

Keith Miller (by Shanan Miller)

Worked with EO	From	1973	To	1977
Age on joining EO	23			
Nationality	British			
Role at EO	Driver			
Expeditions/Brief Encounters etc. led or taken	London/Kathmandu/London London/Johannesburg/London Research for Brief Encounters in India			
Why did you want to work for EO?	I recall Keith saying that, having got the degree and the 'proper job', he still couldn't afford a pint when he felt like it so when he saw an advertisement in the newspaper for overland drivers he decided to have a go at it.			
Occupation before joining EO	Electronics Engineer. Worked in Switzerland on a Nuclear Power Plant at Muhleberg in the early 1970s. 1972/73 Driver for Intertrek in Asia and Africa with Ian Bury, Martin Hayes, Ian Shaw, Guy Ambler, Bill Wallace, Jo Thompson 1973 Driver for Hughes Overland London/Kathmandu.			
Occupation after leaving EO	1977 – 1987 Worked with Sherpa Expeditions as Nepal manager then Director. 1988 – 2010 Self Employed. Operated treks in Europe, Nepal and Africa as a sub-contractor for Exodus, Explore and Mountain Travel USA.			
Now living in	2011 Migrated to Cairns, Australia. July 2016 died from a rare progressive, degenerative, neurological disease called Progressive Supranuclear Palsy.			

Then photo(s)	Now photo(s)
<p>Keith, Room 34, KGH December 1975 – from Derek Biddle</p> 	<p>In the Swiss Alps 2008</p> 

Memories or anecdotes

Apart from being my best friend Keith was an all-round fixer of *anything*, be it electrical, mechanical, plumbing, bureaucracy, company accounts, computers. He was also a great teller of jokes and anecdotes, all told with that wonderful, dry Northern England sense of humour. He was from Cumbria. Keith managed to retain that humour (and his dignity) throughout his illness and it's something which I miss every single day.....

I met Keith in 1978 at the Drayton Arms in London when he'd already left EO. So the following are some dates and facts which have been put together from what I recall Keith telling me; from Dominique and Martin Hayes and from Derek Biddle.

1973 Recruited in Kathmandu for EO by Tony Jones. Having driven an empty truck London/Kathmandu for Hughes Overland following the demise of Intertrek.

1973 Wren Park, mechanic then London/Kathmandu/London

1974 Double truck trip London/Johannesburg. Other drivers Ken Haslam and Steve Kelly. Jonathan Scott was on this trip. There are various 'favourable mentions' of Keith in Jonathan Scott's book 'The Big Cat Man' and he very kindly sent an autographed copy.

1975/76 London/Kathmandu/London. Set up EO house in Maharajgunj in Kathmandu. Researched and ran various Brief Encounters in India and Nepal.

The following was very kindly put together by Derek Biddle:

I first met Keith in June/July 1975 at Wren Park (EO Workshop). As I recall he had returned from a Trans Africa trip. Between then and September, I and Martin Crabb worked with him to prepare two trucks, a Bedford RL and Fire Engine (RL with crew cab) for a trans Asia trip that Keith would lead and Martin and I would be drivers/trainees.

We departed in September 1975 for Kathmandu with a total group size of 44 people plus the three of us. Amongst many memorable moments was a birthday party in the Iranian desert to celebrate Keith's and my birthday on the 4th October. Much alcohol was consumed resulting in numerous hangovers and a late start the following morning.

Despite much bureaucratic difficulty and protracted negotiation, in Herat Keith obtained permission for us to travel the northern route through Afghanistan via Mazar-i-Sharif. A truly amazing and trail blazing experience.

We spent the winter in Kathmandu that year during which Keith led the first Brief Encounter in India. Keith arranged the EO house in Maharaj Gange, Kathmandu later in that winter. Before that he and I shared room 34 at the Kathmandu Guest House. A year or two later this room became EO's Kathmandu office.

Should anybody have anything they would like to add, please feel free to do so.

Shanan Miller

From Tony Jones

One way and another, throughout their professional lives, Keith & Shanan, whether on behalf of Interek, E.O., Sherpa Expeditions, Explore, Exodus, or on their own account, had purchases and services galore to obtain. Unlike most places today when the barcode dictates the final price, back then one could, indeed one was expected to and thus must negotiate. Or one can call it bargaining. And the more East one is the more vital the bargaining and the bigger the gap between the opening price and any closing one.

And Keith would always advise: Make sure you appear in no hurry, introduce a bit of distraction, e.g. idle chat, Don't reveal your bottom price.

Nothing much new in all that perhaps, but Keith's special piece of advice was:- 'Once you know you have screwed the poor man right down and then screwed him down some more till you know that's as far as he can/will go, just be nice and screw it back about half a turn.'

That way he will retain his self-respect, he'll be keen on more business in the future. . . . and ' You don't feel like quite the bastard you might otherwise.'

And for those very reasons I found this a very good, practical tip.

Keith was a man of so many parts. But the one that joined up all the dots so to speak was his gift as a brilliant raconteur. His stories were themselves great but. . . . as they say 'it's the way he tells them!'

I actually got to know Keith and Shanan better after EO, later in our lives when, in different roles for different companies, we were based for much of the year in Nepal which the Millers just about made their second home, exploring it far and wide and having close friendships with many, many Nepalis. Keith is so missed here and Shanan, on her occasional returns, finds such a warm welcome which speaks of the gratitude for so much that they have done here.

Now the story I want to tell is one several of us well remember. I ought to be better at telling it for I heard it more than once as it was one of Keith's favourites. Keith's store of stories had a tendency to be repeated, which actually rather added to the charm. As did the 'shaggy dog' style of his yarns. So, sorry, you have to imagine that style of story-telling while putting up with mine. The anecdote, the origins of which are lost to memory, illustrates the anomalies of Indian Rail and that in India there is an unwillingness to give you bad news, so instead delay and play for time in the hope that it will either resolve itself or you will go away. Oh, and also to imagine Keith's excellent imitation of a Peter Sellar's imitation of spoken 'hinglian'. So to begin

The group had the train tickets, the berth/sleeper numbers allocated and the 'bogie' - the carriage - clearly shown. The group turned up in good time, but only to find their berths taken.

This being India that's no great surprise but the usurpers won't be budged by diplomacy. So Keith speaks to the bogie attendant showing him the tickets and all the correct and matching data there-on.

'Oh dear, oh dear, you please wait Sahib'.

So Keith waits. And waits. But time and the station clock don't. After another, this time more forceful, but equally unsuccessful demand for getting things sorted, Keith finds the main-man overseeing the whole train. Keith points out the tickets' association with the respective berths and the rightful bogie and gets the reassurance he's looking for.

'Please don't be distressed Sahib Sir, this is a minor matter and can soon be rectified, you please wait'.

And off goes he. And Keith waits. And the man returns with another fairly reassuring 'Yes, yes, Sahib' - wobble of the head here, at least in Keith's version. 'Yes, yes, you please Sahib just wait'.

Time ticks away and clearly something is not right; the carriage attendant shrugs, the ticket inspector blocks their way back on to the train. Keith tries reasoning; pointing out with strained patience that all ticket details fit with all the different numbers allocated on the train. . . . while the inspector points out that the names bear no resemblance to those pinned up!!

Until it's almost too bloody late to do any more waiting, Keith storms off and up into the great steel girders of the station's inner sanctum and finds the door marked Station Master. He knocks and uninvited walks purposefully in. The great man, suitably uniformed, is there and Keith wastes no time explaining exactly the situation and - as was so often Keith's wont - exactly the action he required.

'This is indeed my duty Sahib Sir, please follow me'. So off they trot, with minutes to spare and reach the platform and bogie. Staff are suddenly ram-rod straight and cooperative.

Quite a hubbub ensues from which Keith is none the wiser as the count-down to departure fast approaches. After many shouts and furious gesturing, the Station Master comes to Keith and the group, and in that uniquely obsequious manner that only Indians have mastered says (Keith imitating the Station Master in his very best Peter Seller's accent) 'I am so sorry sir, on behalf of Indian Rail I offer my most humble apologies but it simply isn't possible sir for your esteemed group to travel on this train.'

Keith, more than a bit furious, less than appeased by the ingratiation and says something like 'Well just what the heck is going on here, at least I am due an explanation'.

'Ah' says the Station Master 'an explanation. Well our explanation, sahib, is really very correct, very understandable sir. You see sir, there's being some congestion, this train is not actually today's train sahib, it is yesterday's train, today's train will leave tomorrow'. A few moments later yesterday's train slowly pulls out of the station.

Keith liked to end the story there - everyone hanging on ' . . so what happened next?'

And, to be honest, I don't remember!

Tony Jones
Pokhara
July 2018