

PAKISTAN - INDIA - NEPAL

Monday, November 21, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Who is this? The lonely bicyclist, Craig Starr Holden from Pasadena, California. A quiet, soft-spoken American of 34, making a world trip on his pushbike. Today nota bene was his birthday! Until midnight we talked in the youth hostel in Rawalpindi. With melancholy I saw him leave the next day. (*Postscript: in 1979 I visited him in California: there it turned out that I could not put up with his endless runaway chattering.*)

Here in Rawalpindi, in the London Book Store, I bought Sidgwick's 'Observational Astronomy for Amateurs'. In a happy mood I left the shop and saw something I didn't think possible: on the sidewalk a man moved along whose legs are the other way around. He propelled himself forward on hands and feet, sometimes holding his hand out for alms.

Wednesday, November 23, Gilgit, Pakistan. 17.45hrs. We're in a cold hotel room in the village of Gilgit, somewhere in the Karakorum mountains. No cola, but we do have bread with bad Dutch butter, and a lot of peanuts. Above the bed a naked light bulb glows. The environment does not mean much to me now. Am I already becoming tired of travelling? The flight in the little plane from Rawalpindi to Gilgit (only 10 dollar) was very worthwhile. First we see the dark hills far below. In the distance a chain of snowy peaks. The plane is going up and up, but the mountain giants rise faster. Immense snow-covered mountain chains, seemingly impossible to travel through. Shortly before the flight ends, we see on our right the enormous peak of Nanga Parbat, 8126 m high! We fly through a gap, at a height of 6000 m, but the mountains keep on rising above us.

Karakorum, Himalaya and Hindu Kush, the huge scars of the clash of the Indian continent with Asia. The Central-Asia mountain areas to me are almost a symbol of inaccessibility. On the map you see the very high passes.

(While typing this (July 1979) I keep on feeling the desire to return there once more with a telescope, to take pictures of the wonderful starry sky there.)

Jan's journal:

November 23, Gilgit, Kashmir, Pakistan.

We stayed a few more days in Kabul after returning from Bamyan. (Moral support for Tim, who received the wrong parts for his bike for the second time and probably won't be able to make it in time to meet his pre-booked boat trip to Australia. We plan to meet again in New Delhi.) I have been ill for one day (fortunately only one!). Probably ate something wrong. Met up with Sue and Graham again (from the Ercyas-Dagi climb in Turkey). After Kabul the weather has been splendid. We saw palm trees, orange groves, bananas and everything that goes with it. (I heard last night on the Netherland's world broadcast (finally discovered): temperature in Holland 6 degrees).

In Peshawar, Pakistan, we saw many people with firearms and heavy ammunition belts as part of their normal dress code. Darra is a little town where firearms for all the tribes in the area are being manufactured in the most primitive ways; all weapons being copied exactly from American or Russian firearms.

After Peshawar: Rawalpindi with capital Islamabad (building started in 1963, so, not unlike some new developments in Holland). In Rawalpindi we left our gear behind in a youth hostel and we flew to Gilgit (about 100 km from the Chinese border in Kashmir). I was surprised to discover that this was Pakistan territory. The flight was impressive: in between mountain peaks of 8 km high. Gilgit is boring; you can't get anything here, not even cola. We bought an expensive tin of Dutch butter and used it as the only spread on some tasteless white bread;

almost inedible. Has gone off because of the heat. Tonight we had peanuts and we have been reading. Tomorrow back to Rawalpindi.

I heard on the Dutch world broadcast that there has been a cyclone in India, causing more than 10,000 fatalities. Have to ring Holland soon to let them know that it did not affect us.

They expect another cyclone in 3 weeks' time, but by then we hope to be in Nepal.

The day before yesterday we met an American who is doing a trip around the world by pushbike. It was his birthday and we had a pleasant conversation. He had been underway for 11 months and hoped to finish in about 5 months. Besides the oceans he had only taken a boat once (from Italy to Greece), but push-biked everything else! It took him 3 weeks to get through Eastern Turkey, mainly pushing his bike along by hand.

Just quickly a funny incident: We were required to fill in the guest book for the hotel where we are sleeping at the moment. (25 Rs for 2 beds in a barren, filthy room, no chair or table; nothing. There is a restaurant as well, but we happened to see them doing the washing up in the filthy water of the street gutter at the back, so we decided to eat somewhere else, where they probably do the same, but at least we don't know for sure). The "manager" who asked us to fill out the guestbook spoke 2 words of English and communication was difficult. In the first column he wanted my name and in the second column my address. The problems started with the third column where he wanted, after consulting some visitors to the restaurant for the translation, something that sounded like "police riedens" or something like that. I really didn't know what was required and we tried for at least 3-4 frustrating minutes to communicate, but it was impossible. In desperation I suddenly got a brainwave: Very excitedly and relieved I repeated "Oooh I see..., police riedens!", as if I finally understood, and I wrote in the third column "Hout" (the Dutch word for "wood"). Obviously this made no sense whatsoever, but I figured they couldn't read it anyway and it let me off the hook. Then it was Frans' turn. When he got to the third column, he didn't understand either, and looked at what I had written down, which didn't exactly contribute to a better understanding. After I explained to him, he started to laugh out loud, totally unabashed, in such a way that these people surely must have realised that I had taken them for a ride. Grinning he wrote down "ijzer" (Dutch for iron). Several times later during the day, we heartily laughed, just thinking back at what happened.



Flight to Gilgit

Frans' journal:

Friday, 25 November, Lahore. From Rawalpindi to Lahore we rode separately. We had a bit of a quarrel.

In Yugoslavia and Turkey it happened sometimes that people were curious about us. But that was nothing compared to what was awaiting us in Pakistan and India. The curiosity here is hard to imagine. I stopped for bread and a cola somewhere along the road. Sitting on a chair not far from the café, a big crowd gathered around me staring at me. They were almost standing on my toes. My bike, some 20 m away, also had a crowd around it.

After such experiences I go searching for books about astronomy and optics in Lahore. This is a real joy, a compensation for the terrible bustle and the annoying traffic. So, I never change. In the YMCA we meet the New Zealander Norman Gable. He had also been affected by the Kabul trots. Is there anything else I can say about him? Yes, he said that in Delhi, at the New Zealand embassy, we should apply for a working holiday for NZ. Would be possible he said. *(Postscript: that turned out to be just a cold shower)*

The Indian border: I could not locate the engine-number on the cylinder block. We then scratched it in ourselves. The customs official, who was in a hurry, noticed to his amazement that we had scratched it in ourselves. And that was it, no problems!

We also heard the story of some Germans with a car. They were rejected at the border because the Indians did not accept their Carnet. The ADAC (German road association) apparently did not require them to deposit and leave behind a large sum of money as warranty for the Carnet and the Indians heard about this. No problem, they returned to Lahore and had a stamp made for about \$2. They used this to add a warranty value of 2500 Deutschmarks on their Carnet.

Saturday, November 26, Amritsar, India. No problems so far. Just a hassle at the border, but even there we had good luck. We bribed someone for 8 dollars because our cholera vaccinations had expired.

After arrival in the Tourist Guest House in Amritsar (with over 1 million inhabitants) Giit, the hotel guide, showed us around on his rickshaw. I felt sorry for him for we were not exactly a light load. We saw the Golden Temple of the Sikhs: Obviously, when building these type of monuments, people are capable of making enormous efforts when they are enthusiastic about something. That is all I can say. A story was told to us about the deities Krishna, Brahma, Shiva and Kali that I had some difficulty following.

Amritsar at night: lots of colourful little shops, a wedding with adorned elephants, singing, music. The guide tricked us for 40 rupees. This is because we did not agree on a price in advance. "You saw my job!" and "God gave me this job!" were his excuses for the high price. Somehow he is right. The city was extremely busy: a lot of cyclists, cows everywhere.

Jan's journal:

November 26, 1977, Amritsar. Our first day in India.

Pakistan gave me the shits; I really didn't enjoy it. Not one moment of peace and quiet. When stopping for a cola along the road, you have no choice but to consume your drink amidst a crowd of staring faces. When asking: "What do you want?", there is no answer, they just stare. Yesterday, for instance, I had a flat tyre. I was on my own. (Frans and I had decided to ride apart for a while, just to give each other some breathing space). I had pulled over and was trying to come to terms with what had happened, (a crowd already starting to form), when I heard Frans' motorbike approaching from the distance. I got very excited by the prospect of having Frans there with me, to share in my misery, rather than facing it on my own. I frantically waved my arms from the side of the road, but Frans' forward gaze never deviated an inch; he never looked in my direction and never saw me. I ended up fixing the tyre

surrounded by an ever-increasing crowd that pushed closer and closer all the time, until they were no more than 2 foot away from me. It drives you mad! They say India is even worse. Today, it took us 4 hours to cross the border. On the Pakistan side, someone wanted a bribe (\$8 for both of us; our cholera injections were out of date). On the Indian side we feared problems with the Carnet; Frans' engine number was nowhere to be found. We scratched it in ourselves with a pointed screwdriver. To our surprise, that was good enough for them and they accepted. (We later talked to some Dutch people who, for the same reason, were sent back to Lahore 2 days ago to have the number hammered in).

After the border we rode to Amritsar, relieved, but full of anxious premonitions. There was an unbelievable number of people on the roads, especially push-bikes, but they gave the impression to be more disciplined, and thus less dangerous, than in Pakistan. Somewhere along the way, a beautiful young woman waved to me and that made my day again!

Apparently women have another place here than in previous countries. (in India mainly Hinduism, whereas Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan mainly Muslim). I am curious to see what awaits us. We found a good place to stay in Amritsar (Tourist guesthouse, 2-person room 20 Rs = \$2). To close things off, we were cheated by a rickshaw driver who took us around town. But we did see a lot during his tour: Hindu temple with their large number of deities and the Golden Temple (fabulously grand and beautiful).



The Golden Temple in Amritsar

November 27, 1977. 150km before New Delhi.

I am starting to understand why so many people travel to India. Tonight we are sleeping in a luxurious, clean hotel (costs 15 rupees = \$1.50 for 2 people). We had a nice meal in a luxurious, clean restaurant with good service (2 persons, 31 rupees, reasonably extensive, with desert and coffee). Curiosity and attention not too bad, and, up to now, traffic not too bad either. Tonight we even had a beer (0.65 litre, 8 Rs). I had another flat tyre today, the second one in three days. This time the rear tyre. Crazy; 11¹/₂ years riding a motorbike: nothing. And now twice in three days! Tomorrow New Delhi. I am curious.



Somewhere in India (Photos Olivier Matthews)



Frans' journal:

Sunday, December 4, 1977. New Delhi. 23.00 hrs. I am surprised about my mood changes during this trip. I left Holland with a feeling of relief: at last I was free of that drivel about who you have to be and what you should be doing; ie career, start a family/home and other such provincial drivel. Then there was the reaction: a tiring life, no intellectual satisfaction (at least not for me), no possibility to be creative; I wished I was back home again. But I can see that I would probably end up in the same inertia as in the beginning of 1977. At least, now I know the cure.

Tuesday, December 6, 1977. 20.00 hrs. In fact, Delhi is more incredible than Tehran. I noticed this when I was stuck in traffic with the motorbike in Old Delhi. Buses, scooters, motorcycles, those stupid scooter-taxi's (you only notice them when they zoom by unexpectedly), trikes, bicycles, ox-wagons, cows, pedestrians, it is a swirling mass. And then that unbelievable and annoying curiosity!

The park in Cashmere Gate, just next to the campsite, is a respite. I am sitting relaxed on a stone bench. Huge vultures are lurking in a tree a little further, or they float high up in the sky. Endearing squirrels are running around, sometimes drinking from a water stream coming from a pipe in the ground. I see blackbird-like birds, then other birds again with a black crest, coming down just beside me. The low sun puts a golden glow on the grassy field to my right.



Vultures in a New Delhi park

When I behave more conspicuously by sitting down in the middle of a grass field and looking through the binoculars at the vultures, a group of young Indians comes crowding around me, staring and asking the usual questions. They are interested in the BMW too, which is here an unusual motorbike; normally they only see Enfields and Jawa's. A BMW is an unattainable luxury for them. "How many Horse-Power?!" is the question most often asked. But they don't mean the power of the engine, but the cubic capacity in decilitre!



The 'red tape', yes, yes, we get our share of that too. Like when we bought airplane tickets to Bangkok: 2 hours work in the bank, countless employees who all contribute a little bit to the process. It is a way of fighting unemployment in India. But Jan, Alastair and I were exasperated.

At the campsite here are two men of whom one is blind and the other accompanies him wherever he goes. How glad I am that I can see and that I have so many chances compared to a lot of people in India!

The letters from home that I receive show a certain jealousy and an irritation about the routine in their daily lives. I don't think it will be easy to again adapt to the routine life in Holland, with the constant desire to be entertained, the endless chattering with the same people all the time, without hope for a bigger venture. The emptiness that overtakes me sometimes during this journey is due to a lack of fulfilment of creative desires. I am not very involved with the motorbike, there is no opportunity for stargazing and astrophotography and also, I can't play with rockets. These are the things that I can do in the Netherlands. Even so, I did neglect these interests during the last year at home, mainly because of a lack of self-confidence and commitment, all due to depression. Somehow I was made to believe that relationships are more important than following one's own interests.

Yes, one can get fooled easily sometimes. But a journey to India can open your eyes!

We are now camped with a whole bunch of motorcyclists in a corner of the Delhi campsite: Jan and I, Alastair, one German (Michael von Pupka) on a BMW R 90/6, four Scotsmen on Moto Guzzi's and the Norwegian Telje on a Yamaha 750. Olivier has left for Nepal and Tim is still some way back. Al's bike had major mechanical problems but an Indian mechanic (a Sikh of course), with a great love for bikes and his trade, helped him out. And he didn't want any money!!



Camping in New Delhi

Sunday, December 11, 1977: 60 km before Kanpur. The incredible curiosity of the Indian people makes me furious. I have to be careful, otherwise I will have a nervous breakdown. Roads in towns and villages are incredibly crowded. Fewer and fewer people are able to speak English.

22.00 hrs. Tonight I was finally able to enjoy a wonderful starry night. Jupiter and its moons, the Orion nebula, the Andromeda nebula, the star clusters in Perseus. I felt I came to life again after the hectic life of daytime in India.

Jan's Journal:

December 11, 1977. Much has happened since my last journal entry on November 27. We left Delhi a few days ago after having stayed there for about 9 days, mainly lazing about and not doing very much.

We met some really nice people. Eg. a mechanic (Sikh), fantastically skilled tradesman, in love with his trade, not charging a cent if doing work for tourists. (His only opportunity to work with modern bikes).

My bike is one of the few on the road without problems. Passed 98000 kms on the odometer today.

India is incredibly tiring. Today a startling number of people on the road (2 hours for 70 km was the best we could do).

Yesterday we visited the Taj Mahal in Agra. Didn't really spend enough time there to do it justice. Frans has been back there this morning, but I couldn't get out of my bed. Built entirely of ivory-white marble, with exquisite inlay work of precious stones and in absolute symmetry, the building is very beautiful. In total some 20,000 people have worked on it and it took almost 20 years to build. It has been said that the builder wanted to erect an identical mausoleum in black marble on the other side of the river, but that he was stopped from doing so because the people were totally 'bled dry' and the population was too drained to further pay for it.

You see terrible accidents here. Cadavers are not being removed here, the vultures take care of things.

The trip to Australia has been organised. On January 15, the bikes will be put on board of a transport ship in Calcutta and we will then fly via Rangoon to Bangkok. From there, on February 8, a flight to Sydney.

And then, all I can do is hope that I will be able to earn some money to pay for my trip back, so that I won't have to sell my bike. I am going to need Frans' money to 'impress' the Australian customs in order to gain entry. After Australia, we will not continue together.

After a day like today, being sick and tired of India and having had more than enough of it for one day, you have to be careful not to take your frustrations out on each other.

Sometimes it seems to be more sensible to continue separately. But even Frans feels that it is important, amidst these never-ending, staring, pushy, curious people, to have an opportunity to exchange a few words with each other.

Nature is exuberant here and animals generally pretty docile.

In Delhi we were with 14 bike riders. One of the guys there had been present, when, in Afghanistan, between Herat and Kandahar, a New Zealand biker on a Yamaha 500 Enduro lost his life while crossing a river.

When we went through there, everything was still dry.

Yesterday, one of the Scottish bikers had a collision with a donkey. Headlight smashed, front fender damaged. Fortunately, there was no visible damage to the donkey and also the biker himself got away unscathed.

We met in Delhi many other people that we knew from the road (ie fellow-travellers). We played cards again with Piet and Truke.

I had a rather peculiar night once when I was invited, together with Alastair and Terry, to dinner in the 'Intercontinental Hotel' by the son of the owner. He also loves motorbikes. Afterwards we went to a "party"; it was slow and boring, but the affluence, the wealth that one person can possess here is extraordinary and unbelievable. That was quite clear. And snobbism also exists here.

If you then compare that with the extensive poverty and misery that you see here everywhere, then it becomes really difficult to try somehow to reconcile these things.

It is also still far from clear in my own mind as to what my share should be in solving these problems. I have the capacity to give every day ONE person a meal, (or 8 persons, 1 rupee (\$0.10) each), but inexorably the moment arrives that you callously shake-of a miserable, disfigured beggar while going about your business, because you can't go on for ever and because you have been hassled so often that you literally get sick and tired of it.

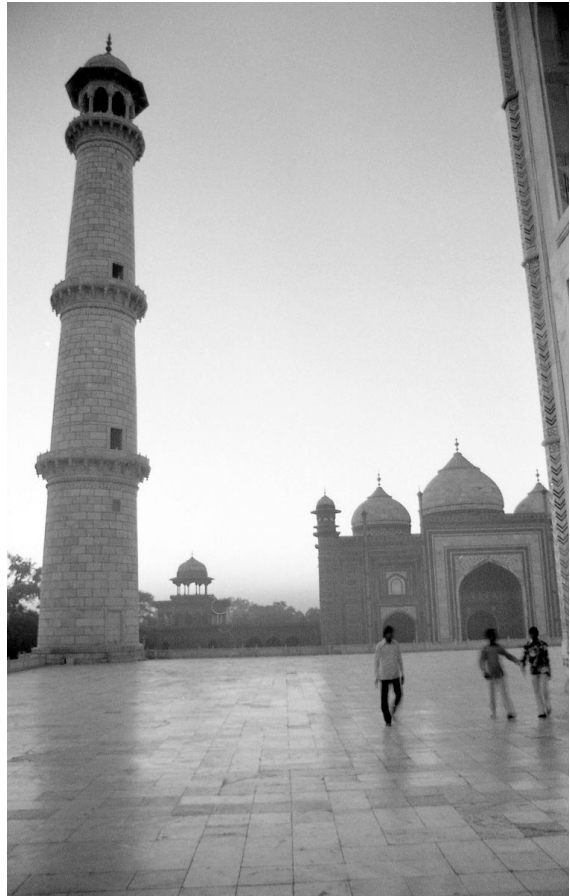
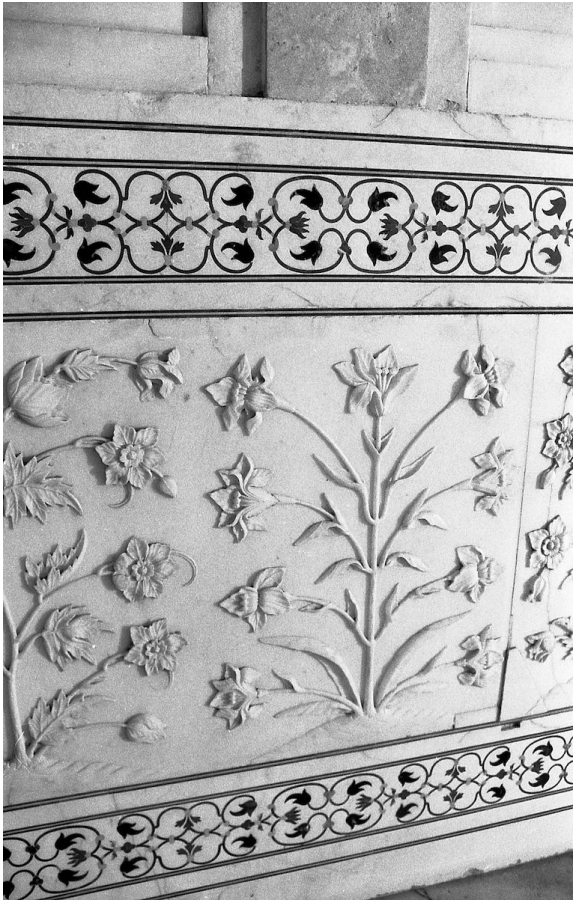
FUCK!!! I really hope that at some stage, for my own peace of mind, I will find some sort of answer to this dilemma.

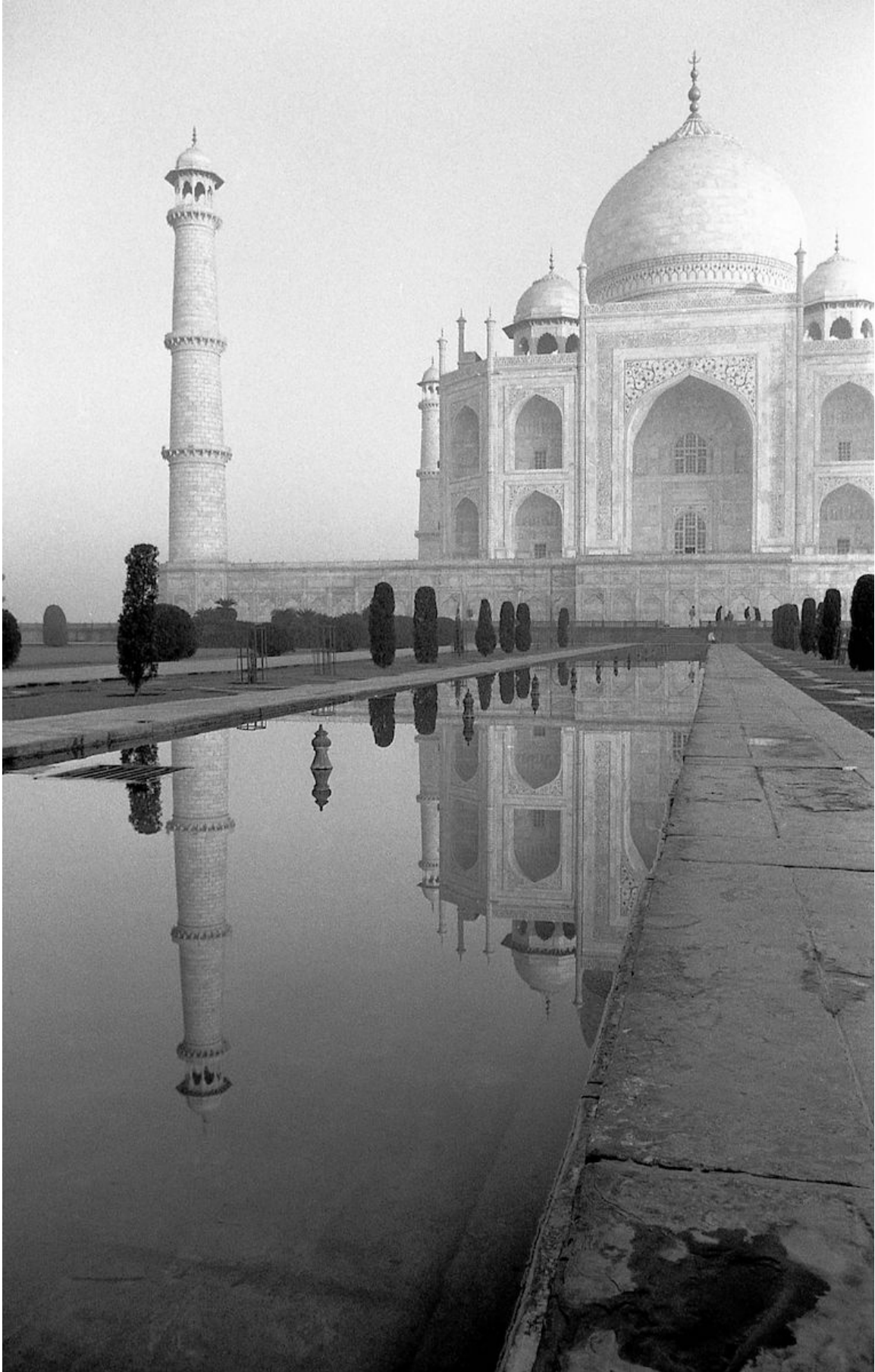


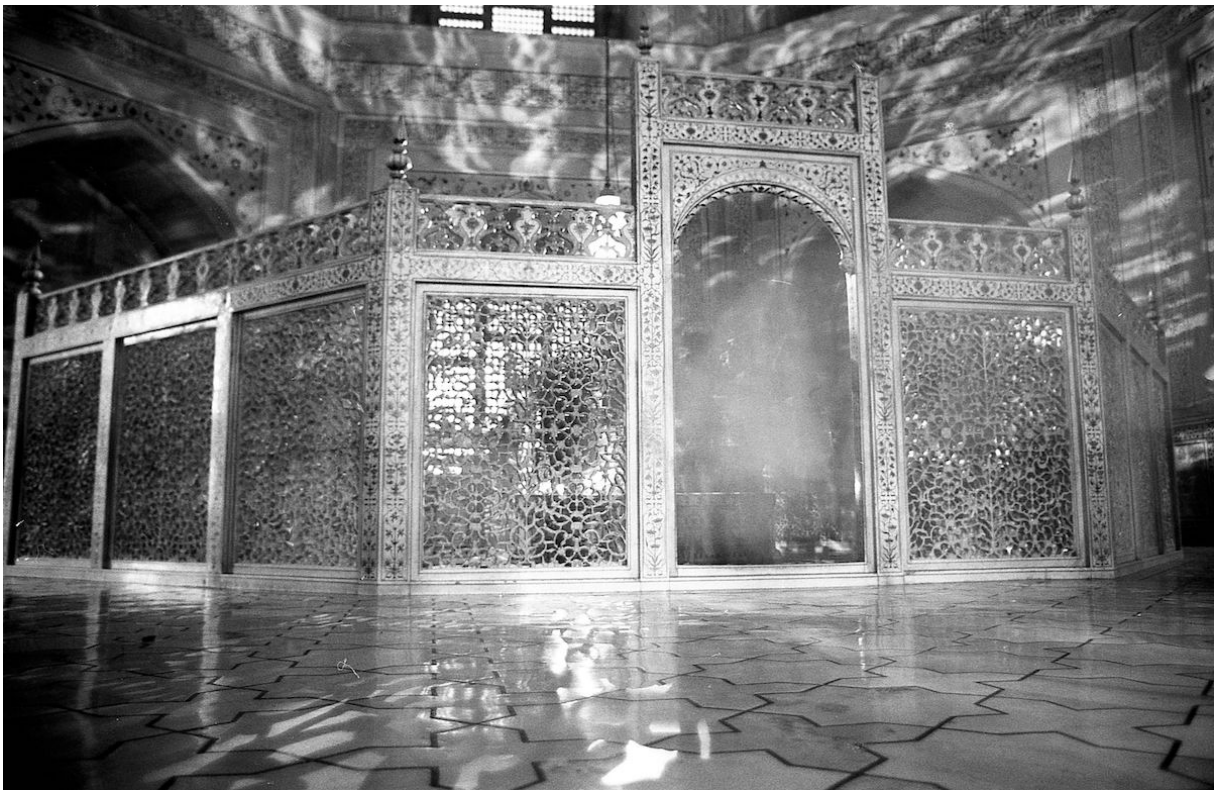
Streetscape in India (What do you think the man on the left is doing?)



Jan at the Taj Mahal







Taj Mahal interior



Frans' journal:

Tuesday, December 13, 1977. 22hrs. We are relaxing and reading in a small hotel, called "Swiss Lodge", in a small town on the border of India and Nepal. I believe it is called Sonauli. Outside I hear dogs barking continuously and the sounds of throaty rasping by people. In Holland you hardly hear this, but in India it is very common to hear, in public, the loud rasping of people clearing their throat of phlegm.

Today also was a tiring day, narrow roads, admittedly made of asphalt, but very, very crowded. Especially the last part to the border was teeming with ox-wagons.

In Faizabad, where, sure enough, there was a Tourist Bungalow, we met a Dutch student in cultural anthropology. He was doing research into activities of priests who receive and accompany the pilgrims around Lucknow. He admitted that life here was not all that nice. Little help from the university of Lucknow (mainly because of bureaucracy), wretched hotels, bad food. The longing for circumstances that were a little better led to higher expenses than provided. He had been here during the summer when the temperature was 45°C!!! How is that for a summer temperature? Not for me!

Today again: overwhelming interest in us. This quickly leads to annoyance and irritation and then it becomes difficult not to lose your temper. It is difficult for instance, not to be rude and act irritated when a friendly young Indian man, who is so obviously delighted to have an opportunity to talk to us, wants to chat.



Border India- Nepal

NEPAL

Wednesday, December 14, Pokhara. I experienced arriving in Nepal as a nice birthday present. Cool forests, and the highly sought-after tranquillity! We are in one of the many small 'hotels' near the lake of Pokhara. The Nepalese people are very friendly and the food is delicious. But we will continue towards Kathmandu. There, the decision will be made about the trek. After all, that is the reason I am in Nepal!

Unfortunately, that is not the case for Jan



Thursday, December 15. On this cool morning, I saw the razor-sharp peak of Machapuchare, the 'Fishtail Mountain', for the first time. My enthusiasm for the Himalayas was immediately ignited



Machupuchare

Tuesday, December 20, Kathmandu. And now, after five days in Kathmandu, I am almost ready to start my trek! I received my 'Trekking Permit' and tomorrow I will go to Pokhara to undertake the trek to the Jomosom. I have a burning desire to make the side trip to the Dhaulagiri Icefall. But have to be aware of the cold.

Kathmandu: yuk! Dusty, dirty, full of gurgling and defecating people (in the dry river bed, where there are a lot of pigs as well; a fitting company!).

The influence of Buddhism is clearly visible here, because of the many pagoda-like temples.





Last Sunday I practiced for the trek, fully packed, in the hills west of Kathmandu. Everywhere paths wind between the fields and villages, you see laughing people and playing kids. Next to a quarry, some people are chopping up big stones to make gravel for the roads.

In spite of the bustle I enjoyed walking there. None of that stupid staring that we experienced in India.

It is remarkable that the exhaustion from mountain walking has no influence on my good mood. This, in contrast to the effect of exhaustion on my mood after a day on the motorbike. Finally I went around on a bicycle again for some days. Lovely, almost forgot about that nice feeling.



In the evening we were in 'Durbar Square': shadowy figures whisper: 'Buy hash? Opium? Marihuana? We yell: 'HASH? NO, WE DON'T WANT HASH'. That helps a lot to get rid of them.

I read the autobiography of Edmund Hillary. This was a book that wasn't hard to find here; the bookshops are loaded with books about the Himalaya, Everest, etc. Again, I feel a deep longing for high mountains and I see in my mind's eye Misty, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, rise up before me.

Damn it, a regular existence back in Holland (with the booze to help me survive) can't be my sole fate! I still have some dreams, Armand! (NB. Armand is a Dutch singer who in the 1970s protested against the Dutch bourgeoisie, their materialism and their absence of ideals.)

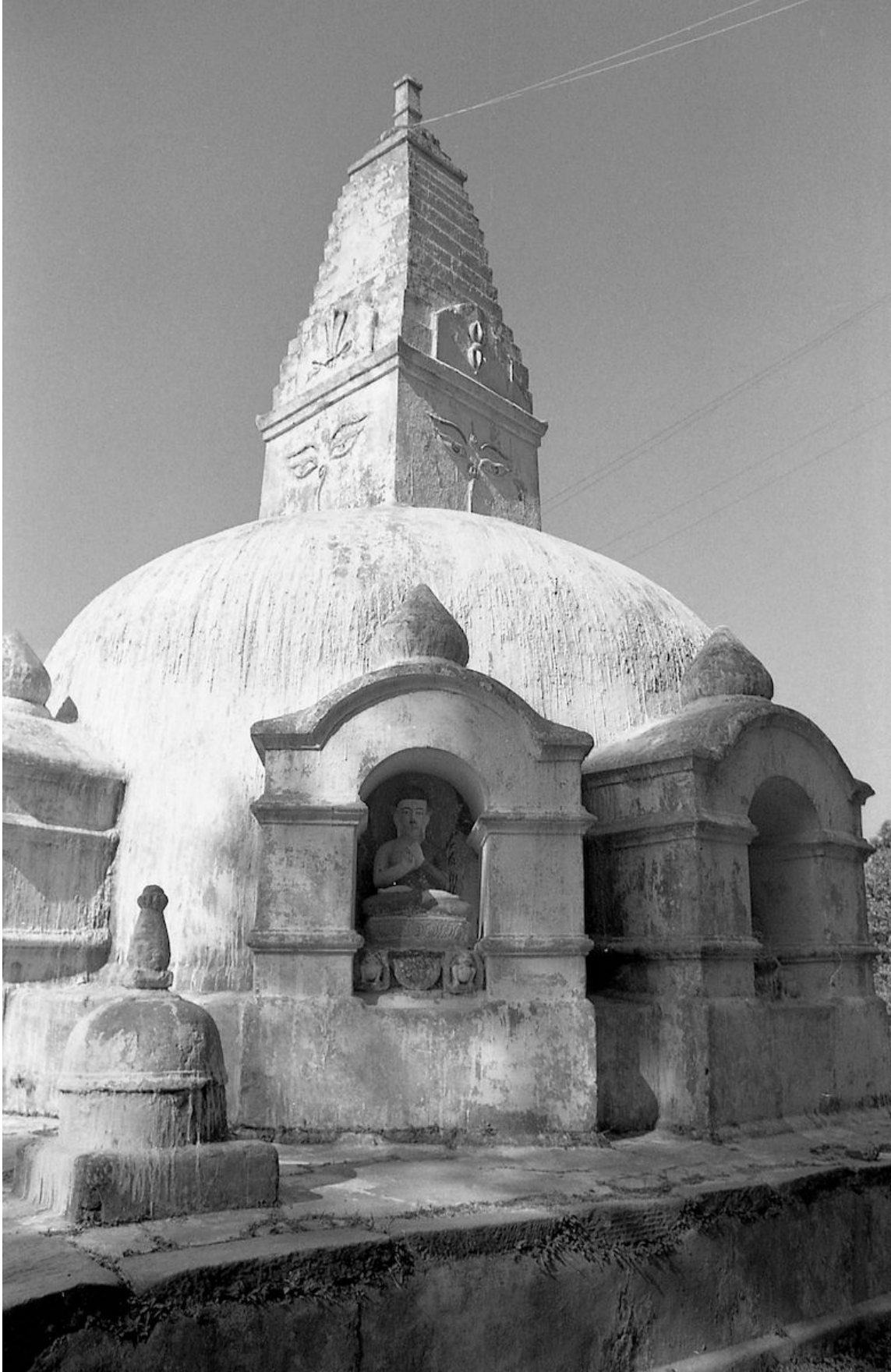
I curse my smoking habit and my feeling of total inertia and I just feel a burning desire to start my trek in the mountains.

In the meantime I received 5 letters: from my sister Meta, Wino/Diny, John, Maarten and Jan van Nes (with a report from the amateur rocket society). John writes about his enthusiasm for Nepal; Maarten thinks it is a miracle that we have made it this far and fills up his letter with a number of dirty jokes.



Kathmandu





Temple in Kathmandu

Thursday, December 22, Pokhara. 21 hrs. We initially left today for the trek, but now I am back again in 'Trekking Retreat'. How is that possible? Well, a thunderstorm arrived with hailstones of 1 to 3 cm! The hotel owner told me there is snow on the highest pass, halfway on the Jomosom trek. The moonlight glittering on the hailstones outside creates a fairy-like atmosphere. I get memories of those New-Year-Eves in the snow, back in Holland. I had a lively conversation with a few fellow walkers. I look around and see the Australian couple we met in Band-e-Amir as well! Maybe this is not surprising because we regularly meet up again with other travellers during this trip. Best example: the Dutch couple Piet and Truke, from Friesland, Holland: Jan and I have played cards quite a few times in the back of their van on this trip.



Settlement West of Pokhara

Friday, December 23. 7 hrs. Weather is clear. Dhaulagiri and Machapuchare tower in the Northwest. I just want to get on my way!

8.45 Finally on my way. But first in a taxi, crammed in with 9 Nepalese people, to the 'Shining Hospital'.

9.10 At the Shining Hospital my walk starts. The backpack gives its first annoyance: left band is pulling too much. Fixed that.

9.50 I see a small blue-grey bird with a brown-red tail, about as large as a sparrow.

10.15 Arrived in the Tibetan refugee camp. I am still going strong. Now on my way to Hyangya and Suikhet.

11.10 First disaster: my water container is leaking after a fall. I had bought it for 8 rupees from the boss of trekking retreat. It was a flimsy plastic thing.

11.50 I am going to wash my feet, shoes and trousers in the rice fields of Suikhet. It so happened that I plunged into deep mud. Also, I tried to repair my water container with Tesatepe. But it still leaks. Only way is to hold it horizontal. Not easy this way. One hand is occupied by the water container, with the other I carry the nylon bag with books, notebook and map. The weather is glorious. Dhaulagiri and Macha are not visible though. On the right there are high hills, with here and there deciduous trees.

12.30 In Suikhet. In front of me a meal of rice and dahl, the traditional trekkers food. I can buy a water bottle for 50 Rupees, another one for 20 Rs. Both leak like a sieve.

12.50 I finished my first rice and dahl meal. Some hot green slices were part of it. It all cost 5 Rs. It wasn't bad, when you're hungry. Now, an English speaking couple with huge backpacks slump down opposite me. The girl has legs like tree trunks, she will be able to do Mt. Everest!

13.45 Up, into the woods.

14.00 The coolness of the woods is lovely. We ascend well. I take a short rest. A Nepalese comes down with a type writer in his basket. *Namaste!* Up, left to Naudande.

14.30 Shortly before Naudande I rest. An old Nepalese man passes by and we talk a little. He is 58 and had been in the war in Switzerland. Wow, even at 58 he is still very capable of getting up the mountains! In the North the Dhaulagiri and Machapuchare are rising further and further above the ridge.

15.00 In the Mahendra Lodge in Naudanda. The sleeping hall: bed against bed, at least 15 of them. Outside I washed myself in a bowl. The soap falls on the sandy clay. Goddammit. Two girls of around 10 years old appear and start studying me. One of them accidentally drains the water tub.

It wasn't a bad day on the whole. Big stretches were flat, only the last part was tough. About 400 m ascending at a stretch. But that old Nepalese woman! Calmly, but relentlessly, stepping on. Me, time after time, walking firmly, getting ahead of her, but then having to pause again to rest. We arrived at the top at the same time. When I saw a guy coming up the 'stairs' carrying another guy on his back, I could hardly stand the sight and took to a bottle of rum.

The hotel owner smokes. I long for a cigarette. But these two weeks must be the turning point.

15.35 A pair of slippers would be welcome. I am sitting on the stone floor with my socks, glad to be rid of the heavy shoes.

16.00 Already 10 trekkers have arrived in this little hotel.

Things are going well! The bottle of beer before me is almost empty. It is all in my legs now.

16.20 I light a cigarette. There you have it! On the one hand the need for nicotine, on the other hand a reward for the fact that now I am finally getting some results. Tomorrow it is going to happen.



17.00 It is quite cold. Without eider down jacket it would be worse. I hired this jacket somewhere in Kathmandu. In some shops you can hire a complete mountaineering outfit. The two mountain giants are hidden in the clouds.

18.30 At the table, rice again with dahl and vegetables (of course). Well, this dahl (lentils) is a good source of protein. Two French couples are having a conversation. The Australians, whom I also saw in Pokhara, tell me some interesting things: in Darwin you can earn 200 dollars per week with unskilled work. It is just that an apartment is very expensive (40 dollars per week) and it is very hot there. At this time of the year it is the wet monsoon season there.



Hut along the Jomosom route



Path along Jomosom trek



Saturday, December 24. Woke up at 4.30 already. The Japanese man beside me had a restless night. He punched me, a few times at least. At 6.30 I rose. Inside it is pitch-dark, outside it is getting lighter. Dhaulagiri and Machapuchare. are shining in the sunlight. Upstairs everyone sleeps on. Only the Australian couple rises at 6.45. Outside the cold is not that bad. Porridge is served for breakfast.

After 5 minutes walking, a peaked cap with a gun approaches me and asks for my trekking permit. Up, toward Kahre, on the left the Pokhara valley is in the mist. The sun sparkles in the lake.

9.15 Climbing, climbing and more climbing. My spirit sinks a little, but gets better quickly after a short rest. I already snuffed two handkerchiefs full. I wash them in a stream. Beads of sweat are on my camera. I am really hungry.

10.55 Chandokar. Tired. The pain in my instep is becoming a hindrance. I am covered with sweat, underneath the roof of the house, in the shadow, it is cold. That is why I am now writing while standing in the sun. This kind of exhausting activities makes me think of how nice it would be to take some time out to gaze at the stars or to do astrophotography. I always have that after long hard efforts!

On my way I saw hundreds of caterpillars (brown, about 3 cm long), crossing the path, head to tail, in endless rows.

11.15 A couple of old people pass by and stare at me from across the table. I let them look through the lens of the camera for a while: the sky and clouds are mirrored in it.

12.45 I am on my way descending to Birethrante. A lot of toiling Nepalese are coming towards me, ascending. Big birds of prey (dark-grey with white) are hovering over the valley. The clouds are hanging above my head, no more than 500 m high. On the road, Nepalese are trying to sell me small bags that are decorated with beautiful stones.

13.15 Birethrante. In a lodge beside a wild streaming river, I have a black coffee. Why am I feeling homesick for Canada, for that trip I did with Ron Kok to Mt. Robson?

I am hurrying because it would be a bit embarrassing if the Japanese would overtake me. This is ridiculous! Look how affected I am by the performance society. When I arrive long before the Japanese my ego gets a kick!

13.30 There are the Japanese! They stay here, and will go to Annapurna Sanctuary tomorrow.

16.45 After a difficult climb I arrived at Hille. Things are much more primitive here than in Naudanda.

18.30 In the meantime I have washed myself at a waterjet. Two women are filling their copper drinking water pot. In the hotel, the hostess is preparing rice with dahl. The two German trekkers receive their share first, after that the five Nepalese. The portions are huge, served on tin lids. The food is eaten with their right hand. I get nothing because I forgot to put in an order. So, I take some crackers with cheese, which I like better anyway!

The pain in my instep is less. My shoulders hurt, but fortunately it is getting less. Thanks to the rum probably! This Nepalese rum doesn't taste that good, but it is cheap and helps to go to sleep.

Sunday, December 25, Christmas. Yesterday I had a lot of rum. Pain in my right foot. On the second and third toe (seen from the little one) are wounds now. Put Band-Aids on it and put two pairs of socks on.

8.10 Set off after a big helping of porridge. The path crosses the river and then ascends steeply. I put some flowers in a plastic bag, more specimens for Ron. Later I will identify them with the help of a book.

8.30 Rest.

8.50 Exhausted. It's hard labour. Seemingly the path continues to go up until 2000 m.



Donkey caravan in Nepal



Many stops on the way, looking and observing, which is nicer than a blind race to the top!
9.20 Exhausted again. Not a lot of people around here.

How attractive tinkering and stargazing now seem to me. I now feel I completely understand Pieter Meester's thoughts, and his dedication to his hobby. The serene beauty of the starry sky, as opposed to the ongoing struggle of a daily job. Most of us don't have the amount of respect and love for our hobbies and interests that Meesters had, (because of the absence of the above-mentioned contrast?) and consequently don't get very far with them.



Path on the route in Nepal

9.50 The path keeps on rising. By this time, being here and experiencing all this, here in the Himalayas, it seems so utterly and completely ridiculous that I should feel a lack of self-confidence towards people.

10.00 Arrived in Ulleri! How is it possible! At once I lay out the clothes to dry. Everything is wet, T-shirts, handkerchiefs, shirt, denim jacket. I keep on snivelling. That is a problem! Without the eider down jacket I would have been in real trouble.

The British couple have overtaken me. It seems that they are in a real hurry. In three days they want to get as far as possible. Not for me.

In this hotel you have more choice than in Kille, eg. a decent pancake.

Annupurna-south looms between two low mountain peaks.

12.00 A walk through a cool forest. There's a bush with white flowers that have a divine fragrance. The British couple is just in front of me.

13.45 I have withdrawn beside a small lake. Cheese + biscuit, then wash clothes. Rest for a while. Gorapani is an hour away.

14.10 Departure.

15.35 Finally arrived in Gorapani (2835 m). Thank God!

Some "character" told me a quarter of an hour ago that it was at least 3 quarters of an hour more walking to Gorapani. I nearly collapsed at the thought.

Now, being in a rather luxurious hotel (with an extensive menu), I feel relieved. There are even tables and chairs, a good bed and a warm room. Soon I will take a bath, (outside, admittedly), with the help of a bucket of hot water. It is Christmas, time to pamper myself a little.

I am not really liking this heavy toil. Possibly (probably) I am not fit enough. But I only go through this hardship, without too many complaints, in order to achieve a certain goal, something useful.



16.10 Just had a doughnut + coffee. Beside the fire, (with the smoke just going into the room!), sits a French couple. They have been to Tatopani.

16.40 I enjoyed washing myself in the bathing hut. A big bucket with hot water works miracles. The mood is fine again. An hour ago I nearly dropped dead here. But after a day of doing nothing I always feel pathetic. Influenced by Calvinism?

17.15 The lamps here consist of empty coffee pots filled with oil. A wick through the cover burns with lots of smoke.

Mondag, December 26. 7.00 hrs. It's snowing! A white Christmas.

Outside, the hills and the trees look like a fairy tale in the falling snow. I go down to the river to freshen myself up. Walking back up again, everything feels sore. Yet the two pairs of socks have helped a lot; I have no more blisters.



10.30 Descent in falling snow, which turns into rain later. In Sikha I have a lovely baked cornbread with beans and tea. The Australian couple, (I thought they were British), are also here. It continues to rain.

14.40 Tatopani – Dhaulagiri lodge. Tatopani means ‘hot water’; from the cliff wall, just next to the river, hot water flows from several springs. Some of the trekkers are taking a bath there. - I have been here now for half an hour. It keeps on raining like mad. All my gear is wet. Now I am paying the price for having forgotten to cover my rucksack. I dry my sweater and socks over the cooking fire. Smoke stings my eyes and the Nepalese laugh. I am sitting in a circle of Nepalese around the fire; hot on the front, cold on my back.

A lousy day today. Not that heavy, but everything is dirty. I still remember a Swiss man (between 40-50 years old) who moved along the path like a mountain goat (and did this with a heavy backpack!).

18.00 A petrol lamp is suspended above my head. I managed to dry my trousers a little, while sitting around the fire. The taproom is full of trekkers. We are waiting for the food. The rum makes me feel better. Dammit, that rum has become a necessity!

Except for writing, there is nothing to do. Labouring, resting and then thinking. But not the kind of action I like. That will come.

19.00 Dinner is done. I had a nice conversation with my colleague-trekkers.



Tuesday, December 27. 9.00hrs. Slept well. The sky is heavily clouded. My knees and feet still hurt. I will stay another day. Most of the others will go on. A Swiss guy told me that there’s snow in Lete.

16.00 Brown bread and cheese is sold in the little shop opposite the Namaste hotel. Something to remember for when I return!

19.40 After dinner, talking and joking with the American and the Swiss. It seems Lete is the border. Many will return tomorrow via Beni in order to avoid the Gorapani mountain.



Wednesday, December 28. 7.30hrs. The weather is not brilliant, but it has to happen now. Between the clouds some blue spots are visible. So, I will leave for Lete. The bill is 70 rupees. A bit crazy really.

8.30 Left. 10.15 Dana. Drizzle, clouds everywhere.

14.30 Arrived in Ghasa. Still a lot of clouds. I will stay here today. Tomorrow I shall decide whether to go on or not. A trip to Lete and back kind-of appeals to me

17.45 We have had dinner. The Australian and Swiss couple are both here too. My knees still hurt.

19.30 I go to sleep. The sleeping room is full of smoke. The Nepalese in the living room are stoking a big fire. Ventilation: what's that?





Along the route in Nepal

Thursday, December 29. 11.50 hrs. Went until Lete and then back. Heavy clouds and light snowfall. A glimpse of a huge mountain range in the north, vaguely between the clouds. The deepest ravine in the world begins here. I continuously felt that I was wasting my time; that is why I went back. Hopefully I will arrive in Tatopani today.

17.00 There we are again, back in Tatopani. Immediately bought a load of cheese, bread and rum.

19.30 Next to my room some cattle are mooing continuously.

On my way to the taproom I first didn't see a low hanging beam and, after that, a high threshold. After having tumbled from the little stairs I roll backwards into the room of some other trekkers, flinging open their closed door with force. This event causes hilarity among the trekkers for the rest of the evening.

I will help myself to a fair amount of rum in order to get some sleep.

Friday, December 30. 8.30 hrs. On my way to Beni. A long, nice walk through the ravine. When the road starts to ascend, I am getting very frustrated and have trouble keeping up my spirits.

17.30 Beni. I have really had enough. In the river I saw giant boulders, that consist of a conglomerate of buffed stones. They were, as it were, cemented together. I am staying with a family and just shared a rice and dahl meal with them. There was a lively conversation with many discussions (?!). Afterwards the dog licked the plates clean (large metal lids).



Saturday, December 31, New Year's Eve! What am I doing here?!

8.15 Direction Khanyaghat – Kusma

Kusma. I am staying with a family again. The food came rather late, so I satisfied my hunger with a kind of flour balls. At 6pm the rice and dahl was ready. During the meal a distinct grunting was audible. What could that be? It turned out that two pigs were waiting their turn at the front door! I went upstairs and returned a quarter of an hour later to have a tin of pineapple opened. And yes: the pigs were doing the dish washing in the kitchen!

Sunday, January 1, 1978. 7.30hrs. The moon (in its last quarter) is above a cool morning landscape. I have breakfast in a lodge several hundreds of metres down the road. This is going to be the last day of the trek.

-And what a day it was! Seldom I have been so exhausted. Stupidly enough I undertook the trip back to Naudanda together with two Nepalese. That is to say, they stuck with me all the time and said that I had to stay with them otherwise it would be hard to get to Naudanda before dark.

Well, they live here and had only little luggage, so understandably I, (with a rucksack of more than 20 kg), had a hard time. At a certain stage they apparently considered the situation hopeless and left me behind. My knees were hurting and the last big slope I descended little by little.

It was dark anyway when I finally arrived in Naudanda. I was lucky to end up with a caravan of Nepalese. Thus, I had no difficulty to find my destination. Once there, I jumped without delay on the bus to Pokhara. It left at once and drove with great speed (in the dark) along frightening abysses to the Pokhara airport. The last part I walked.

It was nice to just sit at a table in 'Trekking Retreat' and to just eat, drink and rest.

(Later I met up again with Jan in Pokhara. We stayed there for some days and then went to Kathmandu where we met up again with Craig Holden, Tim, Bruce and Tiina. We spent several more comfortable days in Kathmandu and then, on January 9, Tim, Jan and I left for Calcutta by motorbike.

Not a little scared, we crossed the 2700 m high pass, halfway Kathmandu and Raxaul. The road was covered with stretches of ice and it was snowing. But we made it to the border unscathed. There I bluffed some border officials and didn't declare my 300 mm tele-lens. Which I sold it later in Calcutta.)



Tim and Jan

Jan's journal:

Pokhara, December 30, 1977

Haven't written in a long time. Not because there was nothing to write about, but because I haven't had time. I have had a wonderful time in Nepal. What a country, and what people; fabulous! People love to have fun and are friendly. Many picturesque and strange statues in Kathmandu. An intriguing city that never gets boring. I was there approximately 12 days. Frans went 'trekking' (Jomoson). Today I heard that a motorcyclist was severely injured by the Indian border (collision with a truck). India, (from Delhi till the Nepalese border), was abominable; enormous numbers of people on the road. very tiring. Collision with a pushbike rider, nothing serious, only some material damage. When I saw that the man himself was not harmed I judged it wiser to simply continue on my way (it was clearly his fault anyway). Nepal was a breath of fresh air. The last 14 days I spent mainly in the company of Michael Von Pupka, a German biker. I celebrated my birthday on the 29th in a kind of fashion; Michael, Claudia, Ralf, Tim and Bruce were present. I even received some presents. On December 26th I wrote a letter to Frans Jacobs in Holland. That was OK. For the first time in my life I smoked, very modestly, some hash. Too modestly, because it didn't do anything for me. I started to drink again after 2 months of abstinence. 'Country Liquor' in Nepal is cheap and very drinkable (1/4 litre \$0.40). Had some problems with the bike; very weak spark on start-up. I was just about to send for a new ignition coil when everything seemed to work ok again. I didn't find any real problems, so I'm not sure if I can trust the 'fix'. Wait and see. In Kathmandu I had a few days of feeling rather down and listless. 2 reasons: worries about the future (not enough money to reach Australia, although everything already booked). Sold my radio (about \$90) and some books. There was another reason, but I have already forgotten. Anyway, I'm over it now and I am enjoying myself again. Today, for the first time in a long while, I am sleeping in the tent again. Quite nice, under the starry sky. And yes, we also rode to the Chinese border (with Michael). Unfortunately, we weren't allowed to set foot on Chinese soil.

I have written many letters and postcards to Holland. I am curious to see how many reactions I will get. Tomorrow is New Year's Eve.

Earlier tonight I witnessed something special: a falling star traced a bright trail through the night sky over at least 90 degrees. It lasted several seconds.

Tonight's account hangs together like loose sand, but at least these are some impressions of the last couple of weeks. I will try in the future to write more regularly.

Pokhara. December 31, 23.30 hrs

In half an hour we will enter the New Year.

In 4hrs 40 minutes + half an hour it will be in Holland; at this moment it is in Holland 19.10 hrs. In Tiel they will be thinking of me. I just wished they knew how good things are going for me. I had the same thoughts earlier this week, in Kathmandu, in 'The Pie Shop', while I was enjoying a big, delicious piece of cake. I thought then, that, if they could only see me sitting here, having a good time, they would know that they don't have to worry about me. Chances are that I am having a better time than they have.

In a little while I will be entering the new year, sharing a drink and toasting the new year with Michael. This afternoon we had the idea, (unfortunately too late), of going into the mountains, so that we would wake up on the first morning of 1978 in the loneliness and splendour of the beautiful nature here. Unfortunately, we thought of it too late to make it happen.

By the way, earlier today I met an Australian farmer who has been here already 10 years. I am going to visit him later in the week; could be very interesting.

Anyway, I am going to finish writing now. In a few moments I will enter 1978, under a magnificent starry sky, in the company of Michael, enjoying a couple of stiff drinks together.

Friday January 6, 1978. Kathmandu

Today, for the first time again, I enjoyed a delightful, magnificent hot shower.

Today my bike passed the 100,000 km. In fact, at this very moment it is parked next to the lodge with 00000 km on the counter! We met today, against all expectations, Craig Holden, the push-biking American again. It was great to see him again. Together with Craig, Frans, Bruce, Tiina and Tim, we had a splendid, sumptuous meal and a nice after-dinner chat. (1 hot lemon drink, 1 kothay (fried) rice, 1 banana split, 1 coke, 1 coffee. 20 NRs=\$2).

Since about 4 days, for the first time on this trip, I suffer from the "trots". If it is not getting better by tomorrow I am going to try to do something about it (eg. not eating anything for a day, except maybe for some yoghurt). Until now I haven't taken any medication on this trip, except for Malaria pills.

At night, it gets reasonably cold here. As far as that is concerned I am looking forward to India again.

Monday, we will leave Nepal and the Himalayas behind and leave for Calcutta.



The Himalayas (photo Olivier Matthews)

THE LAST LEG: KATHMANDU-CALCUTTA-AUSTRALIA

Frans' journal:

Tuesday, January 10, Muzaffarpur

We left Kathmandu yesterday morning in good spirits and crossed the border into India, but now it seems that the motor trip ends here in Muzaffarpur for me. For the time being anyway. About 80 km before this city, on a bad road, the shock absorbers gave up. That is to say they are now too weak and I am too low in the suspension, causing some interference in the universal joint of the driveshaft.

Very carefully we continued on to Muzaffarpur, where we camped on a grass field near a big bungalow. We went immediately to the railway station to arrange transport: tomorrow a train leaves for Calcutta.

The station was incredibly crowded, everywhere were people standing, sitting and laying around. There must be many that live there permanently!

On the grass field of course there is again enormous interest in us. Thank God they all leave when it starts to get dark and we enjoy a quiet evening.

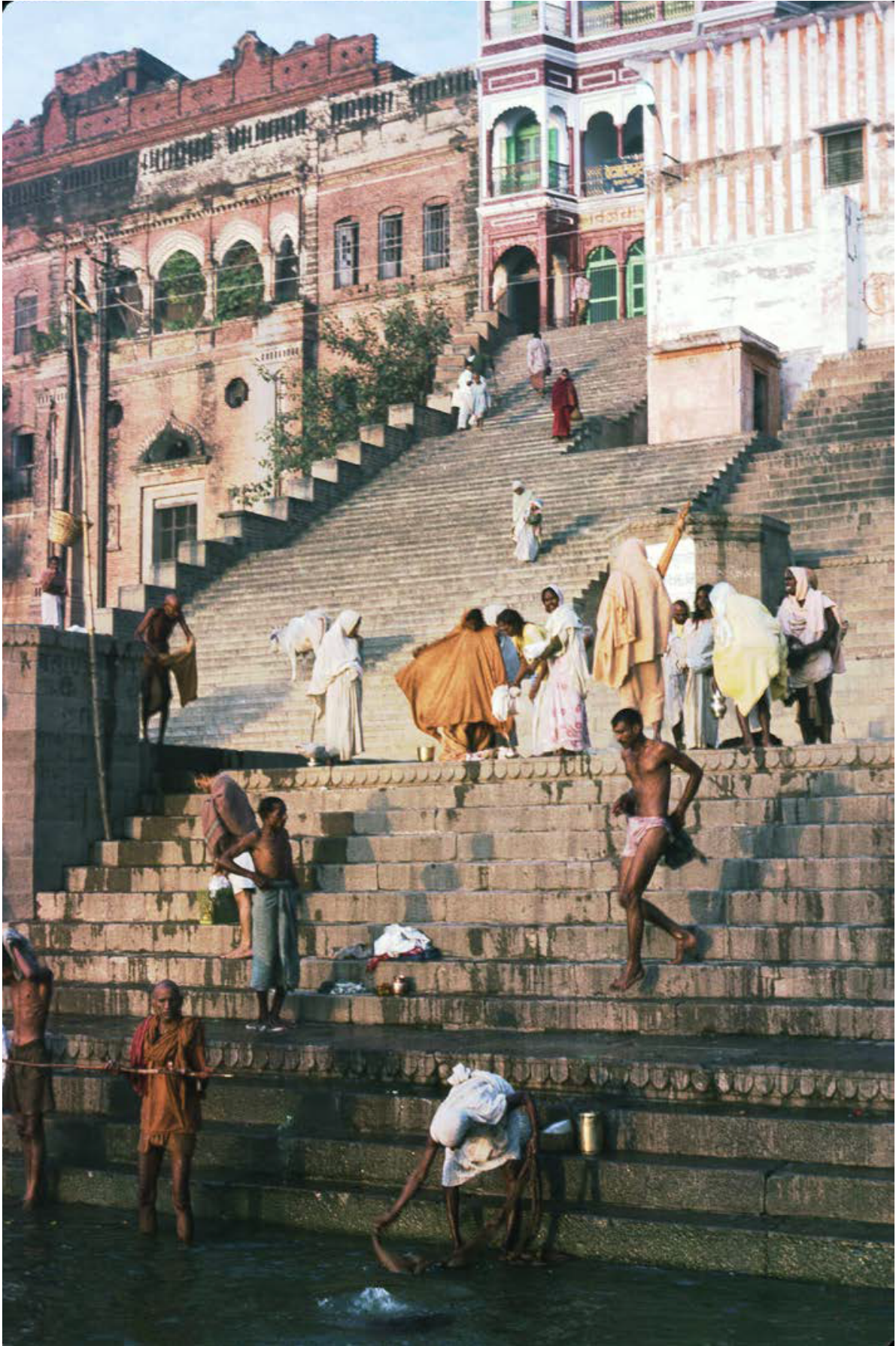
On the fence beside the bungalow I can distinguish in the dark a small stocky bird: a little owl!

Using the 20x80 binoculars I observe double stars; M33 is not much, not even with the 20x80. The surface brightness is much less than that of M31.

Tim is sitting, or actually laying, under his mosquito net, writing in his diary for a long time. He also managed to get some mosquito nets for us in the city, they only cost 27 Rupees.



Along the Ganges



Along the Ganges in East-India

Wednesday, January 11, Muzaffarpur

At 6.30 I crawl out of my tent. Above the walls that surround the grass field many faces already show, looking intently at us, and it isn't long before the first people walk onto the grassy field. First they look at my unfriendly face, but then they gather around the figures of Jan and Tim in their sleeping bags. When they wake up, I quickly see an expression of resignation appear on their faces.

We have a quick breakfast and start to pack, a job that takes quite some time always. The crowd increases to several dozens of people and all they do is stare at us. It is getting on our nerves and we make a sport of it to stand on their toes from time to time. This doesn't seem to cause any anger whatsoever, there is just some giggling, however

Later, returning from the station, where I went to arrange the transport of my motorbike, I see that there's a big fuss and lots of commotion: Tim's shoulder bag has gone missing with all his travel documents, films, money and diary! Normally he carries it on him, but on starting his bike he had put it behind him for a moment. "Wow, finally an opportunity for revenge for the stepping on toes", someone in the crowd must have thought.

Of course, Tim is devastated. Eventually a policeman comes, who at his ease writes down the story. Things don't look good. How do you catch a thief in a city of over a million inhabitants! And he could just as well have taken the bus to another town.

As a last resort we offer a hefty reward: 300 Rupees. That is a month's earning!

And what do you think!? After two hours the policeman comes back, accompanied by a crowd. In his hands the bag! Only the (cheap) camera has been stolen out of it. He had found the bag somewhere in a ditch in the city (or scouts of his had done so). Delighted he accepts the reward.



Tim's bag returned in Muzaffarpur

The moment of farewell has come: Tim and Jan continue by the motorbike to Calcutta. They take me to the station, where to our surprise we also find Bruce and Tiina. Tiina still does not feel well, which is why they gave up on the trip as far as the motorbike is concerned. Together we manage to put the heavy loaded motorbikes into one of the luggage compartments. Fortunately, some Indians come to help us, for the wagon's floor is much higher than the platform.

14.30 I am sitting in the 1st class compartment, relaxing for a moment before the train leaves. The Indian opposite me stares at me all the time. Out of the window I see big steam locomotives. For some reason I find those the most impressive machines that exist. Is it because of their dark, threatening appearance, their hiss, the huge wheels and the rattling connecting rods?

The trip's price is not high: 105 Rupees for me, 90 for the motorbike and another 10 Rupees *baksheesh* (tip). Later a couple of Brahmans enter and throw a cool glance at me. I return the coldness. Then I decide to take my stuff and join Bruce and Tiina in their compartment. But unfortunately the railway guard will not let me stay there, in spite of my attempt to bribe him. I have to go back to my own place, to the nasty Brahmans. This repeats itself two times. After a reasonable evening meal, we flip the benches and go to sleep at 23 h. This works well, we are with only 4 people in the compartment. In the 2nd and 3rd class it will not be that easy!



Jan somewhere in East-India

The only problem is that, when you sleep on the upper bench, you have to be careful where you put your belongings. I had put lots of stuff around my head, which the next morning I had to gather up from the floor. I am sure that several items would have landed during the night on the head of the person below me.

Thursday, January 12, 1978

At 6 in the morning we rode into the suburbs of Howrah, the western part of Calcutta. I went immediately to Bruce and Tiina and when the train stopped in Howrah station, we immediately ran for the luggage compartments with the motorbikes.

Although we didn't have any illusion of arriving there first, the sight of the compartment's interior bewildered us. It was chock-full with Indians. Given our experiences in this country during the last month this wasn't totally unexpected, but what bewildered us was that, besides our bikes, apparently an enormous number of porcelain pots with white paint had been loaded in this compartment as well. And these had not been fixed properly. The result was many broken pots. Literally everything was covered with white paint, including the motorbikes! When the Indians saw our amazement, they started to point accusingly at the motorbikes. They wanted them out. Well, so did we, and with all forces united we dragged the smeared vehicles out. One of the Indians tried to lift my bike at the plastic mudguard. Crack! Afterward they stood in line with their hands up for money. With a sigh we pulled out our wallets ...



Jan somewhere in East-India.

CALCUTTA

January 12-26, 1978

It is still early in the morning on January 12. Carefully, on the bikes, we pick our way through this giant city. At an intersection we stop for a while to study our primitive map. Within minutes a crowd starts to gather around us. Tiina gets upset and screams: "Let's hurry up! Let's move on or we'll get another bloody crowd!"

The tourist office says that we can camp at St. Paul's Cathedral. It is located in Calcutta's more modern part, far from the horrible Howrah where we arrived. We drive into the cathedral's garden and already see some cars belonging to other western tourists. First we have to report to the 'supervisors': in a wooden hut two old ladies are seated who look at us flabbergasted. Finally, they allow us, reluctantly, to camp on the grass field. They are concerned that we'll be robbed and they advise us to give our precious stuff to the car owning tourists.

To my delight, I discover that there is a big planetarium next to the cathedral! There are three performances: one in Hindi, one in Bengali and one in English. Again the starry sky becomes my refuge: sitting in a chair and watching the richness of the stars that are projected on the dome. Should I have been interested more in the seething life in Calcutta? Well, there comes a time when one has to stop moaning about what one *should* be and accept what one really is. After the first performance that I attended I enter the operating room. The two Indians get up at once and offer their chair, although I do not exactly look like a gentleman. I ask them where in Calcutta one can buy books on astronomy. They reply that there is an Oxford bookshop in Park street.

In Calcutta many places bear English names and west of the cathedral is the pompous Victoria monument.

On January 14, Jan and Tim also arrive and the next day we turn our attention seriously to the problem of getting the motorbikes to Sydney. I didn't take a lot of notes about those 4 days of paperwork at the harbour, but the transport of the bikes (with a ship of the 'Shipping Corporation of India') we arranged through an agent. We spent a lot of hours in the huge customs building, where the fat, grinning Mukerji managed to do two things at the same time: fill in our forms and have a telephone conversation with a colleague. We fight our way with the motorbikes through the Calcutta traffic, from one office to the next. But by now we are getting used to the Indian traffic, which, in terms of being chaotic, surpass by far the traffic chaos in Amsterdam. However, knowing that we won't have to face this for very long anymore, we accept it with a smile (and now and then with a firm Dutch curse!).

Later, someone of the Shipping Corporation comes to measure our bikes. The price of the crossing depends on the measurements. He was extensively assisted by us: one of us holds the rear end of the tape-measure. Each time when the man goes to the fore part with the tape-measure, we cautiously shove the rear end from mud-guard to the rear wheel hub. He is a little suspicious, but at the fourth time measuring we succeed in our criminal intentions. At least, that's what we thought. As it turned out however, in the harbour the bikes were measured once more and there, no one of us was present to 'assist'.

January 16, 1978.

In the afternoon I ride back from the city to the camping. Jan is sitting beside the tent, but next to him sits someone else. I have to look twice, for I can't believe my eyes. No, surely it cannot be! It is no one else but Frans Jacobs, complete with beard and laughing face! I presumed him to be in Holland, far, far away from here. For a while I am lost for words.

Frans had come to India to make a photoshoot of the flood in South-East India and because he had understood from our letters that we would be quite some time in Calcutta, he decided to come from Delhi directly to here. How to find a few Dutchmen in a city of some 9 million inhabitants? Well, first he went inquiring at the harbour, and so, asking around, he learned that some motor bikers were camping at St. Paul's Cathedral. Well, I suppose, us not being exactly inconspicuous also contributed to the success of his search.

The three of us then went by public transport to a park outside Calcutta to talk and exchange experiences. Well, public transport in Calcutta! One could easily make a slapstick film about

it! The traffic in Calcutta is chaotic (that is to say from our perspective) and busses which in Holland would have been sent to the scrap heap a long time ago, plough their way in between the countless taxis and other road users, tilting heavily, producing black smoke and honking incessantly. The tilting is, because, according to Indian ideas, a bus is only full when a large number of people are clinging onto the bus, standing on the footboards. The driver sits in a locked cabin, otherwise there would be people sitting on his lap too ... My height causes me much discomfort, and much hilarity for the other passengers. When an empty chair becomes available I forget my modesty and make a beeline for it.

In the evening we have a good glass of wine in Frans' hotel room in the YMCA. He likes the Indians because they are such friendly people. Indeed, socially they are rather special. One day, when we had to wait for hours in the harbour, I had a long conversation with a civil servant. He couldn't get over the fact that I was travelling alone, that I wasn't taking my whole family with me!



Sir Timothy John Chetwood Fryer in Calcutta

Jan's journal:

Calcutta, January 16, 1978.

Much has happened the last 10 days. With the three of us (Frans, Tim and me) we departed from Kathmandu and rode over 2 days to Muzzafarpur where Frans put his bike on the train (on a bad stretch of road he went through his shock absorbers).

While packing up our campsite in Muzzafarpur, Tim's bag was stolen from under our very eyes. It was less than 2 metres away from us, left unattended for maybe a minute, while we were being surrounded by at least 20 onlookers. Incredibly bold. It contained everything of value to him; passport, Carnet de Passage, travel documents etc. (Two hours later, thanks to the police, everything was returned to him, except the camera.)

After that, Tim and I rode to Calcutta. That was a good experience. The absence of Frans and the presence of Tim clearly influenced the way I experienced things. Some crazy things happened when we chose a road that was not used as much. At first we experienced an overwhelming curiosity and attention. Worse than I ever experienced before. We ended up escaping, by taking a rickshaw and going to the cinema. We even signed autographs (ridiculous!)

Later there were long stretches with beautiful scenery and few people, where it was delightful to ride and where you could stop without seeing a soul. With the exception perhaps of an occasional pedestrian, like the one who promptly proceeded to kiss Tim's boots (probably as thanks for a cigarette that was offered to him). Because of this, (the scenery and the solitude), I became curious again to see Southern India.

*Another incident in Burduwan: we almost got into a fight with a stubborn, pig-headed Indian who refused to be contradicted. It was because we didn't speak high enough of India and he really took it personal that we had the gall to plan to leave India again, having only seen 5% of the country and he became absolutely furious, seething, if you started to talk about other countries than India, such as Nepal, Sri Lanka or Afghanistan. You could only get him to quieten down by wholeheartedly agreeing with him; we **had** to repeat after him: "Indian people: small purse, big heart". The conversation was really too crazy to believe; if anyone would have told me this, I wouldn't have believed it. Everything was along the lines of: accept my hospitality, or I'll shoot! But, other than that, everything was as it was: overwhelming, impressive, strange, 'Easterly', etc. Immense numbers of people in the cities, busy with all kind of things.*

First impressions of Calcutta: dirty, busy, smelly. Strange mixture of East and West, poor and rich, illiterate and cultured etc. There was a planetarium. We saw a movie (One flew over the Cuckoo's nest) in a luxurious Western-style cinema. Outside: rows of people, covered in rags, sleeping on the pavement. Howrah, slum area: misery, busy, alive, scary in its scale and depth of poverty. We are here on a little camping place with some other people, next to a church (St Paul's Cathedral) and this afternoon I had problems believing my eyes when thought I saw Frans Jacobs (whom I thought to be in Holland, waiting for our next letter), crossing the church yard, walking in my direction. But it was true. That was too crazy. It took me an hour to get used to the idea. I thought it was brilliant. We sat down and talked for ages, enjoying a drink in the process. He is going to do a photo-shoot in South India of the reconstruction and rebuilding after that hurricane in December. It was a real crazy experience, such an unexpected meeting, but very nice.

Frans' journal:

Tuesday, January 17

Beardy Jacobs went on his way and we busied ourselves at the camp site.

In the evening Tiina welcomes Tim with the original greeting: 'Hey! There's our upper middle class pom!'. Tim's reaction: 'What, what, what??', totally confused by that sharp tongue.

During the night at the docks, in our absence, the motorbikes are put in the slings and hoisted aboard the 'Vishva Vikas'. Bruce's Suzuki goes to Melbourne (his parents live in Tasmania), the motorbikes of Tim, Jan and I to Sydney. The whole thing costs me 1300 Rupees (\$130, transport by ship, costs of the agent, insurance).

Most of the luggage stayed on the bike and was attached firmly to it with steel ties (1 Rs per tie). As could be expected the customs were to roam through our stuff extensively. We also saw them break open a lot of wooden boxes, that were waiting for transportation, and scatter the contents all over the floor! The sending of a VW-bus cost about 5 to 6 times the price of a motorbike. Not something to do often!

Tuesday, January 24

Somewhere south of St. Paul's Cathedral I notice a huge number of vultures. Presumably they are eating a carcass, it is too far away to properly see. Between them, some Indians are busy, I don't know what they are doing, but every now and then they throw something at the vultures (meaning to hit them). At one stage, one of them takes a vulture by its wing and hurls it round and round, fast. After half a minute the vulture tumbles dazed down the slope of the waterside and shakily flaps on. The Indians must know that vultures are cowards, otherwise such a large number of animals would not tolerate to be bothered about, just like that.

Wednesday, January 25

It's very hot in the tent. Just the inside tent is still standing, I have removed the outer cover (no rain expected). Jan and Tim are sleeping (in their sleeping bag) on the lawn. Tomorrow we will leave India; goodbye to curious crowds, goodbye to officialdom! I don't regret leaving Calcutta. I don't think I ever saw so many people in one place as here in Calcutta. When you walk in the vicinity of New Market in the evening, there is a dense crowd milling around in between the stalls. As a westerner you can't expect to be left alone, or walk at your ease and look around. Already at several hundred metres distance of this huge covered market, 'market boys' come to drag you to one of the shops. Of course they receive rewards for each customer. And if they get nothing: I don't think there is any dole here in Calcutta ...

BANGKOK

Bangkok, Saturday, January 28, 8.00 hrs. I am sitting in hotel Hualampong at the table, having breakfast. The traffic is thundering past the hotel. Incredibly noisy, day and night. It is now noticeable that we are coming closer to the sun! In the plane I read in the 'Nations', the Thailand newspaper, that the minimum temperature that day would be 24°C and the maximum 33°C. This means pulling yourself together and concentrating on what you are doing, that way the heat will have less effect on you, even when you are sweating all the time. We found a letter from Ollie. On December 31 he was still in Singapore and should be somewhere in Australia now. He wrote that he was getting fed up with travelling and was feeling like settling down somewhere for a while.

We have to get used to Bangkok being a lot more expensive than India, but on the other hand everything is better looked after. The hotel Reno, where we were yesterday, cost 220 Baht for 3 people. But that air-conditioning is appreciated!

It seems that it is the habit of (male) tourists to take Thai girls to their hotel room. In Hotel Reno we saw several notices saying: 'Please pay an additional 20 Bt for the overnight guest'. In fact, I am not sure what to do in Bangkok. I am already done with playing the tourist. I have a desire to be more targeted. I am sick and tired of sauntering through cities. The Floating Market seems nice. The rest doesn't interest me that much anymore. The traffic bustle is overwhelming as everywhere in Asian cities.



River transport, Bangkok

Sunday, January 29, 13.30 hrs. A cool room in the 'Malaysia Hotel'. I believe that yesterday we tasted some of the real spirit of Bangkok. After a not so careful consideration we decided to get a massage. Here in the hotel they knew at once what to advise us! Off we went into a taxi and to the massage institute. We got out of the taxi at a big building and entered with a strange feeling. The amazement that came over me! Well, what else could you expect, you can say. We entered and on the right was a big room with lazy chairs and sofas, with a kind of hall behind big glass windows. That hall was full of girls in

white dresses and they were all carrying a sign with a number on it! They were watching TV but glanced every now and then at the guests, who were sitting opposite them in the lazy chairs and sofas.

We were still looking with surprise at the scene when "Mama San" approached us, confidentially put a hand on my knee and made a suggestion to us. 100 Baht for regular massage, 200 for 'body massage', 600 Bt for body massage followed by a 'nice time'. The moment for choosing had come now. I remember Tim's bewildered face, the grinning Jan. And me? I didn't know what to do. Moments later each of us entered a separate little room with table, bath and air mattress. I had chosen the body massage, but before we started, the girl smilingly proposed the extra treatment with tell-tale gestures. I surrendered and Mama San was called in by telephone. With me already in Adam's-costume she entered with a smile on her face. I paid her the additional 300 Bt, and later another 100 Bt tip to Ampa, my companion for that evening.

Well, that body massage was something! The details and the subsequent nice time I leave to the imagination. No need to elaborate. (Jan van Kruijsbergen's comment: 'A good listener only needs half a word!') Later in the bar, we did some more petting, drinking and talking. Tim and Jan's ladies tried to persuade them to the extra treatment (with a lot of giggling and foul language) but these two respectable gentlemen didn't surrender of course.

It was a nice experience though. "Something to look back on", as Tim said. Everything was very clean and honestly done, no mysterious stuff. This is a normal aspect of Bangkok! Here in the Malaysia Hotel I regularly see western tourists going around with Thai girls. However, that is not for me, to be constantly stuck with someone and walk hand-in-hand with a girl whose company you actually bought!

22.00 In the hotel's bar. We are discussing that we should be looking at our plans.

Saturday morning in the AUS travel office: we wanted information on flights from Singapore to Sydney, because we planned to go by bus to Singapore and do some shopping there. The three of us all need a watch and Jan and Tim also some other things. Ollie had bought an Olympus OM-1 camera plus zoom lens for only 300 dollars in Singapore!

Well the timing of those flights came out bad and when the Australian girl behind the counter heard that we wanted to go to Singapore to do some shopping, she suggested: "Why not go to Hong Kong and then catch a flight from there to Melbourne?"! As if it was nothing; as if, for a trifle that we couldn't buy in Utrecht, we instead go down the road to Amsterdam! It's crazy, we are covering big distances one after the other; we are real globetrotters by now! A few days ago we flew from Calcutta to Bangkok and tomorrow we'll buy the flights from Bangkok to Hong Kong and then on to Melbourne. Fortunately, we'll be in Hong Kong just before the Chinese New Year, otherwise it might not have worked out as far as our shopping plans were concerned. Besides that, because fireworks are now not allowed in Hong Kong, it wouldn't have been worth-while for me anyway.

This morning we played the common tourist: a boat trip on the river, visiting the famous Floating Market of which my brother Jan made a film in the past.

It felt good to be on surging waves again. It rekindled memories of canoe trips on the storm-swept "Nieuwkoopse Plassen" at home. In the early morning (7.00 hrs) when the sun is just rising, it is really a wonderful time to be on the water. Water-taxis speeding past, with enormous 4-cylinder engines with propeller-shaft, creating huge waves and high splashing prow water which, if the captain didn't raise the propeller from the water to slow down, gave the tourists on board a cold shower. Many canoes with fruit, wooden houses on poles along the banks, green palm groves, many people washing themselves in the river, large iron boats. In short, the river was much more used and lived on than the Rhine in the Netherlands.

A few times we stopped at temples. Only the Cambodia-style temple Wat Arun (temple of the dawn) impressed me; a wonderful structure, glazed porcelain in cement. It was much like the

mysterious Angkor Wat. Just before the end of the trip, the guide told us that we would be treated on a 'soft drink'. I also imagined something to eat, because our 'free breakfast' had only consisted of 2 bananas. Well, the hut where we stopped was a lousy damned tourist trap, with expensive gems, charming hostesses, one cola and lots of rubbish! Snake Farm??



Jan's journal:

Bangkok, January 29, 1978

What a difference, what a city! Bangkok completely lives up (and more than that) to its image of being THE best place in the world to get yourself spoiled and to let yourself being pampered.

Starting at the beginning: we changed plans. We didn't go to Rangoon because of problems getting a flight out a week later. Instead we made plans to take a train from Bangkok through Malaysia to Singapore (to buy a watch and a zoom-lens). That is not going to happen either. Now it seems likely that we will fly the day after tomorrow to HONG KONG!!!! And from there, on February 4, to Melbourne. I am very excited. Not in my wildest dreams would I have ever thought I was going to see the Far-East on this trip; I feel like a real world-traveller now.

So how did this come about? Really simple actually:

The conversation at the AUS travel agency went a bit like this:

-Girl behind the counter: "Why do you want to go to Singapore? For shopping?"

-Me: "Yes, I want to buy a couple of things there"

-She: "Why don't you go to Hong Kong then. The shopping is just as good or better than in Singapore and the flight to Hong Kong is free if you take the flight to Melbourne on the 4th of February."

- Me (to Frans): "Yeah, why not?!! Let's go to Hong Kong!"

It was as simple as that!!



On their way to the floating market

Bangkok: in some ways Western (clean, good roads, good cars, good drivers, disciplined road users, more expensive), in other ways Eastern (beautiful temples, beautiful women, floating market etc.). Heart-warming openness about the things most tourists come here looking for: the nightlife. We sampled a bit of that; on the first night we visited a Go-Go bar in Patpong (the red light district of Bangkok). Expensive drinks, beautiful women. We were able to resist the temptations though. On the second night we decided to try a "Thai massage". At our hotel they gave us a reliable address and that's where we went. Once I entered I was totally bewildered. What I saw I had seen before on TV or in a movie: as in an enormous aquarium, behind a glass wall, under bright lights were seated about 20-25 girls, watching TV, waiting to be "chosen". After we recovered from our initial shock we ordered a drink and had a good look. There were some really beautiful girls amongst them. The 'Mama-San' approached us and started to explain the 'rules'. We could choose a girl and then there were the following options: 1) A 'no-more' massage for 100 Baht (\$4), or 2) a 'no-more' massage + a "body" massage (200 Baht), or 3) a 'full treatment' (600 Baht). After careful consideration I decided to go for Nr 2 because I suspected that the 'full treatment' might become a frustrating experience. I was curious to find out what the 'no-more +body massage' entailed. I thought I could probably guess what the 'full treatment' was. Mama-san then explained that if I changed my mind mid-stream it would cost me an extra 500 Baht, rather than the 400 Baht up-front, but I felt determined and as strong as a bear. I made my choice and the girl left the 'aquarium' and came sit next to me. I wasn't sure how to act and offered her a drink, but she declined. (Prices for the drinks were normal: cola 6 Baht, a beer 25 Baht. In the hotel 4 and 24 Baht respectively). In the meantime Tim and Frans had also made their choices. With difficulty some small talk ensued. After a few minutes we were led to another part of the building with many small rooms with a bathtub, massage table and an airbed. The taps were opened and the bath filled up. In the meantime, she prepared a lather in a separate bowl using some deliciously fragrant soap. She was a really beautiful girl. Because I didn't know what was expected and her English was very limited there were some comical situations from time to time. At some stage it was made clear to me that I had to undress. She undressed as well. I had to lie down on the airbed on my back. The body

massage was going to happen first. She soaped me up using the prepared lather. That was very nice. Then she soaped herself up and gently put herself on top of me. She proceeded sliding forwards and backwards over my body, our slippery bodies sliding over each other. I really didn't know how to react. I didn't get excited or anything, but I did enjoy it. Nevertheless, I did get the feeling that she would have preferred me to get excited. Memories stopped me from allowing myself a quasi-intimate embrace, although at times I had the urge to do so and would have liked to. I had paid for a massage and decided to look at it that way. Intimacy needs to be worked at; you can't buy it and quasi-intimacy only clouds and spoils things. It probably would have been easier if I would have chosen a girl that spoke better English. After a while I was asked to turn around and she continued with the sliding motion. At that stage I had become very relaxed and really enjoyed it. Strangely enough, it was then that I started to experience some excitement. When asked to turn again, the (slightly) increased size of certain body parts made this excitement noticeable. She repeated the procedure once more, but the knowledge that it was better to keep things clean and unspoiled made my excitement disappear again. After a while I was invited to get into the bathtub again. She must have realised then that she had lost the battle (only an assumption of course). After she joined me in the tub, she washed me and rinsed me. Later, while I dried myself, she washed and rinsed herself. I was asked to lie down on my back on the massage table. Just as she started the massage there was a knock on the door. The Mama-San entered to ask if I might have changed my mind. Before she left she said that if I changed my mind and decided to go for the full treatment then it would only cost me 300 Baht. The massage was extensive, in my limited judgement not very professional, but very enjoyable nevertheless. After she finished, for a moment she draped herself against me and for a while I gave in and we sat there like that. Then I gathered myself together, thanked her and started to get dressed. Just then a little bell rang to indicate that the time was up. Altogether it might have taken an hour. Later I gave her a tip of 20 Baht; she made an attempt to get more, but only weakly. Afterwards we sat together for a while having some drinks. The girls drank nothing or very little and the atmosphere was very nice and relaxed. We had a good time. There was some gentle reproach that Tim and I hadn't taken the 'bait', but that was more teasing than serious. After an hour we left, a bit poorer financially, but an experience richer. As Tim put it: "It was worth every penny."



HONG KONG

Frans' journal:

Hong Kong, February 2, 1978 . On my Liquid Crystal watch (brand Seiko) I see that it is 6.21.36 pm. After 2 days walking around and haggling in Kowloon and Hong Kong Island I bought this watch for USD 95. To buy a watch, camera, tele-lens or binoculars you have to follow a tactic. There is so much on offer that it is necessary to first make a choice. Then you visit all the shops and suggest a price of about 30-40 % of the price asked and see what happens. Here I also bought my Zeiss 8x30 binoculars (rubber coated). It is now my inseparable companion on many trips.

The number of shops: incredible! And almost all of them with very expensive equipment. I saw many Schmidt-Cassegrain tele-lenses, 1000 mm f/1 and 1000 mm f/6.3, also 'normal tele lenses of 1000 mm, many kinds of zoom lenses, even one of 200-600 mm!

Hong Kong is one and all sky scrapers; I saw practically no poverty. There is an excellent ferry between Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.

This afternoon at 17.00, deep below us in the street (we are on the 10th floor of the Chung King House, in the International Guest House), there was suddenly a banging on a pan to be heard (like the butcher used to do in the old days on the Singel in Woerden when he brought out the meat). Pedestrians were stopped and after half a minute there was a series of loud bangs, smoke came out of a pipe that was put slantwise in the ground. Later I saw that a large part of the street had big holes in it that were covered with metal plates. (I think they were building an extension of their subterranean railway system)

19.00. I am watching the colour TV in the dining hall of the hotel. A difficult film about personal problems, a lot of talking. I only look because I am eating. I ask the Chinese waiter for strong coffee instead of the tea-like drab we usually get. And, oh miracle, it is a little stronger.

(Two days later, on February 4, 1978, we boarded the plane to Melbourne Australia)