

John Macdonald

Date of travel	from	September 1973	to	December 1973
Age at the time		16		
Full name	John Macdonald			
Continent / country / name of your trip	Kathmandu to London			
Location details where your story is set	General- throughout the trip. Anecdotes from Afghanistan and Pakistan			
Your connection with EO	Expedition member			

Memories or anecdotes

I guess I was a little precocious as a teenager. I was doing a high school internship at the University of Southern California, when I saw a bulletin board posting for the EO trans-Asia trip. I had an interest in the exotic products of the region, and a sense of adventure. I convinced my parents to come to the EO presentation, and somehow talked them into signing off on taking the trip. Tony Jones was understandably reluctant to accept me, but after receiving a letter of recommendation from my school attesting to a degree of maturity, he OK'd it, God bless him. Years later, when my late parents were asked what they were thinking at the time, the response was "I have no idea". I flew out of Los Angeles on a date I will always remember; August 25th, 1973.

After an arduous and eventful trip on Iraqi Airways from London, with an overnight stay and late-night hotel search in Delhi, I landed in Kathmandu. I had about ten free days in Kathmandu. I fell in with some American backpackers and their Nepali friends, which was a fully immersive start. They weren't boy and girl scouts, but they showed me some good times.

I did not bring a camera, and I regrettably didn't keep a journal. All I have are my memories. Tony Jones came with us from Kathmandu to Delhi. Mike Wedgwood was our driver- he reached out to me a few years ago. We picked up Yusuf, the son of the owner of houseboat Young Good Luck in Kashmir, and dropped him off somewhere on the route, maybe Pakistan. Yusuf and Derek from the UK were my best mates on the trip- I was fortunate that they befriended me and took me under their wings. Other members I recall were Willie and Rosemary from Switzerland- pastry chefs; Uni from Norway/South Africa; Brian, I recall, from New Zealand; two young Australian women. I must be forgetting someone, but we were a small group, and I was the only American. I had to up my game of interacting with adults pretty quickly. I kept a pretty low profile, and I didn't complain.

There were so many experiences packed into those four months, it's hard to know where to start. So I will just share a few anecdotes from the forefront of my memory:

- Stopping to camp in rural India, with no one around. Within minutes, we'd be surrounded by a crowd of gawkers, who were uninterested in engaging with us in any way- just staring. This phenomenon lessened as we passed into Pakistan, and disappeared in Afghanistan.
- Derek and I being caught surreptitiously sharing a can of fruit salad in front of the truck. Sure to go down in the EO Hall of Shame. I also enjoyed a few cans of steak and kidney pie. You couldn't pay me to eat that now.

- Camping off road in the treacherous North West Territories of Pakistan. We soon saw the headlights of three vehicles headed our way, so we prepared a defense of pots, pans, and kitchen knives. It turned out to be the Pakistani Army, who insisted on escorting us to a nearby refugee camp. An eye-opening experience, all around.
- An amazing night at the Lakes of Band-i-Amir, staying in a single room adobe group lodging heated by a fireplace, with music played by locals. At some point, I had a bad piece of goat here, and paid dearly. I knew it was bad as soon as I bit into it.
- Still at Band-i-Amir, I slept in, while everyone rode horses to the lakes early. Not sure how this lined up with the bad goat meal, but I rode to the lakes by myself later in the day. It was all smooth going up to, and around, the spectacular lakes. As soon as I turned around for home, my stable bound steed went like a bat out of hell down steep slopes and onto the plain at a full gallop. I had virtually no riding experience, and the stirrups bit into my bare ankles- I was wearing tennis shoes. This was a risky, hair-raising experience.
- Equally impressive- the Buddha statues at Bamian. Didn't realize you could limb right up into them.
- Cappadocia, Red Fort, a Roman pillar strewn hot spring in Turkey, spectacular mosques in Isfahan and Shiraz, Ephesus, chilling at the Pudding Shop et al in Istanbul, while the truck was being repaired. Above all, the individual encounters with people with world views so different than mine.

Like almost all of you, I continued to travel, mostly in Mexico and Central America in my case. I was determined to find a way to get paid for what I loved, so I enrolled in an international management graduate program, where I met my wife of now 36 years. She is a kindred spirit, who lived in Kenya for five years, and is as open minded as I am about different cultures. We celebrated our thirtieth anniversary with a camping trip on Socotra Island, Yemen. I pursued a career in international sales of radio station equipment, and picked up a couple of languages. I now have 82 countries under my belt, with great friends around the world. We have three curious adult children, whom we have dragged around Latin America and Africa as children. They are avid travellers in their own right, with their own adventures to recount. It's hard to say what influence any single decision on a crossroad of life will have on one's future, but I am pretty sure that taking that EO trip in '73 set me on a path I might not have otherwise followed. I am very fortunate that Tony Jones and my parents OK'd my trip. Everything has turned out just fine.

These days, our society seems more risk-averse. Not many American parents would now be willing to send a sixteen year old across Asia for four months in a truck. There must have been some nail-biting: my parents probably only received five or six aerograms over the four months. Their friends must have shaken their heads. But life is full of risks. Driving, crossing the road, a poor diet, smoking, drinking, and so on-these are the familiar, risky behavior in which all of us here engage, to one degree or another. It's the unknown and the unfamiliar which scare us the most, which are perceived as the biggest risks. I certainly had some dicey moments on my trip, and in subsequent travel. But these risks have made my world a lot bigger, and enriched my life in so many ways. It's worth considering what the risk is of *not* getting on that plane, of not diving into unknown territory, of playing it safe and missing those experiences. I wouldn't trade my risky choices for anything.