The lake is called Shkoder.

And then there are people who trudge along the road: Bent under the load of a large bag with all their belongings; an incredibly tanned face that you only get by a continuous exposure to the blazing sun. A little old(?) lady passed us while we were having lunch. She mumbled something but didn't beg. She walked on. Kilometres further we passed her again; still trudging along; where to?

The ants on the roadside. I studied them. Many of them are carrying things. When I concentrated on one ant, it was just running around in circles; then it dropped its load again. Why do they do it?!



Children come begging on a dusty road. They plod along the roads with their parents.

Jan's journal:

17-9-77. Macedonia, between Ivangrad and Pec.

Today for the first time the feeling that I am outside of Western Europe. At Ivangrad we left the transit route to Greece (ie the tourist route). Enormous effect: Immediately bad roads; long distances without tarmac, cow-herding people on the road, everyone looking, children wave. People very friendly. I have found the Yugoslavian people in general friendlier than expected.

We have found a place to camp in a little meadow, hidden by trees. While setting up we were only noticed by two people: One woman on a donkey with a man carrying a scythe walking next to her, returning from the land.

We can't be seen from the road. By 7 pm complete darkness had settled in. People on the road (probably returning from work) sang (loud, two voices, 2 males). From the land across the river sounds a (similar) response. It sounded a bit Gregorian. For some reason it made me think of the fact that we were not far from the Albanian border. In the dark it all sounded a bit sinister as well in. We have contemplated the idea of trying to pay a visit to Albania. The possible consequences of having Albanian stamps in our passports has stopped us.

I have seen today a number of things and people (apart from landscapes), that I would have liked to photograph, but I still don't have the courage. I find it rather embarrassing. Begging children (sent by their parents, some type of gypsies?) when we were sitting down having something to eat. I gave them 1 Dinar (14 cents) and a sandwich. A striking little woman, carrying a heavy bag on her back, plodding along the side of the road. When she saw us, she stopped, saying something we couldn't understand. An unbelievably carved face. But she did NOT hold out her hand! She only talked. I gave her a slice of bread (with jam, of all things), after which she continued on her way. These things do make you think. It was, as they say, in the middle of nowhere. Where was she going? Where did she come from? Does she have a place to live? Where would she get food? Her weathered face suggested a day and night outside existence. Age? Impossible to guess! Old.



Jan in Macedonia

Frans' journal:

Monday, Sept. 19, 1977. On a campsite in Skopje. It is raining. Something completely different than the burning sun on our heads that we have had for the last week.

Yesterday's drive was quite something! After Ivangrad we took the bad road to Pec. Nothing but dust and stones! Most of the time we couldn't go faster than 30 to 40 km per hour. But during such a ride you really live in the here and now! Gone is the boredom of the broad motorways. Now you feel really involved in the driving!

And the landscape! During the last 10 km it looked like the cliffs along the road reached to the sky. Impossible to capture this in a photograph; you miss that indescribable feeling that you get when you are actually in those chasms.

Along that stretch of dusty roads, we observed how poor some people live: Hovels made of branches and straw served as a home. We stopped somewhere and immediately a crowd of children came running up the slope to the road from such a hovel and looked at us with large eyes. After Jan had given them some T-shirts they immediately wanted my leather hat and my ballpoint as well. Well, they could get my pen, but I wanted to keep my hat (optimist!). Then that roadside café, about 20 km before Pec. Some Macedonians (or Montenegrins?) stood there, waiting for the bus. One of them, an old man with a tanned face, wearing a white cap and a magnificent white moustache, made quite an impression on me. Twice the bus didn't stop, which caused some grumbling among those waiting. But both times he turned, very slowly, and looked at us with such a "knowing" look and such twinkling eyes under those lowered eyelids that both times we burst out laughing! He wasn't put out that easily; he knew the world.

In Pec we were considered some kind of "Wonder of the World". We were immediately surrounded by dozens of young boys when we parked the bikes. Well, we did look a bit travel-weary; having just travelled a long stretch of dusty roads we were totally covered with road dust, as were the bikes. My motorcycle jacket was completely grey. My beautiful leather hat, bought in Barcelona, was attached to the luggage of the bike by an elastic strap. When we returned from a drink at the café it was gone. Desperate looks in the direction of the grinning crowd didn't bring it back.



Waiting for the bus in Macedonia

Tuesday, Sept. 20, 1977 Late in the evening, on a silent road, we pass the Greek border and set off for Thessaloniki. South of the city we arrive at the campsite Agia Trias. Next day we go into town. For the first time during this trip we have trouble finding the main post office. We always check this in the hope of finding letters “poste restante”. Until now the main “Post Office”, in whatever language, always was something with the word “Post“ in it. Nothing that straightforward this time: “Tahidromio” it was.

It is always nice to get letters from friends and family when you are far away from home.

This time too: I received letters from Myra Reinten and Ton Thiele.

In this city we also found the last well-stocked BMW-dealer for motorcycle parts until Sydney. Jan bought a new rubber cuff for his R50 driveshaft.

Wednesday, Sept. 21, 1977. 23.30 We settled at the end of the afternoon on a remote grassland near Kilkie. When we look for free-camping places we always look around carefully to see if there might be someone who sees us and will take exception. On a hill in the distance we could see the outline of a person, someone who kept an eye on us. Well, bugger it; we are here and that’s it! At 18.30 a herd of cows passes our tents. We have a difficult conversation with the friendly herdsman. He warns us that rain is coming.

For the first time in my life I taste Retzina. Well, that tastes quite nice!

I observe the first quarter moon between the clouds with the 20x80 binoculars. Really impressive! Especially the dark clouds look ominous and threatening in the narrow field of view of the binoculars. I take a lot of pictures with the 300mm telephoto.



To the hairdresser in Greece

Thursday, Sept. 22, 1977. A campsite near Kavala at the Aegean Sea. North-Greece: Barren, dry, almost deserted and almost nothing to see.

This morning we took a bad road from Kilkie to Lavahas. Jan had a fall with his bike. In the blazing light of a low sun I saw vaguely a wild thrashing of arms, legs and a motorcycle. Luckily there was no damage. Unfortunately, fate can be cruel. Later, as we rode through the bone-dry steppe in the direction of Drama, we saw two policemen busy trying to put out a grassfire. Jan stopped, put his bike on the stand and wanted to help, but as he was yelling at the policemen his bike suddenly rolled down the slope next to the road. Windshield to pieces, photo case a bit busted, eating plate splintered. Fortunately, not much more than that. Sometimes fate cruelly punishes good intentions, it seems. All around us we could see plumes of smoke from burning grass fields.

The heat is now sometimes unbearable. At midday you better take it easy, because it takes a lot to just stay positive. But the early mornings and also the evenings are great, just because of the coolness and the atmosphere of the country.

Yesterday something else happened: First the introduction to the very high petrol price in Greece: f1.36 for low octane and f1,60 for high octane fuel. If you bought more than 5 litres you could get 40% reduction.

In Thessaloniki I received a letter from Ron and Lidy, which my brother Jan had forwarded from Barcelona. The postman, who searched through the pile of letters just didn't see mine. Luckily I watched carefully.

Here in the north of Greece we meet just as many Dutch and German speaking Greeks as English speaking! One Greek commented on our pending visit to Turkey: "Turkie niks nie goed nie!" This is difficult to translate, but it was obvious that he didn't like the Turks very much.

In Sere we sent part of our superfluous stuff back to Holland. Because we also wanted to send a number of photographic films, we sent the whole lot to Frans Jacobs in Ottersum. Well, it wasn't that simple. I had carefully made a package and sealed it with tape and rope.

You probably guessed it: I had to open the package. Everything was checked; each film containers had to be opened because the man suspected they were full of drugs.

Finally, I could wrap it up again, pay 260 Drachmas and buzz off.

In Sere I phoned my sister Annelies: She told me about a great cholera-epidemic happening in Turkey and Iran.

In Drama, at around six o'clock, Jan and I destroyed the upcoming evening fitness with a large bottle of beer each; after that on our way to Kavala.

Jan's journal:

Kavala, 22 September, 1977. I sure got my share of things today!!! This morning delightfully quiet (free-camping, not far from Kilkis). Had breakfast, packed up and started riding in the direction of Serre. After some time, the tarmac disappears; sandy, compacted dirt-road. Quality varied between rather bad to very bad. The sun was merciless. After quite a few kilometres of intensely focussed riding (risk of skidding in the loose sand), my front wheel gets caught in a groove in the road and stays there. I lose my balance and fall. I managed to avoid the heavy bike, which came to rest on the edge of the road embankment. The damage was limited to 3 broken attachments of my tank bag and a broken rear view mirror. Did some shopping in Serre, went to get a haircut, sent a parcel to Frans Jacobs and phoned home for the last time for a while. Then we continued on our way. It was the hottest part of the day. Incredibly arid and dry landscape. Suddenly, on our way to Drama, there is a grass fire on the side of the road. Two policemen are trying to quell the flames with branches. I stop to help, put my bike on the stand and while I try to find out if they want any help, behind my back, the bike falls over and rolls head over heels down the embankment (about 1 to 1 ½ metres high) and comes to rest on its side in the burned grass. Windscreen shattered, bracket of the stand broken off, (has been welded in the meantime), cooking pot dented, dinner plate broken, tools all over the place, photo bag dented, but, miracle of miracles, no serious damage to the bike. In the very hot and burning sun we managed to upright it. After leaving it for a while I could start it again and managed to ride out of the field and back onto the road a little further down. As far as I can tell at the moment, the frame is not bent. Later, on better roads, I managed to ride again at 100 km/hr without any issues. Even so, my mood at that stage had definitely dropped to below freezing point, but that has passed again since then. (By the way there were many, many fires along the way. It hasn't rained here in 4 months.)

Frans' journal:

Friday, Sept. 23 21.00 Kavala. We worked all day on the bikes. I destroyed the screw thread of the filling plug for the drive shaft of my bike. We now need to find a company that can insert a Heli coil.

Close to the tent 3-meter-high reed is growing. Hadn't expected that in such a dry area!

Saturday Sept. 24, 1977 We found a business to fix my bike. Instead of inserting a Heli coil they cut new thread. Cost: 200 Drachmas.

In the meantime, a large bus has arrived; there were however only 4 passengers. They drive to West-Asia to buy carpets and then sell them again in Europe. In the evening we have a party on the campsite. There is drink (what else did you think!), guitar playing (not by me, although I would like to be able to do that on a night like that) and lots of talk. I must say that social company sometimes, unexpectedly, gives me pleasure. True, normally I can't even imagine that, and often it is again forgotten the next day.

Tomorrow we will cross the border into Turkey.