

**Overland journey by Land Rover to Nepal  
with short expedition towards Tibet.  
August to December 1962  
(PM Alec Moir)**

Having both heard and read about our four volunteers from our Plumbing Professional Development Scheme, supported by our Plumbers' Charity, I was most interested in their recent successful challenge of providing clean water supply to a village in Nepal.

For me, this challenge brought back memories of a journey I undertook over 63 years ago with two companions David Hall and John Koch. Our journey to Nepal, and further, has been documented into a book by travel companion David Hall from his daily diaries on the journey. His book "Eastwards" has been brought to fruition with the guidance and assistance of David's friend and publication expert, Leah Schuter.

I joined G N Haden at Tavistock Sq., London in 1956, with deferment from National Service while completing an indentured 5 yr student apprenticeship. Following day release and 1 yr Diploma and personal evening studies to achieve Chartered status of I Mech E, I was notified that I was no longer required for military service. Thus, at the age of 23 yrs and on approx. £500 pa salary, this gave me the opportunity for a travel break. In reply to an advert in 1962 to join a group to sail an old schooner to Australia, which was soon judged not viable, I met David and John. Within a few months, with my resignation handed in, a long wheelbase Land Rover purchased from a school friend, David primarily having fitted out the interior, we had agreed to drive overland to Singapore.



**My Journey to Singapore - Farewell from 45 Haden colleagues – The Scotch Nit**

Our camping journey started on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1962, just before my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. The planning of our journey was guided by a 1955/56 Oxford & Cambridge Far Eastern Expedition to Singapore which was sponsored by Land Rover. However, on arrival in Europe, we first turned left, heading north to Scandinavia, because we half hoped to be able to enter Russia and travel through Eastern Europe to Asia. No entry permitted, so back south through a very damp Europe towards the Mediterranean and sunshine.

Within days of sharing cooking, I was demoted to washing up and maintaining the Land Rover with John, but luckily David was an excellent cook over most of the journey utilising local ingredients when available and dried vegetables and other basics purchased in UK. On the journey particularly from the unmade costal road of Tito's Yugoslavia through Turkey, the Middle East and onwards to India, we suffered many punctures and breakdowns including broken springs, drive half shaft but kept going on 2-wheel drive. Even in the remotest areas, the ingenuity of locals with often a Land Rover agent nearby, we continued to progress. In

Asia, with few foreign travellers on the roads we became of great interest to the local population who wanted to know where we were from and to where we were going and why, and the children wanted to practice their English. There were no campsites, so we camped under the stars, sleeping on folding canvas beds, usually remote from villages and towns. Surprisingly, at all hours, people emerged from nowhere to inspect us, then to be served coffee by us while attempting to communicate. We soon discovered that in most countries they were not partial to their neighbours, so we bought our currency before entering the next country. We soon learned that whatever regime was controlling the country; the people were invariably very friendly and helpful and occasionally asked us to stay at their homes, often not being wealthy families.

Throughout the journey we carried drums of water in the back of the LR and had one sealed vessel in which we put our dirty washing with powder so as we bounced along on unmade roads and tracks it acted as a washing machine for the clothes, then to be rinsed and hung up to dry in the sun. To have cold drinking water we had thick canvas containers, dosed with treatment pills, and fixed to the front bumper to cool by evaporation.

Our visit to Baghdad had a memorable incident – when on the outskirts we were arrested for taking a photo of our first seen beautiful coloured tiled domed mosque, which happened to be in the compound of the Ministry of Defence. We were accused of having literature “prejudicial to the State,” being tourist data printed in King Faisal’s reign before he and his family had been assassinated a few years earlier in a military coup led by Gen. Quasim. Luckily, we were rescued and released by a young officer who had been trained at Sandhurst! This was pre-Saddam Hussein era who came to power through another coup. So strange to think that many years later during Saddam’s time, I would be travelling to Bagdad for Oscar Faber, on a regular basis, related to the design of hospitals in Baghdad and around the country, while travelling in BA VC10s via Beirut. During the early days of the Iraq/ Iran war we flew in smaller aircraft from Amman, low over the desert at night, with Baghdad runway lights being turned on and off again when we were on the runway. Following the fall of the Shah in 1979, the Iraq /Iran war lasted for eight years.

We reached Afghanistan in October having driven over the rutted desert roads of south Iran in temperatures near 100 F and into the arid stony desert of Baluchistan, a State of Pakistan via English looking Quetta. In these areas camel trains were common. Once in Afghanistan the countryside is wild, interspersed with green valleys with sheep. While camped in remote hills, occasionally we were collected by military patrols, for our safety, to camp in their compounds. Since we slept on folding canvas beds under the stars, often in very cold nights, I recall early one morning, sensing someone near, to open my eyes to face an Afghan tribesman peering at me with his ancient rifle over his shoulder together with a banderillo of cartridges – with some shock, I went into action and put the kettle on for coffee – we were of passing interest to him! Despite the wild looking tribesmen, we had no problems. All women wore Burqas which totally covered them from head to foot with only a small material grille to peer out! At this time there was a respected King of Afghanistan who kept peace amongst the tribes.

Having reached Kabul in October 1962, our stay was during the Cuban Missile Crisis, between President Kennedy of USA vs Khrushchev of Russia, due to Russian missiles being deployed in Fidel Castro’s Cuba. The King had allowed Russia having influence in the North and USA in the South, we could sense the tension in the city. We stayed in a dreadful hotel in the city where the loo was a hole in the floor located in an overhang over the hillside and we also caught bed bugs biting us around our waists – much safer to camp out! During this period, the Russians carried favour by tarmacking some of the streets which the citizens could see and appreciate while the Americans were spending vast sums to build a dam in the countryside to bring electricity to Kabul, without most of the population being aware!

From Kabul at 6000 ft, we had one more pass at 9,000 ft and then a steady drop through the narrow Khyber Pass into Pakistan, and tree lined Lahore and then just over the border into

India to visit the Sikhs' Golden Temple. Now in Delhi we heard news that changed the future of our journey to Singapore. Due to Chinese aggression over disputed territory in the Himalayas, our access through Assam and Burma to the Malay Peninsular was blocked. In aid of The National Defence Fund, we were lucky to attend this event in the garden of Mr Jawaharlal Nehru and to meet him. My mother's comment was "how could I meet Mr Nehru without being in jacket and tie" – but sadly I did not have such garments while travelling!



**Meeting Prime Minister Mr Jawaharlal Nehru at home in Delhi**

Now, we were faced with having to sell the Land Rover to continue our travels, but beaurocracy did not allow sale in India. However, in 1959, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet with 100,000 refugees, via Nepal, to be given sanctuary in India, after an unsuccessful uprising against the Chinese who had invaded the country in 1950. The best option was to head north to Nepal and try for a sale in Kathmandu. We entered Nepal on 2<sup>nd</sup> December and as we drove over a high ridge saw the distant Himalayas with Kathmandu set in a large valley of mostly unmade roads. On arrival, we found a small local hotel in town and very few Europeans about.



**Last day with Land Rover in ancient city of Kathmandu - Photo by courtesy of David Hall**

Following official approval to sell the Land Rover, the Govt. Survey Dept. bought it without even opening the bonnet on the basis "if it reached there – no problem" The only drawback was they wanted to make payment in Nepalese Rupees which meant delays, since we needed £s or \$s to continue our travels. Sadly, John had fallen ill with jaundice and transferred to hospital for a short while. In our hotel bedroom, we quietly went about selling all our supplies from food to tools and camping gear, achieving good prices - some sales of canned meat were quickly purchased undercover by Hindu vegetarians! We soon moved out of the town in the valley to Bodh Nath with its famous Stupa which was the religious centre of Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal. There, we met the religious Lama and his monks/followers

who purchased the balance of our equipment from the LR. Through the Lamas' son, David and I arranged for a guide named Lotus Jewel, from among the Tibetan refugees living at Bodh Nath. Unfortunately, David then developed a heavy cold, so on 16<sup>th</sup> December I set off alone with Lotus Jewel, who could speak no English, so we communicated by signs and drawings.

We stayed over-nights, mostly with Tibetan refugee families who had settled in the Himalayas to farm on small patches of land. Cash payments for accommodation, as we went further into the mountains, were of little use so I paid with cigarettes and small gifts of pencils and notebooks. I carried limited medicines, aspirin, antiseptic cream etc, which they pleaded for, whatever the symptoms, but mostly colds, since it was late December and bitterly cold at night while bright sun by day. The families were lovely simple and hard working at subsistence level with chickens and a few yaks who lived at ground level under the wooden houses while the family lived in a single room upstairs, accessed by an external staircase. I was not allowed to touch any food during preparation and slept on the floor in my sleeping bag with my head facing a mini holy section in the room. Drink was usually black tea with ghee butter and served in bamboo stems as cups – not very appetising. Fresh water was collected by the women from the valley streams which also served for clothes and human washing and was bitterly cold!

The trip was not mountaineering but steep walking over progressively higher peaks and green valleys, to reach above the tree line at 10 to 12,000ft – we could often see Everest in the far distance with its bare rock face. We stayed over-nights in small communities in the valleys. One night we stayed with a holy man who chanted from strips of script the whole night through! As we approached nearer to the Tibetan border the mountains were bleaker.



On return to Kathmandu, I booked myself into the Imperial Hotel, lazed in a huge hot bath before enjoying a delayed Boxing Day Christmas dinner. On 29<sup>th</sup> December, having said farewell to John who was recovered and returning to Australia, David and I boarded an old Dakota to India, having travelled 15,000 miles together in our Land Rover to Kathmandu. For David and I, our journey continued, travelling by third class train around India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for a further month before finally departing from Madras (Chennai) by ship, travelling as deck passengers on the stern hospital deck, to Penang.



Photo by courtesy of David Hall

On arrival in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, but soon to become the new country of Malaysia, I had contact with Haden's again. Subsequently I sought employment with Thomas Anderson & Partners, an Australian firm of consulting engineers, having major projects including the new House of Parliament, a new airport, and a 1,000-bed hospital. David departed for Japan and subsequently settled in Melbourne in September 1963 and later married. In 2018 David, John, and I, with Judy celebrated a fifty-five-year reunion in Australia.

While awaiting Govt. clearance to work in KL, I travelled through Thailand and Cambodia visiting Ankor Wat, by bicycle from Siem Reap. I found myself virtually alone pedalling my way around the many temples which were overgrown by the jungle. This was prior to the USA escalation of the Vietnam war in 1964. On return to KL, I was taken on and stayed for the following three years at which time Judy arrived by ship at Penang, while on her way to New Zealand, but stayed working at the NZ High Commission, while her luggage continued to NZ! We became engaged and Judy arrived in UK six weeks before our wedding while I arrived three weeks later. This year we celebrate our Diamond Wedding Anniversary with our family.



**The Reunion in 2018**