

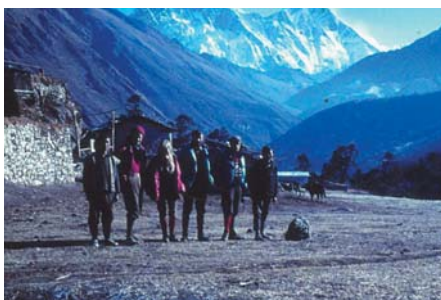
Travellers' Tales

WE'RE ALWAYS INTERESTED to hear about your travels, from the epic trips to Everest (see below), great moments captured on camera to the smaller things that help make a enjoyable trip, such as a great restaurant, good book or a piece of travel advice.

Overland to Everest

In November 1967 we set off to drive overland to Nepal, four men and one woman. We all met at Teacher Training College and had been planning the expedition for two years. Each had contributed £300 to cover the cost of the Land Rover and one year's travel. We were entirely self-financed and were among the first to take 'a gap year' - after teaching for three years. The journey was ours; we were free to visit, to wander where ever we wanted. Every day was an adventure. Every day was a day of discovery. There were few local maps and no guide books; we knew of lots we wanted to see and do but we were entirely flexible and changed our plans almost daily when we met other travellers and listened to their experiences. The only limit was to stay away as long as our money lasted.

We travelled out through Europe, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India into Nepal. Our diaries, written every day, tell the stories that still thrill me to read forty two years later; Persepolis when we were the only tourists there; and we camped right by the main gates; of Christmas camping out in the Iranian desert completely alone beneath those incredible night skies; of Fatehpur Sikri where we camped right in the heart of the complex of palaces and wandered in and out freely. A day at the Taj Mahal with about fifty Indian tourists and no other Europeans, and so on until we arrived in Kathmandu.



Thangboche



The tree where we aired our sweaty garments, in 1968

Kathmandu in February 1968 had almost no vehicles. There was only one company organising trekking and no one organising and supporting trekking to suit our financial plans. We stayed in a medieval house that catered for travellers and called itself a hotel. We lived and cooked in the one room. From there we hired one Sherpa to be our guide and he hired a porter to carry a hundred-weight of food and equipment. We carried about thirty pounds of personal gear. On the morning of February 19th we left Kathmandu to travel to Dolalghat and from there began our trek out to Everest. It took us until March 5th to reach the foot of Everest.



The street to our hotel, 1968

We slept out on the verandas of Nepalese houses. In Sherpa territory we slept in their houses; there was no superstructure for trekkers, no hotels or lodges. In the month we were trekking we met only four other trekkers.

We were alone, just the four of us accompanied by our Sherpa, as we slowly, carefully made our way to Gorak Shep and then up the mole hill of Kallar Pattar. We stood on the summit looking across the Ice Fall into the Western Cwm and the South Col. Tired, pale and drawn we made our way back to Labouche to drink cup after cup of tea.

Return to Everest, 2009

Forty two years later and with the same companions I returned to Nepal. Old men come to view their youthful ambitions and relive some of those moments. In preparation we had gathered a series of photographs taken in the places we could revisit. Nepal has changed; new roads cut into hillsides; pylons carry power up terraced mountains and over ridges; plastic pipes snake from streams to bring water to houses and villages; mobile phones are everywhere, making the country even smaller and part of the whole world.

In a splendid minibus we were able to reach Jiri and visit villages we had walked to and slept in. We retraced our steps and stood with our photographs to determine the exact spot. Crowds gathered to look and wonder that forty two years ago these old men stood here. Few that gathered had been born then. All the villages had changed. Our memories of detail sprang to life as we found the water source where we washed; the exact tree where we rested, drank tea and aired our sweat sodden garments. We debated whether it was still the same suspension bridge that spanned the



Team photograph from Sagarkhot above Pokhara Machhapuchre in the background



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Group gathers to look at the photos of 1968

glacier charged river. We stood in admiration of the steep foothills that tiered away towards the mighty snow-capped peaks. We had climbed them, trekked over them.

We could remember almost every step. It was a joy that stiff and aching knees could not diminish.

From above the hotel at Dhulikhel we watched the sun rise and kiss the distant face of Everest that stood a lifetime away.

David Peckett, John Driskell and Les Sims travelled with Audley on their return visit to Nepal.



When in Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang in Laos was a delight with its wealth of temples, crumbling French architecture and wonderful mountain and river scenery. But the highlight for us was a ritual that takes place each morning but which hardly gets a mention in most guide books. At 6.30am over 300 monks emerge from their various Wats to form a silent



Monks collecting alms, Luang Prabang, Laos

orange file which then snakes its way through the town. Lining the street are devout locals, armed with their mats and wicker baskets which contain the sticky rice they have lovingly prepared that morning. As the monks pass, they roll the rice into balls and drop these in the begging bowls. At the end of the main street the monks quietly disperse and return to their temples for breakfast and prayer. It is a simple, moving demonstration of the Buddhist faith and there was hardly any other western tourists to witness it. Definitely worth getting up for.

Sally Bevington travelled to Laos with Audley.

Wildlife galore!

In February this year, we travelled with Audley to Borneo. The whole three weeks was the most incredible experience. We saw so much wildlife including a huge turtle laying her eggs on Lankayan island, a rare sighting of a mouse deer in a clearing in the trees, a banded civit, Hornbills nesting in the tree opposite our lodge and one feeding her chick in the tree, a huge python right above our heads! and probiscus monkeys playing yards in front of us.

However, nearly everyone goes to Borneo to see orang-utan, and we were no exception. We visited the two sanctuaries of Sepilok and Semenggok and were disappointed. Though no guarantees of sightings, at Semenggok we saw nothing and Sepilok was too crowded. We were however in for a marvellous treat at Danum Valley when their largest orang-utan named King decided to come into camp and nest in the tree

right outside our lodge. We watched him eat his supper, then climbed 'our' tree and made a nest. At 6am the following morning, we watched him complete his ablutions in the tree, climb down and eat his breakfast. We were treated to an amazingly close encounter over two days from this marvellous animal. We stayed at Danum valley for five days and would seriously recommend this amount of time there to see the most of the wildlife.

Christine Reddall travelled to Borneo with Audley.



King the orang-utan, Danum Valley