THE OVERLAND HIPPIE TRAIL TO INDIA AND NEPAL IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

Submitted by
GRANT JOHN SZUVEGES

Thesis submitted as part of the
Final Honours Examination
History Program
La Trobe University
2014

This thesis is my own work containing, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material published or written by another person except as referred to in the text.

Word count: 14,663 words

GRANT JOHN SZUVEGES, 24-10-14.

THE OVERLAND HIPPIE TRAIL TO INDIA AND NEPAL IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

CONTENTS:

Word Count for text: 14,663 words

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

'The Overland Hippie Trail', also known as the 'Hippie Highway' or 'Road to Kathmandu' refers to the popular, and highly romanticized travel movement involving an overland journey to India or Nepal from the West. The movement began in the mid-1960s and ended abruptly in 1979 in a significantly changed world. The Overland Trail played an important role in the shift of consciousness and spiritual awakening of the West, unfolding in tandem with it.

While humans have always travelled, some specific journeys significantly shape the societies of those who undertake them. The Overland Trail was one of these. Due to specific external factors in the political and social climate of the West at the time, the Overland Trail became romanticized.

If the Overland Trail could be compared to any other travel movement, the closest in comparison is the 'Grand Tour' a century and a half earlier, when wealthy, young Englishmen travelled en masse to Rome and Greece in search of models of political reform and alternatives to Christianity.[1] The most significant similarity however, as described by Rory Maclean in his secondary account of the trail *Magic Bus: On The Hippie Trail From Istanbul To India*, was that, "Both groups aimed to learn and

[1] Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 1-16; Rory Maclean, *Magic Bus: On The Hippie Trail From Istanbul To India* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 12.

extract pleasure from 'the foreign'. Most of all, they travelled to be transformed."[2] Swami Shankarananda also made the comparison, describing the Grand Tourists tour as the finish of their education.[3]

While the Grand Tour only shaped a generation of the aristocracy, poorer young people were not exposed to it. The Overland Trail, however, was egalitarian. For the first time, anyone wanting to participate in a mass travel movement had the opportunity. While working class people had flocked in droves to the seaside for decades[4], the Overland Trail was the first time an entire generation of young people from all socio-economic backgrounds had the opportunity to undertake a long international journey. Michael Mayers concluded, with evident irony, "We might claim to be the first free mass movement of young people from the west to the east since the Crusades."[5]

Before the Overland Trail began, independent travel was somewhat unusual, even eccentric. By the time the phenomenon finished, independent travel, or 'backpacking' as it came to be, had become not only common, but a rite of passage for many people in the West. Josephine Hawkins explained "…not many people were backpacking/overlanding in those days and it certainly wasn't a rite of passage like it is now."[6] Rose Price agreed with this view, maintaining that it was eccentric then, yet mainstream now.[7]

[2] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 12-13.
[3] Swami Shankarananda, interview with author, Mount Eliza, Victoria, February 12, 2014.
[4] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Second Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 16-26.
[5] Michael Mayers, interview with author, via email, July 4, 2014.
[6] Josephine Hawkins, interview with author, via email, March 26, 2014.
[7] Rose Price, interview with author, Melbourne, February 12, 2014.

After twenty years of rebuilding after World War Two, those growing up in the prosperous 1950s and 1960s faced an era without the hardships faced by previous generations. For the first time ever, an entire generation of young people had the opportunity to critically evaluate and question their society and its values. Maclean describes this extraordinary generation: "Kids who face no unemployment, who fear no hunger, who have the chance to imagine no boundaries; a footloose generation devoted to the acquisition of experience and self-knowledge."[8]

While this young generation began to question their world, a shift in consciousness within the West began to appear. Maclean continued, "Ordinary people did extraordinary things. A generation rejected old, unfeeling ways, questioned established practices, searched for new values."[9] While rejecting the values of their own societies, the Overland Trail generation also rejected their societies' regular holidaying habits. Many interviewees I interviewed described themselves as 'travellers' rather than 'tourists'. They emphasized this differentiation.

While this sentiment was common amongst interviewees, it indicated a lack of understanding amongst them of the theories of tourism. Different outlooks on tourism can exist. In *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry divides these outlooks, or 'gazes' into two categories: the romantic tourist gaze – where experiencing the destination is emphasized, and the collective tourist gaze – where pleasure seeking is the priority.[10] While the Overland Trail began as romantic tourism, by the late 1970s, it could also be legitimately described as collective tourism. Paul Derrick described the lengths

[8] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 18-19.
[9] Ibid. 267-268.
[10] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 54.

Overlanders would go to to avoid being categorised as 'tourists': "Well you thought you were special and consequently a little up yourself. For instance you didn't go to known 'tourist sights' because 'they were just for tourists'. Consequently you 'cut off your nose to spite your face' as tourist sights are invariably really worth seeing."[11] John Worrall concurred, explaining in *Travelling for Beginners: To Kathmandu in '72*, that he and his travel companions oozed smugness, identifying as travellers rather than tourists.[12] On reflection however, Worrall continually questions whether they were in fact 'travellers', 'tourists' or something in between. This theme appears to be the central focus of his account.

One interviewee who argued against the 'traveller/tourist' differentiation was Tony Wheeler, the high-profile founder of Lonely Planet Publications. While acknowledging that there is a difference between 'travel' and 'going on holiday', Wheeler argued that all travellers are tourists.[13] Urry emphasizes that tourism in all forms plays a role as a contrast or opposite to everyday life, in particular to regulated and organised work.[14] This contrasting experience can be sought through romanticized or collective tourism.

A scholar, Scott Cohen has described tourism as a romantic escape from modernity and a quest for authenticity.[15] Hippie Trailers sought authenticity. The

[11] Paul Derrick, interview with author, via email, March 15, 2014.
[12] John Worrall, *Travelling for Beginners: To Kathmandu in '72* (Amazon/Kindle, 2012), Chapter 8, no page numbers.
[13] Tony Wheeler, interview with author, Melbourne, Victoria, January 27, 2014.
[14] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2-3.
[15] Scott Cohen, 'Searching for escape, authenticity and identity: Experiences of 'lifestyle travellers', in M. Morgan and P. Lugosi and J.R.B. Ritchie (Eds.), *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2010), 6.

point is that all tourists seek authentic experiences[16], although intellectuals and those who feel alienated in their own society may well engage in more serious quests for authenticity than most 'rank and file' members of society.[17] The Overland Trail generation clearly fit in to this 'alienated' category. Urry explains, "The tourist is a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other 'times' and other 'places' away from that person's everyday life. Tourists show particular fascination in the 'real lives' of others that somehow passes a reality hard to discover in their own experiences."[18] Travel writer Peter Moore once re-enacted the Overland journey while describing backpackers of the modern era. He describes their quest for authenticity:

> At breakfast the next morning I discovered the Indian backpacker scene. A tribe of tanned Westerners sat on the floor eating yoghurt and lentils. In many ways they weren't very different from the hippies of the sixties and seventies in whose footsteps I was meant to be following. They all wore baggy pants and loose cheesecloth shirts, and decorated themselves with the same assortment of bangles, anklets, necklaces and earrings. All the girls – and most of the guys – had their noses pierced. And they all looked as if they had been in India for months, maybe even years.[19]

The deeper the experience wanted by the tourist, the more they embrace 'the other'.[20] By embracing Indian clothing and food, the travellers Moore describes embrace this other in their own search for 'authenticity'.

[16] Erik Cohen, 'Authenticity And Commoditization In Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 15 (1988), 372.
[17] Ibid. 376.
[18] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 9.
[19] Peter Moore, *The Wrong Way Home: London to Sydney The Hard Way* (Great Britain: Bantam, 1999), 222.
[20] E. Cohen, *Annals of Tourism Reseach*, 376.

'Cultural Tourism' involves both passive consumption of culture, such as soaking up 'the atmosphere' and active consumption, involving visiting sites in the search for authenticity.[21] In Cultural Tourism, secondary tourist facilities such as public spaces, restaurants, cafes and bars are equally important as tourist sites.[22] Hannam and Diekmann explain, "In part, this is about an attempt to consume the everyday lives of other people and other places as a marker of authenticity."[23] Scholars like Scott Cohen believe that understanding the quest for authenticity is vital for understanding tourists of the past four decades.[24]

The Overland Trail generation helped form the quest for 'authenticity'. By contrast, when I asked if they considered the Overland Trail to have triggered the modern international backpacking phenomenon, my interviewees were mixed in their views. Hans Roodenburg explained, "It should be noted that hitchhiking/backpacking to far-away places … had already become popular long before the Hippie Trail, in the nineteen fifties if not earlier. However, since the Hippie Trail it developed into a mass movement, which may have inspired modern backpacking."[25] John Worrall had a similar view: "I don't know about it being the start of backpacking. It may have been the start of bigger numbers doing it but the sort of trip I did was early long-haul tourism, sort of tourism-with-dust."[26]

Others were keen to disassociate their Overland Trail experiences with those of modern backpacking. Mick Whelan was particularly critical: "Backpacking, in my

[21] Kevin Hannam and Anya Diekmann, *Tourism And India: A critical introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010, 32.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] S. Cohen, *The Tourism and Leisure Experience*, 5.
[25] Hans Roodenburg, interview with author, via email, February 21, 2014.
[26] John Worrall, interview with author, via email, May 27, 2014.

opinion is a bunch of spoilt brats, constantly on their computers or mobiles to home. They do not mix with the locals, rather just people in the tourist business. They, by and large, have no respect for local traditions and beliefs and treat most of the locals with contempt."[27] Whelan's view indicates that backpacking is now very much in the category of collective tourism; 'keeping up appearances' within their scene of people is of extreme importance.

Backpackers pave the way for mass tourism,[28] and in recent years have continued to search for authentic experiences in the same manner as the Overland Trail generation did. As explained by Hannam and Diekmann:

> Contemporary travel writing … depicts the exotic through the lens of the individual traveller or backpacker who has to overcome (and suffer) a series of rites of passage in order to move from being a tourist to being a fully accomplished traveller in an exotic world. Such 'suffering' is of course constructed as an 'authentic' experience in the glorification of being a traveller consuming the exotic, in contrast to the tourist who consumes the familiar.[29]

Urry explained these rites of passage as occurring in three stages: Separation from the home environment, spending a period of time in a different place, and the return home with a higher social status for enduring the first and second stages.[30]

While the Overland Trial marks the dawn of international backpacking on a mass scale, the Overland Trail itself only triggered this phenomenon because the right political, social and economic conditions in the West allowed large numbers of people to participate. A critical factor influencing a generation to undertake such a

[27] Mick Whelan, interview with author, via email, July 1, 2014.
[28] Hannam and Diekmann, *Tourism And India*, 92.
[29] Ibid. 88.
[30] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 10-11.

long journey was disillusionment with many aspects of Western society. Concurrently exposure to alluring aspects of Eastern society triggered a tempting pull from the East.

The Overland Trail and the sweeping social changes of the era intertwine, producing a 'chicken and egg' scenario, as was discussed in my interview with 'Bill'. 'Bill' argued that the modern backpacking phenomenon was an offshoot of the hippie ideal rubbing off on society, rather than an offshoot of the Overland Trail.[31] The discussion continued:

> 'Bill': … the reason people went to India in the end was because of Sai Baba, and Guru Maharaji, and the Beatles gurus and all of that sort of thing.
>
> Grant Szuveges: But these were exports from India.
>
> 'Bill': They were exports from India, but again, it's not the travel phenomenon, it's the change in spiritual attitudes where people were looking for something other than the Judeo-Christian work ethic to rule their lives.[32]

The 'chicken and egg' scenario questions whether social changes triggered the travel movement or if travel to India triggered the social changes.

This thesis explores how and why the Overland Trail became a mass movement triggering mass international backpacking.

A significant amount of primary source material for this thesis was attained through interviews with thirty-eight people who had travelled the Overland Trail. In

[31] 'Bill', interview with author, Apollo Bay, July 9, 2014.
[32] Ibid.

order to source a representative sample of people reflecting the norms of the era, I set strict yet minimal conditions for interviewees: All interviewees had to have travelled to either India or Nepal between 1960 and 1980. Although many claimed not to have identified as ‘hippies’ or ‘freaks’, they were still interviewed because their trips were within the parameters of the Overland Trail. Interviews were conducted on a ‘first come, first served’ basis with a strict limit of forty interviewees. No interviewees were excluded for their trips being uninteresting or irrelevant. No extra interviewees would be included, regardless how interesting their trips sounded. Some interviewees were happy to be referred to by their full names. Others such as ‘Bill’ and ‘Phil’ preferred to be known by their first names only, and have been referred to as such. Others such as ‘Motya’ are using their alias while some wished to remain totally anonymous, however none of the anonymous interviewees have been quoted in the thesis. Twenty two of the interviews were conducted via email, whilst sixteen were conducted live. Of the live interviews, two were conducted via Skype and the others face to face – in most cases, in the home of the interviewee.

CHAPTER 2:

The Route

To understand the Overland Trail, a thorough analysis of the route is required. The route itself was never a specific route from A to B. Routes were as fluid as the motivations of the travellers.

Unlike journeys such as the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, Route 66 in the United States or the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia, the Overland Trail had no particular start or finish. Jack Parkinson emphasizes this point: "It is not a strictly defined way and it is certainly not the best way to get to anywhere fast, but it is a *trip*."[33] The experiences gained on the journey were more important to the travellers than covering distances.[34] The Overland Trail could be travelled by road, rail, on foot or with an array of alternative forms of transport.[35] The trail seemed limitless, opening up possibilities and to Parkinson, "No two journeys need ever be the same: even those starting and finishing at the same places."[36]

Beginnings and ends of different travellers' overland trails depended on where they lived and on where they were travelling from. London was a popular destination for Australians, whilst at the same time it was humdrum to British travellers. As

[33] Jack Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven: Rites of Way on the Overland Route* (Port Melbourne: Government of South Australia through Arts South Australia, 2001), 13.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid. 17-18.
[36] Ibid. 22.

Alexandra Copeland, an Australian, saw it: "I had grown up in a time when, for Australians, London was the centre of the Universe."[37] Another Australian, 'Phil', agreed.[38] Michael Mayers, a working class Londoner however, stated: "I was escaping, running away from boring, underpaid work."[39]

According to the Indian and Nepalese governments, by 1966 there were 47,000 Americans in India and Nepal.[40] After crossing the Atlantic, Americans often joined the trail in Europe, particularly in Paris, Amsterdam or London.[41] These European cities however, were the very places that many European overlanders were keen to move away from. Between 1966 and 1971, numbers of Western Europeans in India doubled to 104,000.[42]

In *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, Parkinson describes the route expansively as "a convoluted and overlapping series of overland connections between Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia, with branches in both Americas. The trail doesn't stop at the edge of any continent."[43] Only Antarctica and the Soviet Bloc seemed to be excluded from his description. He continues: "The trail then effectively encircles the entire globe with a series of more or less well-defined pathways familiar to generations of backpackers."[44] Parkinson's description of the route however, is excessive and far too broad. His claims that Quito in Ecuador, Marrakech in Morocco and the Great

[37] Alexandra Copeland, interview with author, via email, July 7, 2014.
[38] 'Phil', interview with author, Apollo Bay, Victoria, July 9, 2014.
[39] Mayers, interview with author.
[40] David Tomory, *A Season in Heaven: True Tales from the Road to Kathmandu* (London: Thorsons, 1996), xiii.
[41] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 22.
[42] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, xiii.
[43] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 18.
[44] Ibid.

Barrier Reef in Australia are part of the trail[45] are echoed by no other person who has spoken to me or who has written about the Overland Trail.

The consensus is that the trail had clearly defined external boundaries. The Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans form the Western, Eastern and Southern boundaries. With the exception of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, communist states were excluded, being virtually inaccessible to independent travellers during the 1960s and 1970s. They formed the Northern boundary. The Middle East and Africa were accessible from the trail by land, however the vast majority of those travelling did not venture into these regions. All other states fitting within these limits, it can be argued, could be considered part of the trail, however some had more significance than others.

The backbone of the Overland Trail consisted of six core countries: Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal. The Lonely Planet guidebook *Istanbul to Kathmandu: A Classic Overland Route,* first published in 2001, supports this definition of the route with the very name of the title suggesting that Istanbul was the gateway to the trail and Kathmandu the finishing point. All other countries take on a status of 'significance' to the trail. In the sample of thirty-eight travellers interviewed for this project, all thirty-eight travelled to India during their trip. Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal featured in the trips of at least twenty-eight of these travellers. Greece and Yugoslavia were the only other countries visited by just over half of my thirty-eight interviewees. Not only did Greece and Yugoslavia attract

[45] Ibid. 17.

significantly less of the sample group, but both were European and less 'exotic' than the six countries forming the 'backbone' of the trip.

The tone of the blurb to the guidebook pumps up the romance:

> Istanbul to Kathmandu: The names alone inspire images of an exotic overland adventure. There's something undeniably irresistible about starting a journey at the gateway to Asia, among the minarets, bazaars and Turkish teahouses, and ending up surrounded by the snowy peaks of the Nepal Himalaya.[46]

The blurb makes no mention of squat or drop toilets for example, or of undrinkable tap water, which may spoil the romantic image. While Greece and Yugoslavia undoubtedly attracted large numbers of tourists during the era, they were less exotic to Westerners and were mere 'transit lands' on the road to Istanbul. As Peter Moore states, "with the hippies coming from all over Europe, the trail didn't really start until Istanbul."[47] Istanbul marked the first bottleneck on the trail. It was the beginning of the first great exotic 'Other': the Muslim world.

The countries comprising the Overland Trail did not all play the same role. The route contains numerous 'destinations', but always seems to pivot around two standouts: India and Nepal. To reach India or Nepal was the reason most travellers travelled this route. To miss either country was to not travel the Overland Trail, or more specifically 'The Road to Kathmandu'. One could even fly to the Indian subcontinent, travel extensively overland across India and Nepal by road or rail, and still claim legitimately to have travelled at least part of the trail.

---

[46] Paul Harding and Simon Richmond, *Istanbul To Kathmandu: A Classic Overland Route* (Footscray: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2001), 11.
[47] Moore, *The Wrong Way Home*, 37.

The overwhelming majority of travelogues and other literature about the trail focus on India and Nepal. David Tomory's *A Season In Heaven: True Tales From The Road To Kathmandu*, for example, dedicates only three of seventeen chapters to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan; the remaining fourteen concentrate on India and Nepal. Parkinson similarly dedicates seven of his seventeen chapters to India and Nepal, despite passing from Australia to Britain through 18 countries.[48] As Maclean states, "travellers arrived in India with a feeling of homecoming, as much to themselves as to the country. After the long and narrow overland trail, the road broadened out into the subcontinent's hundred cities and thousand choices."[49]

While Nepal and India were clearly destinations for those on the road, Pakistan and Iran, and to a lesser extent, Turkey, were part of the route through necessity – as the only viable overland crossing from Europe to India. Maclean explained:

> Iran was the 'in-between' country: drugs were illegal, torture was common and Islam was a religion too practical and grounded to appeal to most mystic-seeking hippies. No one came to Tehran to get high. 'Iran is a repressive police state,' wrote one early intrepid. 'Get through it fast.'[50]

Pakistan was also seen in this light. As stated by Andy Weber, "Most freaks tended to see Pakistan as a hellhole and went straight through it in twenty-four hours."[51] The sample interviewees often supported this view, with 'Phil' saying

[48] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 10-11.
[49] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 204.
[50] Ibid. 65-66.
[51] Andy Weber, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 52.

"Pakistan was very like India only more crowded and noisier, so we just zipped across."[52]

Turkey was considered a gateway to the trail. It is discussed later in the chapter as one of many bottlenecks. Afghanistan was seen by some as a destination in itself, and by others as a transit country like Iran and Pakistan. Interviewee Kate Powley recalls: "Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan weren't conducive to staying for extended periods. Despite some travellers extolling the hospitality of Afghanis at the time, I knew of no travellers who were tempted to just hang out there for a few months!"[53]

Even though Afghanistan could be avoided due to Iran's land border with Pakistan, most travellers still entered the country. After entering Pakistan via the Iranian border, John Worrall and his companions even detoured into Afghanistan before continuing towards India via Pakistan again.[54] Of the thirty-three interviewees who travelled between Iran and Pakistan, thirty-one travelled via Afghanistan. David Tomory described most graphically why Afghanistan was popular on the trail: "The Afghans … were an example to us all, proving that you could be smart, tough, proud, broke, stoned and magnificently dressed, all at once."[55] Like Christianity, Islam was seen as a conservative religion. Many youngsters of the generation couldn't get used to the public segregation of the sexes.[56] Ironically, the 'conservative' public morals of the West that the sixties generation were rebelling

[52] 'Phil', interview with author.
[53] Kate Powley, interview with author, via email, June 16, 2014.
[54] Worrall, *Travelling for Beginners*, Chapter 10, no page numbers.
[55] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 36.
[56] Ibid. 50.

against and 'escaping' from, were more liberal than those of anywhere else with the exception of certain other Western countries![57]

The Overland Trail also had splinter routes. Anyone traveling between Europe and the Indian Subcontinent was not restricted to one route. Nor did the route from Istanbul to Kathmandu follow one particular path. For example, it was even possible to travel the trail excluding one or both of Nepal and Afghanistan: If the primary destination was Southern India, Nepal could be avoided altogether. Afghanistan could be avoided by using the Iran-Pakistan border crossing. One American who travelled from Europe to India, Robert Friedman, avoided both Nepal and Afghanistan in favour of Southern India due to the colder Winter in the North.[58] Alternately, Sri Lanka was sometimes included in the journey, either as a detour or as a break from India, or even as the final destination. Five travellers from the thirty-eight sample interviews visited Sri Lanka.

The route from Europe could also be altered according to preference. British traveller Irene Milburn, who made the journey to Kathmandu three times, reached Turkey via Yugoslavia and Bulgaria on her first trip, via Italy and Greece on her second trip, and via Yugoslavia and Greece on her third.[59]

Once crossing the border from Pakistan to India, the routes diverged significantly, spreading like a delta into Northern India, Nepal, Southern India and Sri Lanka.[60] As Tomory states, the popular Southern route was to Bombay and then to Goa by boat,

[57] Ibid.
[58] Robert Friedman, interview with author, via Skype, July 1, 2014.
[59] Irene Milburn, interview with author, via Skype, July 14, 2014.
[60] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 279.

with the alternative being a train trip via Pune, which became a destination in itself in 1974 when guru Bhagwan Rajneesh moved there.[61]

Along with splinter routes and divergences, there were certain bottlenecks on the trail – the main one being Istanbul. To join the trail from Europe, travellers almost invariably passed through Istanbul. Although Irene Milburn avoided it in favour of Southern Turkey on one of her three trips[62], this was the only instance of an interviewee in the sample study who travelled through Turkey not passing through Istanbul. Maclean, described the Istanbul bottleneck as follows:

> With rainbow patches on their jeans … the travellers hung out at the first hostels, played guitars together on the steps of the Blue Mosque, smoked hubble-bubbles under cypress trees before driving their battered VW Campers and Morris Minors on to the rusty Bosphorus ferry.[63]

Michael Mayers remarked more bluntly: "In Istanbul you could tell who was going East and who was going West, going East people were fit, fat and healthy. Going West or coming from India they were thin, yellow with hep A and B and unhealthy."[64]

The second major bottleneck on the route was Kabul. Tony Wheeler explained: "Like Istanbul, Kabul was another of the Asian 'bottlenecks', one of those places every traveller seemed to pass through. Kabul was the first of the three Ks (Kathmandu in Nepal and Kuta Beach in Bali were yet to come), places that serious

[61] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 116.
[62] Milburn, interview with author.
[63] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 10.
[64] Mayers, interview with author.

Asian travellers felt compelled to visit."[65] Peter Moore also described Kabul as one of the great haunts of the hippie trail[66], however Kabul, and Afghanistan in general, received a mixed reaction from the travellers themselves. Lotte Rose recalled: "When you arrived in Afghanistan you arrived in the East. It had *soul*. There were cars, but only just. For the first time, the twentieth century lost its grip, it did not rule, it had an uncertain presence. Afghanistan was ruled by something much, much older."[67] To Rose, this is clearly an example of an authentic experience.

Paul Theroux was typically more disparaging however, suggesting that Afghanistan offered nothing more than cheap lodgings and accessible drugs.[68] It is possible that travellers visited bottlenecks such as Kabul to 'keep up appearances' rather than because the bottlenecks offered attractions to visit.

While the route through Europe towards Turkey involved the possibilities of Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece, most travellers travelled through Yugoslavia and Greece. Of my thirty eight interviewees, only seven and four people travelled through Italy and Bulgaria respectively, whilst over half used Yugoslavia and/or Greece. Bulgaria was undesirable to some travellers as hitchhiking was illegal.[69] Hippies were required to have their hair cut on entering the country.[70] Tomory recollected, "I went through Bulgaria because it was supposed to be quicker, and got

[65] Tony Wheeler and Maureen Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story: Once While Travelling* (Great Britain: Crimson, 2008), 18.
[66] Moore, *The Wrong Way Home*, 194.
[67] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 35.
[68] Paul Theroux, *The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 87.
[69] Carlo di Paoli, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 24.
[70] Ibid.

beaten up by the border guards for having no money. It just didn't seem right, getting roughed up by Communists for not being rich enough."[71]

Yugoslavia and Greece however, were popular holiday destinations in their own right. The original Lonely Planet guidebook, *Across ASIA on the cheap: a complete guide to making the overland trip with minimum cost and hassle,* advised travellers, if possible, to avoid the central route through Yugoslavia in favour of the coastal route which included Dubrovnik, the coast and nudist beaches.[72] This advice tells us that the trail could be 'sexy' and 'adventurous', and combined with a 'tourist-style' beach holiday.

The route to India and Nepal from Australia consisted of Portuguese Timor, Indonesia (particularly Bali), Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand followed by a flight to either Kathmandu or Calcutta. As Leigh Copeland stated, "The route via Portuguese Timor was standard for overseas travellers at that time – the shortest flight out of Australia."[73] There was no possibility to cross Burma by land[74] with the requirement to fly over Burma putting Calcutta on the map as a significant part of the Overland Trail if making the journey from Australasia. Calvin Teale recalled, "In 1971 Calcutta was not a holiday destination. Flights from the East terminated there: Americans, Australasians and Japanese landed at Dum Dum Airport, took a look and left for somewhere else."[75] Alby Mangels, who later became a high profile documentary film maker and adventurer, concurred with these sentiments, finding

[71] David Tomory, interview with author, via email, July 26, 2014.
[72] Tony Wheeler and Maureen Wheeler, *across ASIA on the cheap: a complete guide to making the overland trip with minimum cost and hassle* (Sydney: Lonely Planet, 1973), 94.
[73] Leigh Copeland, interview with author, via email, July 7, 2014.
[74] Wheeler and Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story*, 23.
[75] Calvin Teale, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 159.

the poverty and stark difference between rich and poor in Calcutta in the early 1970s highly disturbing.[76]

While it is impossible to give the Overland Trail a definite starting point, there are a select few destinations considered 'the end of the road' – including Kathmandu, Darjeeling and Kashmir, due to the closed Northern border with communist China. With Burma inaccessible by land and the closed Chinese border, Nepal and North East India were universally considered the 'end of the road'. Parkinson stated: "Darjeeling is a small town and although the locals could hop on to a Landrover transport and drive without fuss to nearby Gangtok, frustratingly, this route was closed to foreigners. Assam, Sikkim, and Bhutan remained strictly out of bounds; Darjeeling was the end of the line."[77] Peter Matthiessen commented about Pokhara, Nepal's second largest city, in the same manner: "There are no roads west of Pokhara, which is the last outpost of the modern world; in one day's walk we are a century away."[78] Matthiessens comments reflect the lack of modernity in a positive light, emphasising the importance of authenticity to those who travelled the Overland Trail. Goa, Kerala and Sri Lanka could also be considered 'ends of the road' where the Indian Subcontinent meets the Indian Ocean.

While any town or city in Nepal or North East (or Southern) India could technically be considered 'the end of the road', nowhere attained this symbolic title more than Kathmandu. One of the alternative names for the Overland Trail is *The Road To Kathmandu*. The name *Kathmandu* is also the brand name for an Australian

[76] Alby Mangels, *World Safari* (Adelaide: Savvas Publishing, 1986), 14; Lynn Santer, *Alby Mangels: Beyond World Safari* (Melbourne: JoJo Publishing, 2008), 36-37.
[77] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 140.
[78] Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard* (London: Picador, 1979), 30.

outdoor clothing and camping company specialising in adventure travel in 'exotic' places such as the Himalayas. This high profile given to Kathmandu suggests that the city is the epitome of authenticity as a tourist attraction, making it a vital destination for the 'romantic' traveller.

Kathmandu was certainly a physical end to the trail. Parkinson notes:

> From all directions except north, the trail converges on the great hippie melting pot of Kathmandu in Nepal, where a large population of travellers is always found. Turning south from there, it disperses through a thousand thoroughfares into the vastness of India, only converging again at favoured haunts, Goa, Agra, New Delhi and Darjeeling.[79]

Milburn described this practical end of the road more simply: "Kathmandu was as far as anybody goes because you've got to turn around and come back again from Kathmandu."[80]

For many, Kathmandu was also the emotional end of a long journey. Maclean mentions that travellers often didn't know what to do after reaching Kathmandu, finding themselves at a loss: realising that Nepal was not a perfect society, or one which could sustain a harmonious balance between East and West.[81] Some travellers turned to drugs, some committed suicide and most simply went home.[82] Parkinson, on a more positive note, describes the comfort and elation of reaching Kathmandu after an arduous journey:

[79] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 23.
[80] Milburn, interview with author.
[81] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 257.
[82] Ibid.

> Ninety thousand visitors a year were arriving by the 1970s and Kathmandu was *the* dream destination on the trail for many. Kathmandu was the end of a very long road and it had everything; cheap living, reasonable food, legendary drugs and a relaxed and sociable lifestyle close to the spectacular visual panoramas of the highest mountain chain in the whole world.[83]

While Parkinson focuses on the practicalities of Kathmandu, Wheeler describes the city's exotic feel:

> Some places find their way into your heart instantly and Kathmandu was one of them. Perhaps the long ride up from the Indian plains helped, but as we topped the edge of the valley and dropped down towards Kathmandu, it seemed like Shangri-La, with multi-tiered temple roofs punctuating the city skyline, oil lamps twinkling through latticed wooden windows and the setting sun warming the snow-capped Himalayan range as a backdrop.[84]

More than any other location on the trail, Kathmandu acquired a mystical and legendary image, both for those involved in counter culture and those considered 'straight' or conformist. In *Magic Bus*, 'Penny', an original hippie, recollected to Maclean how on returning to the United States after nine years away, she and her husband were questioned by an immigration officer at Los Angeles Airport:

> This button-down guy in uniform calls us to his desk, ready to give us the third degree. "You been out of the country for *nine* years," he said, like it was a crime … "Nine years," he repeated, flicking through our passports, looking at the visas. "You've been living in …" then he stopped and this weirdness came over him. "…Kathmandu," he said under his breath, over and over again. "Kathmandu." I don't know if it was the name, or if he'd been here, or if he'd just dreamt about Nepal during his tour of Vietnam, but he looked up at us like there was some sort of holy light shining out of our backsides. He closed our passports really slowly, handed them back to us and just said, "Wow."[85]

[83] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 147.
[84] Wheeler and Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story*, 21.
[85] 'Penny', quoted in Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 267.

While Kathmandu was the most high profile destination on the route and is celebrated as the end of the trail, ironically, and perhaps unsurprisingly, over a quarter of the sample group of interviewees did not even set foot in Nepal, let alone visit Kathmandu, preferring one or more of India's popular destinations. This fact alone reinforces the fluidity of the Overland Trail. This was a generation not following rules. Since Kathmandu was the most high profile city on the trail, to reject it in favour of a less well-known destination may have given the traveller an increased sense of authenticity and possibly extra status.

Despite its name, the Overland Trail did not even have to be completed overland. From Australia, various sea crossings and the impossibility of crossing Burma by land made an exclusively overland trip impossible. Flying one way, either to the destination and then returning overland or flying home after making the journey by land, were valid options. Some travellers simply flew to India or Nepal and made an overland journey exclusively in Nepal and India.

Air travel became cheaper and more affordable during the 1970s as the Boing 747 first went into service in 1970, along with other wide-bodied aircraft[86] and as Tomory explains: "the mid-sixties *were* when people began taking to the road in numbers; and the mid-seventies when they began to be outnumbered by those going by air – and the India Trip began to lose its visibility … to mass tourism."[87] As India became more accessible by air, the Overland Trail transitioned from romantic tourism, branching out into collective tourism also.

[86] Wheeler and Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story*, 231.
[87] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, xiv.

While the starting and finishing points of the trail are blurry, fluid and debatable, the various destination points which lined the trail (often within the bottlenecks) were undisputed hives of activity. While cities such as Istanbul, Kathmandu and Kabul were popular bottlenecks, smaller magnets within these cities, known as 'traveller ghettos' also occurred throughout the route. As stated by Tomory: "Every city on the route had one: a budget-foreigner quarter, sometimes no more than a cheap hotel-and-restaurant or two which became famous as everyone passed their names on to everyone else."[88]

One of the most famous traveller hubs along the route was the Pudding Shop in Istanbul, as described by Moore:

> The Pudding Shop was the legendary meeting point for travellers … and it was here that the hippie trail really began. Istanbul was where travellers from all over the continent finally converged – at the crossroads of Europe and Asia – and set off on their common path. The Pudding Shop, in turn, was … a place where seasoned hippies back from the East could sell their beat up VW Kombis to fresh-faced newcomers about to embark on their journeys in search of enlightenment (or at least a shag or two). Over coffee, tea or something altogether a little stronger, travellers would swap information or leave notices on special boards for friends and acquaintances.[89]

Kathmandu's traveller ghetto, known as 'Freak Street', served a similar purpose: "In the late sixties and early seventies, it *was* Kathmandu. It was a collection of cheap hotels, far out restaurants, moneychangers and hashish shops. It was a place to unwind after the long journey east, to catch up with friends, and to find

[88] Ibid. 20.
[89] Moore, *The Wrong Way Home*, 133.

enlightenment."[90] The Malaysia Hotel in Bangkok was another typical overland meeting place[91], as described by Wheeler, "If you wanted to find out about anything, buy anything or simply track down some long-lost travelling companion, chances were there'd be a note about it on the Malaysia's famous board."[92]

While so many elements of the Overland Trail are blurry, with no precise rules or limits, one fact is absolutely undisputed: the way the trail suddenly ended both as a land route and as a social phenomenon. The Overland Trail began as a movement during the mid 1960s, though it is too unclear to announce a definitive starting point. The end of the trail however, is extremely clear: 1979. In 1979, the Iranian government closed Iran's borders[93] closing the trail which linked Europe and India by land. In the same year, the USSR invaded Afghanistan.[94] With Iran and Afghanistan no longer accessible, the Overland Trail effectively ceased to exist. With Burma's borders also firmly closed to land traffic, India and Nepal could no longer be reached from the West by land. Flying became the only viable option when travelling to either country. Since 1979, both Nepal and India became destinations in their own right, remaining popular with Western travellers ever since. This exclusivity has diminished India's and Nepal's status as romantic tourist destinations and increased their status as collective tourist destinations.

In conclusion, the Overland Trail could be likened to a large river, with tributaries along its entire length, widening as it got closer to India. On reaching India, this 'giant river' spread out into a wide delta distributing those in it throughout the Indian

[90] Ibid. 230.
[91] Wheeler and Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story*, 70-71.
[92] Ibid. 71.
[93] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 59-66.
[94] James Joll, *Europe Since 1870: An International History* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 466.

subcontinent. Understanding that the Overland Trail consisted of a series of trails which diverted and came together again helps us to understand that the Overland Trail meant different things to different travellers. Some travellers journeyed after feeling dissatisfied with their homelands in the West whilst others felt a lure from the East. On reaching India, the possibilities were endless.[95] No two Overland Trail experiences were ever the same, but there was still a sense of what was needed in order to be accepted as an 'authentic traveller'.

[95] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 22.

CHAPTER 3:

'Push and Pull Factors'

Disillusionment with the West

The Overland Trail became an event of mass participation because of distaste for life in the West and exposure to alternatives from the East. While the West experienced post war prosperity, conditions were ripe for the questioning of the fabric of Western society. The West experienced a shift in consciousness, values and attitudes. In *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States*, Peter Carroll and David Noble explain this shift:

> Polls indicated [between 1960 and 1972] … dramatic shifts in cultural values and a tremendous loss of faith in established political, economic, and social institutions. Students widely engaged in premarital sex; abortion became a conventional method of contraception to some; marijuana was available as cigarettes; and homosexuality was tolerated. At the same time students shrank from the idea of fighting wars for national honor, and in general they eschewed the use of violence. Students expressed growing distrust of business corporations, the national government, and established churches, and scepticism about the modern work ethic.[96]

As this shift in consciousness occurred, varying degrees of disillusionment with the West began to appear in the young generation, mostly directed at the values of

[96] Peter N. Carroll and David W. Noble, *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), 411.

the generation in power. Values, lifestyle choices and ideas from the East were also beginning to be explored as alternatives to the aspects of the West causing disillusionment. Consequently, two clear motivations for those making the Overland Trail were disillusionment with the West and the lure of the East. These factors were not mutually exclusive and were often intertwined. Experiences and values lacking in the West were often found in India and Nepal. A combination of disillusionment with home, and the lure of the exotic, is still evident among modern backpackers.

The timeframe of the Overland Trail fell entirely during the Cold War. This era of fear weighed heavily on the minds of those that lived through it. As author Jenny Diski explains, "The peaceful world our parents kept saying they had bequeathed to us was daily on the verge of exploding into the worst and final conflict. We expected it to happen."[97] Poet Allen Ginsberg was also troubled by the Cold War and how it held the world hostage.[98] Ginsberg's opposition to the Cold War was emphasized by Deborah Baker in *A Blue Hand: The Beats In India*, "his bearded, bespectacled face and swamiesque figure was ubiquitous on college campuses and protests against the Vietnam War."[99]

Domestic politics in specific countries also contributed to a disillusionment with the West, particularly in the United States. 'Jean' recalled, "I left the country shortly after the slaughter of several students at Kent State University. The anti-war protests were ripping the country apart. I wanted to get away from all the chaos that was

[97] Jenny Diski, *The Sixties* (London: Profile Books LTD, 2009), 5.
[98] Deborah Baker, *A Blue Hand: The Beats In India* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 5.
[99] Ibid. 19.

swirling around me."[100] Robert Friedman, who travelled after finishing high school also commented:

> So those of us in that generation that would consider ourselves hippies, or even if we weren't hippies if we just weren't the status quo and we weren't the norm … had problems with so much that was going on in America at that time … 1968 was the year of Bobby Kennedy's assassination, Martin Luther King's assassination, the Democratic National Convention where they were beating up the protesters in the streets of Chicago … the National Guard killed students who were protesting at Kent State University, Ohio. It was a really difficult time in America before we left.[101]

Friedman was also disillusioned with the Vietnam War and the draft conscripting soldiers to serve in it.[102] Australian, 'Adrian', also noted that the Vietnam War and dismissal of the Whitlam government had made Australians disillusioned with their domestic politics too.[103]

'Stephania' felt disillusioned enough to leave the US but without India as a specific destination, only gravitating there gradually.[104] She recalled:

> I left the USA to live in Amsterdam to experience the creative freedom of an open society. So perhaps I was somewhat disillusioned with the material world. I left a high-paying job with an American TV show, sold everything I owned and left. Just felt a pull, I didn't know leaving America I would wind up in India when I left.[105]

[100] 'Jean', interview with author, via email, June 15, 2014.
[101] Friedman, interview with author.
[102] Ibid.
[103] 'Adrian', interview with author, Melbourne, Victoria, February 5, 2014.
[104] 'Stephania', interview with author, via email, May 28, 2014.
[105] Ibid.

Mick Whelan had also not intended travelling the Overland Trail when originally leaving Ireland: "I left Ireland, originally because I felt that I was living in a repressive society, controlled by Church and State so, in a way, I was escaping that and had already tasted "liberation" upon arriving in London."[106]

Christian Mottet referred to the French government's harsh reaction to the riots of 1968 making the young generation feel particularly repressed.[107] Frenchmen were required to complete military or social service which also imposed on their freedom, and the French saw India as a place to be free and the Overland Trail as a journey to freedom.[108]

While there was major discontent with international and domestic politics, there was also a degree of disillusionment with politics itself. There was a feeling abroad and among the Hippie Trailers especially, that politics was not the answer to problems in Western society. As explained by Max Flury, "Politics wasn't it. There needed to be a change of mind, not more politics."[109] Swami Shankarananda concurred, "I felt that politics only reflected the state of consciousness; that if people were in a higher, more loving, more inclusive state, their politics would be better. I was disillusioned by the emptiness of it. It was like a void at the centre of things."[110] Mick Whelan was even more disparaging of politics, stating that he was totally disillusioned with politics and that all politicians, Left and Right, were of the same 'gangster class'.[111]

[106] Whelan, interview with author.
[107] Christian Mottet, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 3-4.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Max Flury, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 211.
[110] Shankarananda, interview with author.
[111] Whelan, interview with author.

Those who travelled the Overland Trail however, do not appear to be any more or less politicized than any other group in society. While some, such as Whelan, were appalled by politics, others such as Carlo Di Paoli, were highly politicized individuals, despite abandoning political involvement in favour of venturing East. Di Paoli recalls:

> A lot of politically motivated people in Italy – we were all on the Left – had a strong desire to move away from capitalism and exploitation; now the mescaline had given me such a sublime experience of peace and love that I thought 'Well, if we can all live in this state, everything will change for the better.' My focus had moved from seeking a perfect society to seeking a perfect state of inner being. I felt I had to find this state of inner being before I could do anything else.[112]

Many politicized Left wingers were highly critical of the Overland Trail, accusing those who chose to travel to India of 'dropping out' or 'betraying the struggle'.[113] Di Paoli disagreed, considering his journey to India part of the struggle.[114] The Overland Trail was synonymous with 'Counter Culture' and Diski explains that Counter Culture was a different approach to the West's problems from the dullness of that offered by Marxism and Leninism.[115] While there was no significant shift to the left at the time, there was certainly a dramatic shift in cultural values towards a more accepting and less militant outlook.[116] Liesches Muller condensed her view: participate in politics or go East – or get disillusioned by politics and then go East.[117]

[112] di Paoli, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 4.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Diski, *The Sixties*, 87.
[116] Carroll and Noble, *The Free and the Unfree*, 411.
[117] Liesches Muller, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 3.

Di Paoli's and Muller's comments indicate that the Overland Trail Generation put greater emphasis on actions than on political theory.

As well as being disillusioned with politics, many of those who travelled were dissatisfied with everyday life in the West and with the expectations from and attitudes of society in general. Much more common than a hatred of Western politics, was a boredom with Western society and its lifestyle.

Rose Price felt that she was disillusioned with the 'rat race' and suburbia in Australia rather than the politics, speaking of how others were excited by the prospect of a house in Endeavour Hills, an outer suburb of Melbourne – a prospect which didn't interest her.[118] Alby Mangels also noted that marriage, children and suburbia were not for him.[119] He noted the assumptions of friends that he would follow this path, a feeling that made him uneasy. "…I found myself talking to my mates about going on a trip around the world. They ribbed me saying that I'd end up just like the rest of them, married with a few kids – that really started to play on my mind."[120]

Nanette Schapel, an Australian from the outback town of Broken Hill, described her major push factor as a need to be away from Broken Hill, a place where most people married young, and had children and a mortgage.[121] Similarly, 'Laurie', from small-town England explained:

[118] Price, interview with author.
[119] Santer, *Alby Mangels*, 16.
[120] Mangels, *World Safari*, 8.
[121] Nanette Schapel, interview with author, Melbourne, Victoria, February 22, 2014.

> I suppose I was looking for freedom which sounds a bit trite but I come from a small mining town in the north of England and had a strict upbringing, the women's lib movement was growing strong and you no longer wanted or felt you needed to abide by the rules of society. There was a whole new world out there and it was exciting.[122]

Jonathan, a Welsh man who felt misplaced in the West[123], stated: "Britain offered me a job, a mortgage, the Bee Gees. I didn't want to spend my life paying for crap, listening to crap. That wasn't my scene. India gave me room to breathe, to find myself."[124] Chris Koller recalls that escaping boredom was a huge factor in deciding to make the trip; "I think we were all looking for something more than the suburbs and we got more than we bargained for."[125]

While many overlanders were escaping from aspects of Western society such as boredom, suburbia, nine-to-five living and an expectation to get married and buy property, others were escaping from other aspects of the very fabric of Western society such as materialism, capitalism and the competitive environment. Max Flury remembered, "I was fed up with the whole Western material way of life, I didn't want to get chewed up by that system, I didn't want to live the way my parents lived."[126] 'Bill' described his "disillusionment with the whole competitive, 'the tough guy wins all' attitude that we had."[127]

[122] 'Laurie', interview with author, via email, June 27, 2014.
[123] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 218.
[124] 'Jonathan' quoted in Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 220.
[125] Christopher Koller, interview with author, Melbourne, Victoria, January 30, 2014.
[126] Flury, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 211.
[127] 'Bill', interview with author.

Robin Brown describes a lack of spiritual nourishment at home as a factor inspiring the India trip.[128] Swami Shankarananda, a former academic in New York, now a spiritual teacher in Australia, describes this lack of spiritual nourishment as 'meaninglessness':

> I was leaving meaninglessness. I'd been disappointed in a lot of things in my life. I had high hopes with the academic life and when I got immersed in that I found it didn't have as much meaning as I wanted. It didn't solve the big problems… I was disillusioned by a kind of meaninglessness and I had an intuition that India had spiritual answers and I wasn't disappointed.[129]

While the attitudes of young people began to change during the 1960s and 1970s, these changing attitudes were not necessarily well received by wider sections of society. Carroll and Noble explain:

> In 1970, polls indicated that a majority of American adults rated the problem of dissident youth above all other problems: war, the environment, race relations, the economy. The adult fear and anger revealed by these polls came from the recognition that the pattern of "adolescence" established between 1880 and 1914 was breaking down. The counterculture adolescents of the 1960s were rejecting conventional virtues such as militant masculinity, competitiveness and aggressiveness, emphasis on bodily cleanliness and self-discipline in order to channel energy into economic achievement. Parents were confronted by "loose" young people, resisting the armed forces and the world of work.[130]

This hostility pressured young people who identified with Counter Culture, further disillusioning them with Western society. Robert Friedman recalled, "Those of us who were hippies at the time did not like the police, we didn't like the military, we didn't like authority, whether it came from our parents or something else. We

[128] Robin Brown, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 233.
[129] Shankarananda, interview with author.
[130] Carroll and Noble, *The Free and the Unfree*, 373.

wanted to be left alone. For us everything was really peace, love and brotherhood."[131] Friedman spoke of feeling a very deep connection with like-minded people, due to large sections of society hating them so much.[132]

While a hatred of the hippie movement certainly existed in certain sections of the West, more usual was a mutual incomprehension between the older and younger generations. As Kate Powley stated, "Hippies generally had the view that anyone older had buggered up society and we had the answer and we lived a way of life that was certainly different to our parents. Our parent's generation generally just walked around with a look of amazement and alarm on their faces."[133]

Being faced with a society who didn't understand their outlook, and in some cases was openly hostile towards them, many young people felt a strong sense of disillusionment with their own Western societies. This disillusionment formed a decisive push factor, pushing them toward the East.

This disillusionment felt by the Overland Generation is still evident to some degree in modern-day backpackers who continue to 'escape' from their everyday routine in search of an authentic experience or personal growth.[134] Riley, in Scott Cohen's article, describes long-term budget travellers as "escaping from the dullness and monotony of their everyday routine, from their jobs, from making decisions about careers, and desire to delay or postpone work, marriage, and other

[131] Friedman, interview with author.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Powley, interview with author.
[134] S. Cohen, *The Tourism and Leisure Experience*, 3.

responsibilities."[135] Since the 1970s, this push factor of 'escapism' has been seen as a primary driver for tourist motivation.[136]

CHAPTER 4:

'Why India?'

The lure of the East

As explained in my Introduction, tourism is partly influenced by an escape from the mundane, everyday aspects of life. The opposite is the 'exotic'.[137] This 'exotic' to Westerners was 'the East'. The renowned literary theorist, Edward Said, explained, "The Orient is socially constructed as a place where those in the West can contemplate their fantasies and desires outside of their own boundaries of normality."[138] The 'Exotic Orient' became a huge lure for the Overland generation, just as disillusionment with their own societies began driving them away from home.

[135] 'Riley', quoted in S Cohen, *The Tourism and Leisure Experience*, 2.
[136] S. Cohen, *The Tourism and Leisure Experience*, 1-2.
[137] Hannam and Diekmann, *Tourism And India*, 84.
[138] Edward Said, quoted in Hannam and Diekmann, *Tourism And India*, 84-85.

This lure also resulted from exposure to Eastern lifestyles in the form of spirituality, meditation, yoga, exploration of sexuality, experimentation with drugs, Indian food, Indian clothing, Indian music and the fact that India itself had become fashionable. As Maclean explains, travellers typically were searching for a guru, God, spiritual fulfilment or sex in India, while others came along to keep up with friends and follow the trend.[139]

While the West was being criticised for its materialism, lack of meaning and absence of spiritualism, India was seen as the place where spiritual fulfilment could be attained. 'Motya', who travelled to India numerous times, eloquently described this phenomenon as a search for a reason to be: "It was necessary to find a raison d'etre, a reason to be and the reason to be obviously was an exploration of the spiritual world, of Asia, of India, of the Himalayas, of the Buddhist world, of the Hindu world … So this became a virtuous thing to do, hence all the travel to India."[140]

Ginsberg had announced, "India will become the holy place of pilgrimage for the young!"[141] Referring to the lure of the East and the disenchantment with his native United States, he continued, "They will come like birds migrating to a promised land."[142] Parkinson agreed, asking, "Why meditate in drab suburbia when you can take yourself off to the sanctuary of a thousand-year-old monastery, or linger for a moment beneath the very tree where the Buddha attained enlightenment?"[143]

[139] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 205.
[140] 'Motya', interview with author, Melbourne, Victoria, April 1, 2014.
[141] Allen Ginsberg, quoted in Baker, *A Blue Hand*, 198.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 15.

The search for a *guru* or teacher in India to impart their spiritual knowledge was widespread. 'Stephania' explained, "I was definitely looking for a guru or enlightenment. I knew the yogis of the Himalayas had profound meditation experiences, magical powers and an inner experience. I wanted that."[144] Swami Shankarananda described his personal search and reason for being lured to India:

> I was definitely searching. Ram Dass had convinced me that there were great beings alive today; beings like Jesus and the Buddha. They weren't just around in biblical times. I thought 'Well, if that's true that they have this spiritual knowledge, I'd be a fool not to avail myself.' So I went searching for that. I knew there was someone there who would teach me these hidden secrets. I went precisely for that.[145]

Shankarananda found his teacher in India and described his experience: "Muktananda's ashram blew me away. It was perfectly on purpose and had a lot of energy. I felt I could really make progress. So I spent the next three years at that ashram."[146]

While the pull of India was acknowledged by those who felt it, they were not necessarily conscious of the reasons for India's lure. Rod Deering had travelled in India in 1972 and after travelling West along the Overland Trail, through Europe and then across Africa, he felt an urge to return to India in 1976 on his way home to Australia. Deering recalls, "I'd decided that I really wanted to go back to India again because I felt I'd sort of missed something. It's pretty hard to describe why, but I just loved India so much … So I got a boat from Mombasa to Bombay."[147] Deering felt that he had overlooked something in his previous trip to India. That something

[144] 'Stephania', interview with author.
[145] Shankarananda, interview with author.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Rod Deering, interview with author, Apollo Bay, Victoria, March 28, 2014.

turned out to be a self-discovery of his spirituality: "I had the feeling that there was something I'd kind of missed and I'd talked to my yoga teacher about meditation."[148]

One path on the search for enlightenment undertaken by numerous interviewees in my sample group was that of *Vipassana* (silent) meditation with the famous guru Satya Narayan Goenka. Chouchou Malderner recollected, "I did take a Vipassana meditation course with Goenka. In a way, I was on a spiritual path but not looking for a leader, looking for a way for me to be in the world that I liked."[149] This corresponds with 'Motya's 'reason to be' analogy. Deering also undertook a Vipassana meditation and elaborated in detail about the experience:

> At some point there became a thing where I realised that there was an observer observing the body experience and I had to let go of the observer and just be the body experience and my whole body just became full of light. It just blew me away, it's just an unbelievable experience and I've never been quite the same since.[150]

While The Overland Trail became a spiritual pilgrimage for many, the concept of a religious pilgrimage was also present and was often intertwined with the search for spiritual enlightenment. Generally, those on a search for religion on the trail had rejected the Western faiths of Christianity and Judaism in favour of the Eastern faiths Hinduism and Buddhism. Robert Friedman explained that many travellers identified with their spirituality, but didn't feel connected with their birth faiths.[151] 'Bill' recalled:

---

[148] Ibid.
[149] Chouchou Malderner, interview with author, via email, June 24, 2014.
[150] Deering, interview with author.
[151] Friedman, interview with author.

> I'd been brought up as an Orthodox Jew. I gave the whole religion thing away when I was 18, but I still believed in spiritual things and I found the whole concept of Hinduism in particular where you had a myriad number of gods and you chose the one that most suited your outlook and your persona as an attractive one, but in the end we were far more involved with Buddhism than we were with Hinduism.[152]

'Phil' was also open to exploring the Eastern faiths, and stated, "I learnt a bit about Buddhism, learnt a bit about Hinduism, I'd rejected Christianity at school so it was just curiosity, to see what it was like."[153]

The widespread appeal of Hinduism and Buddhism centred around their flexibility and lack of dogmatism. As Maclean explains, "Hindu theology accepts that there are many roads leading to nirvana. Hinduism, a tolerant, all-encompassing 4,000-year-old religion without central authority or rigid moral code, never countenanced exclusivity."[154] The irony about Hinduism as a choice by Westerners, as pointed out by Robin Brown, was that "It's an anomaly, because you can't become a Hindu, it's the only thing you can't become. You can become anything else."[155]

Peter Matthiessen, who became a student of Zen Buddhism in 1961[156] described the appeal of Hinduism and Buddhism technically:

> Because of their belief in karma – the principle of cause and effect that permeates Buddhism and Hinduism (and Christianity, for that matter: as ye sow, so shall ye reap) – they are tolerant and un-

[152] 'Bill', interview with author.
[153] 'Phil', interview with author.
[154] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 203.
[155] Brown, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 80.
[156] Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*, 15.

> judgemental, knowing that bad acts will receive their due without the intervention of the victim.[157]

Buddhism had a particular appeal to Westerners due to its non-violence, humility and compassion, as well as its compatibility with individualism.[158] Tibetan Buddhism was particularly popular, in part due to its celebration of sexual union.[159] As Brian Beresford asked, "What kind of religion could it be that instead of having a man nailed to a cross, had sexual ecstasy as an object of devotion?"[160]

While Buddhism and Hinduism were fashionable religions to many, the journey through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan exposed most travellers to Islam. John Butt, converted to Islam in Pakistan whilst travelling on the trail and went on to become an Imam.[161] Butt's story, however, was an exception rather than a norm.

While many travellers were searching for specific faiths, others were not so particular as to which path they took. As Robert Friedman stated, "We were looking for God and hash."[162]

The Overland Trail is quite rightfully associated with the spiritual quest of many travellers, but is also (less accurately) associated with their collective sexual quest. As explained by Edward Said, Western novelists have traditionally associated the Orient with sex.[163] This factor may have contributed to the sexualised perception of the Overland Trail. While attitudes towards nudity and sex were changing during the

[157] Ibid. 40.
[158] Sarah Macdonald, *Holy Cow! An Indian Adventure* (Sydney: Bantam Books, 2002), 156-157.
[159] Brian Beresford, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 107.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 185-191, and Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 47-50.
[162] Friedman, interview with author.
[163] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 188-190.

1960s and 1970s, there does not appear to be much evidence suggesting that either nudity or sex played a great role in the lure of the East. In *The Sixties*, Diski wrote:

> Taking off our clothes was an important part of the project of undoing the constraints we perceived our elders to have been immobilised by. We stripped conscientiously in front of each other and made nothing of it. Sex was written about and acted out in private and in public with enthusiasm in the name of the sexual revolution. The idea was to have fun, because having fun with our bodies was a completely new way of being with our peers.[164]

While this statement reflects general attitudes of young people in this era, nudity and sex do not appear to have added to the lure of the East – especially considering it was becoming more acceptable in the West at the time. Many Westerners who lived or travelled in Goa during their Overland sabbatical discuss walking naked on the beach[165], swimming naked[166] and even having sex on the beach.[167] However in India sex was an activity for the private sphere, rather than in public.[168] While in Goa, a Christian enclave, public nudity was tolerated, it is unlikely that this was the case in the rest of India. Chris Koller recalled that, despite public perceptions, there was not much sex happening on the Overland Trail.[169]

Being naked in spectacular nature probably contributed to the lure of the East however. Parkinson recalls encountering a German woman in the Nepalese Himalayas:

---

[164] Diski, *The Sixties*, 52-53.
[165] Carmel Lyons, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 126.
[166] Brown, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 131.
[167] Ibid. 132.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Koller, interview with author.

> As I passed close by the hot springs I witnessed a remarkable sunset tableau: the German girl standing naked on top of a high flat rock, arms fully outstretched and muscular body straining tautly towards the gleaming snow-capped mountains and the thundering waterfall. She was completely still in this pose for a long moment. … It was a moment of pure pagan delight.[170]

While nudity and sexuality were not flaunted in India, the option existed to explore both, through studying philosophies which celebrated sexual union such as Tibetan Buddhism[171] and Tantra. In these philosophies the pessimistic fear of pleasure and desire was seen as restrictive[172] and bodily desires were embraced. In *The Dharma Bums*, a well-known book to the Overland Trail generation, Jack Kerouac promoted tantric sex.[173]

While sex was not as high on the priority list of Overland travellers as might have been expected, drug use was also not as high a priority as is generally thought. Of my forty sample interviewees, while many experimented with drugs during their Overland journey, the amount of drug use did not seem to exceed the amount common in the West at the time. Very few of the interviewees stated that drug use was a primary reason for them undertaking the journey in the first place.

When discussing the 1960s in general, Diski explains that drugs, along with travel and sexual freedom were used to change consciousness and explore new and different ways of living.[174] She likened this experimentation to the modern day 'Gap Year' taken by many school leavers in the West.[175] Diski explains, "Enlightenment

[170] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 168-169.
[171] Beresford, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 107.
[172] Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*, 155.
[173] Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (USA: Penguin, 1958), 28-29.
[174] Diski, *The Sixties*, 2-3.
[175] Ibid.

found another branch: drugs were already a fast route to opening ourselves up to the religious experience of Eastern philosophy, now they became a way for those not 'blessed' with madness to get an insight into this newly hallowed state."[176] Peter Matthiessen concurred. He had experimented with hallucinogens and other drugs such as LSD[177] but emphasized that while drug use could help one open their mind, it couldn't solve one's problems or give one happiness.[178]

Possibly the main reason for the Overland Trail becoming synonymous with drug use was the fact that cannabis was so readily available in India, Nepal and Afghanistan. Cannabis grows wild in the Indian subcontinent, and as Rod Deering explained, "that was part of the … spiritual awakening, because in India smoking ganga is part of the mystical experience for some people … and there was some culture of these things being a way of getting in touch with your spiritual side."[179]

Stories about border guards and customs officers selling or giving Western travellers hashish on entering Afghanistan as 'welcome presents' were common. One such story was told by Sean Jones, involving a customs inspector asking if Jones had hashish on entering the country. When Jones stated that he didn't, the inspector reached into his trenchcoat pocket and produced a slab of hashish and shouted, "Then take *this! First* quality! Welcome to Afghanistan! *Hahaha!*"[180] The drug was legal in Nepal and even sold in government shops, until the United States pressured

[176] Ibid. 127.
[177] Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*, 48-50.
[178] Ibid. 52.
[179] Deering, interview with author.
[180] Sean Jones, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 32-33.

Nepal to criminalise it in 1973, after which it was still sold through the black market.[181]

The lure of the East also made itself felt through everyday pursuits such as Eastern food, music and art, as well as exotic nature not experienced in the West. Edward Said explains that many 'Orientalists' love the countries that they visit and that this is represented in their clothing, food they eat, the interior design of their houses etcetera.[182] Several of my interviewees discussed Indian food and its lack of availability in the West. A number also mentioned Indian wildlife such as tigers and elephants. Many Westerners first 'taste' of India involves eating Indian cuisine in their home countries.[183] Vegetarianism, and non-Western science and medicine are amongst contemporary cultural symbols seen to lift one's status in the West.[184]

The lure of the East was promoted significantly through the works a number of high profile writers, poets, musicians and spiritual leaders. Many were either from India or had spent time there learning their craft or 'finding enlightenment'. The list of individuals who influenced others' decisions to head to India is countless and could not possibly be included in full, therefore I've chosen to list only the most high profile and influential from a long list.

Poet Allen Ginsberg was the earliest high profile influence on the Overland Trailers. As Maclean states, "Allen Ginsberg was the bearded Beat poet whose

[181] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 188-189.
[182] Hannam and Diekmann, *Tourism And India*, 85.
[183] Ibid. 86.
[184] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 86.

enduring anti-authoritarianism made him a spokesman for the generation."[185] Ginsberg lived in Varanasi for two years[186] and wrote extensively while in India.[187] Maclean explains:

> Ginsberg called India his promised land, writing in his journal, 'it's like a new earth – I'm happy.' In a prayer hall, he experienced 'a kind of Euphoria with my body relaxed and cross-legged and eyes fixed and mind happy and aware of the long trail from New York to Tangier to that spot of wet on the floor' … he found 'in the East something ancestral in ourselves, something we must bring into the light'. His journey was key to the emotional and intellectual counterculture renaissance.[188]

While Ginsberg was the first high profile influence, easily the most famous were the Beatles. In 1967, the Beatles, Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithful (along with other celebrities) all became interested in Eastern mysticism and travelled to India for meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in his ashram in Rishikesh.[189] Paul McCartney explained, "We wanted to try to expand spirituality, or at least find some sort of format for all the various things we were interested in: Allen Ginsberg, poetry, mantras, mandalas, tantra, all the stuff we'd seen."[190] Ginsberg visited Rishikesh in 1962 when it was almost unknown in the non-Hindu world, with very few Westerners joining the Hindu pilgrims.[191] In 1968 however, the Beatles stayed for five weeks, changing the trail, Western fashion and the Western perception of India quite suddenly.[192] Their stay popularised Rishikesh and Eastern religions[193] and the pyjamas and waistcoat given to them became adopted by flower children

[185] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 12.
[186] Ibid. 201.
[187] Baker, *A Blue Hand*, 4-5.
[188] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 203.
[189] Ibid. 209.
[190] Paul McCartney, quoted in Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 209-210.
[191] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 208-209.
[192] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 208-209; Worrall, *Travelling for Beginners*, Chapter 8, no page numbers.
[193] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 195-196.

worldwide.[194] Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's mantra meditation became extremely popular in the west almost 'overnight'.[195]

The Beatles also brought India to the West through their music, with George Harrison incorporating the sitar and Indian influences into pop music.[196] Harrison had enthusiastically explored the philosophies and musical heritage of India.[197] He first heard the sitar in 1965 and played it in *Norwegian Wood*, popularising the instrument.[198] "Sales of Indian instruments soared, along with popular interest in Eastern religion and philosophy."[199] India was also brought to the West as an inspiration, with the Beatles writing excessively whilst there.[200] Almost all of the songs from the *White Album* and *Abbey Road* were written by the Ganges River,[201] and The Beatles' success, along with their music turned India and Nepal into *the* destination.[202] As 'Tim', a British man who travelled the trail states, "A lot of people were going on the hippie trail because the Beatles had been to India in 1968 so it became the place to be."[203]

While the Beatles were clearly the most famous Western musicians to influence potential travellers, the most significant Indian musician to Westerners of the era was sitar musician Ravi Shankar. Shankar had taught George Harrison how to play the

[194] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 211.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Craig McGregor, *People Politics And Pop: Australians in the sixties* (Sydney: Ure Smith Pty Limited, 1968), 74.
[197] Tony Barrow, *John, Paul, George, Ringo & Me: The Real Beatles Story* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch, 2005), 57-58.
[198] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 209.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Bob Spitz, *The Beatles: The Biography* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 752.
[201] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 210.
[202] Ibid.
[203] 'Tim' quoted in Pauline Holt, 'Looking back at the Hippie Trail', *Sunday Sun*, [Newcastle-upon-Tyne (UK)], 23 September, 2007, 38.

sitar in 1965[204] and was extremely popular in the West.[205] Numerous interviewees from my sample study mentioned enjoying Shankar's music, many having seen him play live in concert. Most also described familiarity with his music as part of their reason for becoming interested in India.

Of the books that travellers read whilst on the road and as inspiration before heading East, *Siddartha* by Hermann Hesse, first published in 1951, was arguably the most widely read. Most interviewees in my sample study had read the book. The story is about the life of 'Siddartha', a Brahmin's son, unhappy and unfulfilled with his life who goes in search of inner peace, experiencing life as a holy man, as a follower of the Buddha, as a rich man and eventually as a father. The story documents the lessons Siddhartha learns through these phases of his life and his eventual awakening and enlightenment. The most significant scene in the story is when Siddhartha begins to understand life through watching the river, realising that while the water keeps flowing and moving, the river remains the same and does not flow away with the water.[206] Siddhartha's journey resembles the journey of many Westerners who travelled the Overland Trail: Western youngsters born into middleclass homes yet disillusioned with their own society and travelling East to experience spiritual growth and searching for answers from a multitude of teachers and experiences. While most interviewees mentioned Hesse, 'Phil' stated that Hesse had the most profound influence of all.[207]

[204] Maclean, *Magic Bus*, 209.
[205] Baker, *A Blue Hand*, 148.
[206] Hermann Hesse, *Siddartha* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1951), 101-102.
[207] 'Phil', interview with author.

Interestingly, the story line of *Siddhartha* is very similar to that of *The Miracle of Purun Bhagat*, a short story written by Rudyard Kipling in 1894.[208] Siddhartha's realisation at the river is also not new, resembling 'Fragment 12' from Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus' *On Nature*: "As they step into the same rivers, different and (still) different waters flow upon them."[209] While the similarities with *Siddhartha* are evident in both Kipling's and Heraclitus' works, it is unlikely that many of the Overland Trail Generation would have been familiar with Heraclitus. More Overlanders may have been familiar with Kipling. Kipling however, is (rightly or wrongly) often associated with British Imperialism in India rather than Counter Culture or alternative thinking. Unsurprisingly, *Siddhartha* was more influential to the Overland Trail Generation than Kipling's story written fifty years earlier.

The other highly significant writer was Jack Kerouac, discussed in the next chapter.

Gurus, or spiritual teachers also had a strong influence on many Westerners. Arguably the most famous guru was Baba Ram Das, author of the self-help book *Be Here Now*. Rod Deering described Ram Das as a huge influence[210], while Chris Koller participated in a ten day meditation course with him.[211] Swami Shankarananda described meeting Ram Das: "Friends of mine in Chicago, where I was living at the time, introduced me to the famous American yogi Ram Das at a

[208] Rudyard Kipling, 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat', *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Pall Mall Budget* (New York), October 1894, in Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Rudyard Kipling: Selected Stories* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1987), 260-270; 519.
[209] Heraclitus *On Nature*, in Heraclitus, *Fragments*, tr. T. M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 16-17.
[210] Deering, interview with author.
[211] Koller, interview with author.

dinner party. I sat next to him and our conversation had a great effect on me. Afterwards I knew that I had to go to India to find a spiritual teacher, a guru."[212]

Another guru with a large influence was Bhagwan Rajneesh. Nanette Schapel remembers that there were many Bhagwan followers, known as 'Orange People' in India in the 1970s, and while she did not become a follower, she did travel to Puna to see what the attraction was.[213] Bhagwan became so popular in the West that he began attracting a different type of audience altogether to India.[214] As David Williams recalls:

> In the beginning everyone at the [Bhagwan] ashram had travelled, they were either old India people or had at least *some* notion of what India was about, but now planeloads of Germans, having 'taken the colour' – Bhagwan's disciples wore variations on the sannyasin's traditional saffron – in Germany, were flying into Bombay, going straight to Pune, and never really going anywhere else.[215]

Paul Sieveking enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of Bhagwan's lectures, but also stated the other lure for joining up: "Besides that, the erotic undertone to the place was incredible: wonderful women from all over Europe, in shades of red, ochre, orange."[216]

Yet another important lure of the East, and one which does not share the romanticism of spirituality, religion and music, was that the East was an extremely cheap place to live and travel. People migrate in search of better or easier

[212] Shankarananda, interview with author.
[213] Schapel, interview with author.
[214] David Williams, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 117.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Paul Sieveking, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 118.

lifestyles[217] and as Kate Powley emphasized, "being in the East was so cheap, that if all travellers from that era were totally honest, they would have to admit that that factor played a big part in their travel choices."[218] One interviewee who openly admitted to the lure of affordability was Irene Milburn: "The west is expensive – in the east you can travel much further on the same amount of money."[219] Parkinson also specified that, "a simple change of location can lead to a financial bonus in the form of a lower cost of living. Financial considerations may be low priority, but there can be no ultimate escape from them."[220] Travelling with some particularly frugal characters, Powley explained that affordability allowed travellers extended trips with long stays.[221] Parkinson demonstrated this point through his stories about Werner, a German traveller who was absolutely obsessed with saving money at all costs.[222]

It is possible that longer stays due to low costs assisted travellers to pursue their other interests in India such as spirituality, meditation and yoga without the stress of having to be concerned about money. In this way, affordability aided in the promotion of India to the West. While it would be unfair to consider low costs, as opposed to more 'noble' lures, the main incentive for people to travel the Overland Trail, they can certainly not be ignored as a significant influence. During both the Overland days and in the modern era, affordability is a legitimate factor when considering holiday plans. The extent to which affordability influenced travellers choices to make the journey would have varied greatly between individuals, however

[217] Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (4th edn., UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 4.
[218] Powley, interview with author.
[219] Milburn, interview with author.
[220] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 14.
[221] Powley, interview with author.
[222] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 215-222.

if affordability was the sole motive, there would have been no reason for Europeans to travel any further than Afghanistan.

While disillusionment with their own societies is still evident in Western backpackers today, the search for authenticity and Oriental exoticism is equally evident, with the lure of the East still very much a pull factor influencing travellers to travel to India and Nepal.

CHAPTER 5:

Other Factors Influencing the Journey

While push and pull factors involving disillusionment with the West and the lure of the East played important roles in the mindset of travellers, other more practical factors also influenced decisions to undertake the Overland Trail.

The Overland Trail linked Australia with Britain and Europe and was well serviced with bus companies making the journey from London to Kathmandu and back. Seven of the forty interviewees in my sample group travelled on these buses for part or all of their journey. Worrall regretfully describes his bus journey as insular, with the passengers rarely socialising with locals or other travellers.[223] He also described the bus companies as representing the corporatization of the trail.[224] The bus companies provided travellers with the option of collective tourism with

[223] Worrall, *Travelling for Beginners*, Chapter 8, no page numbers.
[224] Ibid.

like-minded Westerners, should romanticized travel on local transport become too difficult or daunting.

For many Australians and New Zealanders, Britain was their destination, and arriving there their goal. Transit, rather than a search for the 'authentic' or the 'exotic' was their motivation for travelling along the Overland Trail. As 'Phil' stated, "London's the epicentre of English culture. Everyone seemed to want to go there, because of historical and language easiness … Everybody was on the road … going both ways. We went across and flew home, but a lot of people ended up coming home that way."[225] Alexandra Copeland explained that the journey to London was a very large motive for Antipodeans on the road, stating, "In 1972 most of the travellers making the overland trip were Australians and New Zealanders getting to and from Europe as cheaply as possible."[226] The British could enter Australia and work visa free during the 1970s without hassle,[227] which made travel between Australia and Britain a common occurrence.

Many Australians, including several of my interviewees, travelled around Europe during the late 1960s and 1970s. They only became interested in the Overland Trail through their travels in Europe and subsequent curiosity about neighbouring regions. Chris Koller explained that he had never intended to travel overland, but heard about the option whilst in Europe and that 'one thing led to another'.[228] When in Istanbul, Koller was particularly impressed by the travellers whom he encountered returning from India: "I had been to Istanbul the previous year and had seen some amazing

[225] 'Phil', interview with author.
[226] A. Copeland, interview with author.
[227] Wheeler and Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story*, 32.
[228] Koller, interview with author.

men and women get off buses with Afghan coats and long hair."[229] Koller was curious as to what lay beyond Istanbul and was inspired by those he met and spoke with.[230]

As Koller also explained, Australians have always aspired to visit as many countries as possible, wearing these countries as 'badges of honour', giving the traveller added status.[231] 'Tim' concurred, stating that travel has always been a rite of passage for young Australians.[232] With India and Nepal as popular as they were, the two countries were important destinations in travellers collections. Tony Wheeler recalled, "But those European trips had only whetted my appetite. Travelling across Asia would be the real thing."[233] From the other direction, Australians familiarity with Bali was also a factor influencing their travel plans. Bali was a practical stop, as well as the first major stop from Australia and the last one for those coming to Australia from Europe.[234]

Along with transit, another reason for travelling the Overland Trail was to simply have an adventure and 'see the world'. In the 1960s and 1970s, travellers didn't know as much about their destinations as they do in the modern era of internet and global communications. With less known about destinations, a greater sense of adventure prevailed for travellers of the Overland Trail than equivalent travellers today. Alby Mangels had a deep curiosity about the world and strong sense of adventure. He recollected, "I had a desperate urge to travel and used to stare at the

[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.
[232] 'Tim', interview with author, via email, May 12, 2014.
[233] Wheeler and Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story*, 7.
[234] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 46.

stars from my bedroom window at night, and wonder what they would look like on the other side of the earth."[235]

Numerous interviewees from the sample group described a sense of adventure as being a major factor in their decision to undertake the journey, many describing it as far more important than push factors based on disillusionment with the West or pull factors based on the lure of the East. As Rod Deering recalls, "I probably had the feeling, like a lot of people in those days, that Australia was a bit behind the times and that Europe was more progressive and so I wasn't searching, I wasn't really escaping, I was just having an adventure."[236] When asked about disillusion with the West and lure of the East, John Worrall stated, "I wasn't doing either and neither I think were the majority. That particular proposition has been over-played in my view, even though some were looking for spiritual enlightenment after the Beatles flew to Rishikesh and gave more people the idea."[237]

A huge influence responsible for many travellers' sense of adventure, so common during the era, was writer Jack Kerouac. In his most famous book, *On The Road*, first published in 1957, Kerouac glamourized the life of a traveller, and portrayed everyday nine to five living as boring and soulless. The following paragraph epitomizes Kerouac's descriptions of the life people wanted to escape from:

> The cop who had been an Alcatraz guard was potbellied and about sixty, retired but unable to keep away from the atmospheres that had nourished his dry soul all his life. Every night he drove to work in his '35 Ford, punched the clock exactly on time, and sat down at

[235] Mangels, *World Safari*, 8.
[236] Deering, interview with author.
[237] Worrall, interview with author.

> the rolltop desk. He laboured painfully over the simple form we all had to fill out every night – rounds, time, what happened, and so on.[238]

Rose Price was inspired by Kerouac. She told me, "I loved Jack Kerouac, I loved that book *On The Road*, but that was [a] different sort of travelling … that feeling of not being bound to anything really."[239] Chris Koller described the feeling more simply: "I think reading *On The Road* just made you restless."[240] Had *On The Road* been written in the modern era, it would be considered extremely sexist and glorifying of an array of unacceptable behaviours. However, when questioned about this, 'Motya' described his unique view on the book, explaining that:

> The most important thing to do was to violate, to violate anything, any social moray, or any expected experience from the bourgeoisie or from ordinary America and the desire was to violate everything – anywhere, any time, any place, and that was what the virtue of the book was. If things were violated, then it would make people think. It would lead people into experiences which were illuminating that as a result of the fact that they were violated. What was given back was that they were pleasured and there was no pleasure to be had in that strange and amorphous, inert, eosinophilic environment.[241]

Another basic reason for travel to the Indian Subcontinent, and one which has been underplayed, was a familiarity with India, particularly for British travellers. Tony Wheeler explained, "India had had a long history with England so there was no question that living in England you knew something about India. And of course the Beatles were there and Indian music. I'd heard Ravi Shankar play, and there was that

[238] Jack Kerouac, *On The Road* (USA: Penguin, 1957), 64.
[239] Price, interview with author.
[240] Koller, interview with author.
[241] 'Motya', interview with author.

factor as well, India was fashionable."[242] John Worrall concurred with these sentiments.[243]

Others described how their parents or grandparents had worked in India during the British Colonial era before independence. Pauline Holt explained in a newspaper article about the Overland Trail: "I always had a romantic notion of going to India because my grandparents had worked there in the 1920s and 1930s. My grandfather worked for the Indian Forestry Service... My grandmother went out to marry him in Lahore and I wanted to go and see where they had been married."[244] Michael Mayers explained that his father had served in India in the military and that through this connection, he had a certain degree of knowledge about the region.[245]

David Tomory also explained that upon entering the Indian subcontinent that for those from the British Commonwealth, a sense of familiarity was apparent through street names.[246] Traditionally British food such as porridge is also common in India and Nepal, with the Jomsom Trek in the Nepalese Himalayas often referred to as the 'Apple Pie Trail' due to sleeping huts serving apple pie along the route.[247] In reference to this type of comfort and familiarity, Parkinson explained that, "For an alleged wild frontier, Himalayan travel has some very homely touches."[248]

[242] Wheeler, interview with author.
[243] Worrall, *Travelling for Beginners*, Chapter 12, no page numbers.
[244] Pauline Holt, 'Looking back at the Hippie Trail', *Sunday Sun*, [Newcastle-upon-Tyne (UK)], 23 September, 2007, 38.
[245] Mayers, interview with author.
[246] Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 46.
[247] Bradley Mayhew and Lindsay Brown and Wanda Vivequin, *Nepal* (6th edn., Hong Kong: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2003), 316.
[248] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 171.

Familiarity of religion also existed in Goa, a Christian enclave, despite many travellers having rejected Christianity for Eastern faiths. As David Williams recalls, Goa had been in Portuguese hands and had a Western culture which welcomed the hippies.[249] This is also ironic because of how unwelcome they had become in some parts of the West. Nanette Schapel explained that arriving in Goa for Christmas was important to many travellers, who celebrated Christmas with beach parties and falling asleep naked on the beach under the stars.[250] This amusing anecdote ironically combines Christianity, nudity and collective tourism in an exotic location!

Parkinson described arriving in Goa as like arriving among friends, due to meeting other travellers he had met earlier on the trail and the ease with which he met others in Goa itself.[251] He described the daily routine:

> There were arrivals and departures most days, and each morning, eight or ten people would linger over a communal breakfast of homemade jams and crusty bread to discuss the day's agenda. Impromptu groups were formed on the spot to pursue favourite activities. The beach, the markets, a visit to the Portuguese cathedral or another of the local sights, or sometimes simply a hammock and a good book under a shady tree in the garden were the best possibilities on any given day.[252]

Parkinson's quote clearly indicates that stays in Goa could certainly be described as collective tourism.

Familiarity continues to be a factor influencing the travel choices of budget travellers. As explained by Hannam and Diekmann, 'backpacker enclaves' are

[249] Williams, quoted in Tomory, *A Season in Heaven*, 124.
[250] Schapel, interview with author.
[251] Parkinson, *Farewell Hippie Heaven*, 222-223.
[252] Ibid.

common in India, with many backpackers spending most of their trip in these places.[253] This phenomenon is explained in a negative light by Yajna Raj Satyal in *Tourism In Nepal*: "Budget travellers cluster in large communities of their own, they tend to demonstrate a life style which is alien and provocative especially to the young people who come in touch with them."[254] Hannam and Diekmann however explain that the backpacker presence brings many positives to local communities, including backpackers' longer stays ensuring that more money is spent over a longer period of time.[255] Wheeler, in *The Lonely Planet Story* concurs, explaining: "They go to places other tourists don't bother about, going beyond the big cities and big resorts to spend tourist dollars in the backblocks, the small towns, the forgotten corners."[256] Whether backpacker enclaves are seen as positive or negative, familiarity is certainly a pull factor influencing budget travellers to frequent them.

While disillusionment with various aspects of Western society pushed the Overland Trail Generation towards India and the lure of the East simultaneously drew them in, other basic, more practical and less romanticized factors such as transit, adventure and familiarity also played a role in their choice to travel to India. These factors are still present in today's backpackers travelling in Asia.

[253] Hannam and Diekmann, *Tourism And India*, 93-94.
[254] Yajna Raj Satyal, *Tourism In Nepal – A Profile*, (Varanasi: Nath Publishing House, 1988), 106.
[255] Hannam and Diekmann, *Tourism And India*, 92.
[256] Wheeler and Wheeler, *The Lonely Planet Story*, 386.

CHAPTER 6:

Conclusion

The Overland Hippie Trail was a unique event, made possible due to circumstance. While the young generation of the 1960s and 1970s were growing up in a society of affluence never before experienced on a mass scale, they had the opportunity to question the values of this society and the values and morals of the older generation who controlled it. Concurrently, alternative values and lifestyle choices became available from the East, reinforcing the view that the values of the West were not the only ones possible to live by. High profile influences such as musicians and writers advocated the exploration of these alternatives and a unique travel movement was born.

The Overland Trail Generation travelled to India and Nepal for numerous reasons, however most can be categorized into one of two themes: disillusionment

with their own societies in the West and the lure of the East with its plethora of lifestyle choices at extraordinarily low costs. While dissatisfaction with the West and intrigue with the East were major factors influencing the generation to make this journey, other factors must also not be underestimated – namely practical factors such as transit in an era when air travel was unaffordable for most, familiarity with the Indian subcontinent and the timeless urge for adventure.

The Overland Hippie Trail was a unique travel movement in itself, yet it triggered something even bigger: the modern phenomenon of 'backpacking'. People have always travelled and the concept of travelling on a budget is certainly not new. However modern backpacking is a mass phenomenon. It became a mass phenomenon through, amongst other things (such as cheap air travel), the Overland Trail and its subsequent popularity.

The similarities between those who undertook the Overland Trail and today's backpackers are frequent and marked. Both groups glorify a romanticized form of travel. Both also practice a collective form of tourism. Both groups also place great emphasis and importance on the search for authenticity when travelling. As Hannam and Diekmann explain, "Tourists have highlighted the demand for … [an] 'authentic' experience to discover the 'real' India, which draws upon earlier orientalist romantic imagery."[257] Tourists interviewed in India and Thailand in 2007 also professed to be alienated by Western society and materialism, money and drive to succeed, instead travelling in a quest to 'purchase' experiences in the East rather

[257] Hannam and Diekmann, *Tourism And India*, 136.

than goods in the West.[258] These values, attitudes, curiosities and lifestyle choices of the modern generation of backpackers are essentially the same as those of the Overland Trail generation which triggered the modern backpacking movement.

The Overland Hippie Trail was a brief phenomenon, spanning a timeframe of approximately fifteen years. It was made possible by specific circumstances in the West and in the world in general in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1979, when Iran closed its borders to travellers and the USSR invaded Afghanistan, the Overland Trail was effectively closed. While the trail itself has been closed for 35 years, and those who travelled it grow old, the destinations, experiences, activities, values and philosophies of the Overland Hippie Trail continue to live on in the form of the modern backpacking phenomenon which grew from it.

[258] S. Cohen, *The Tourism and Leisure Experience*, 12.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker, Deborah, *A Blue Hand: The Beats In India* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

Barrow, Tony, *John, Paul, George, Ringo & Me: The Real Beatles Story* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch, 2005).

Black, Jeremy, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

Burbank, John, *Culture Shock! Nepal* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1992).

Carroll, Peter N. and Noble, David W., *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977).

Castles, Stephen and Miller, Mark J., *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (4th edn., UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Cohen, Erik, 'Authenticity And Commoditization In Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 15 (1988), 371-386.

Cohen, Scott, 'Searching for escape, authenticity and identity: Experiences of 'lifestyle travellers', in Morgan, M. and Lugosi, P. and Ritchie, J.R.B. (Eds.), *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2010).

Diski, Jenny, *The Sixties* (London: Profile Books LTD, 2009).

Hannam, Kevin and Diekmann, Anya, *Tourism And India: A critical introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

Harding, Paul and Richmond, Simon, *Istanbul To Kathmandu: A Classic Overland Route* (Footscray: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2001).

Heraclitus, *Fragments*, tr. T. M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

Hesse, Hermann, *Siddhartha* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1951).

Holt, Pauline, 'Looking back at the Hippie Trail', *Sunday Sun*, [Newcastle-upon-Tyne (UK)], 23 September, 2007, 38.

Joll, James, *Europe Since 1870: An International History* (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

Kerouac, Jack, *On The Road* (USA: Penguin, 1957).

Kerouac, Jack, *The Dharma Bums* (USA: Penguin, 1958).

Lajipathi Rai, Hanumanthu, *Development Of Tourism In India* (Jaipur: Printwell, 1993).

Macdonald, Sarah, *Holy Cow! An Indian Adventure* (Sydney: Bantam Books, 2002).

Maclean, Rory, *Magic Bus: On The Hippie Trail From Istanbul To India* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

Mangels, Alby, *World Safari* (Adelaide: Savvas Publishing, 1986).

Manning, Patrick, *Migration In World History* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Matthiessen, Peter, *The Snow Leopard* (London: Picador, 1979).

Mayhew, Bradley and Brown, Lindsay and Holden, Trent, *Nepal*, (9th edn., Singapore: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2012).

Mayhew, Bradley and Brown, Lindsay and Vivequin, Wanda, *Nepal* (6th edn., Hong Kong: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2003).

McGregor, Craig, *People Politics And Pop: Australians in the sixties* (Sydney: Ure Smith Pty Limited, 1968).

Moore, Peter, *The Wrong Way Home: London to Sydney The Hard Way* (Great Britain: Bantam, 1999).

Newby, Eric, *A Short Walk In The Hindu Kush* (London: Picador, 1958).

Parkinson, Jack, *Farewell Hippie Heaven: Rites of Way on the Overland Route* (Port Melbourne: Government of South Australia through Arts South Australia, 2001).

Rutherford, Andrew (ed.), *Rudyard Kipling: Selected Stories* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1987).

Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

Sanderson, Terry, 'The trail to Kathmandu: Terry Sanderson takes the overland route to the Himalayas', *The Guardian*, 02/1977, p. 15. (full text online)

Santer, Lynn, *Alby Mangels Beyond World Safari* (Melbourne: JoJo Publishing, 2008).

Satyal, Yajna Raj, *Tourism In Nepal – A Profile* (Varanasi: Nath Publishing House, 1988).

Sheller, Mimi and Urry, John (eds.), *Tourism Mobilities: Places to play, places in play* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Singh, Reena, *Satisfaction Level Of Foreign Tourists Visiting India* (New Delhi: Mohit Publications, 2004).

Singh, Sarina, et al., *India* (30th edn., Singapore: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2011).

Spitz, Bob, *The Beatles: The Biography* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005).

Theroux, Paul, *The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia* (London: Penguin Books, 1975).

Thompson, Paul, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (3rd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Tomory, David, *A Season in Heaven: True Tales from the Road to Kathmandu* (London: Thorsons, 1996).

Urry, John, *The Tourist Gaze: Second Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2002).

Wheeler, Tony and Wheeler, Maureen, *across ASIA on the cheap: a complete guide to making the overland trip with minimum cost and hassle* (Sydney: Lonely Planet, 1973).

Wheeler, Tony and Wheeler, Maureen, *The Lonely Planet Story: Once While Travelling* (Great Britain: Crimson, 2008).

Worrall, John, *Travelling for Beginners: To Kathmandu in '72* (Amazon/Kindle, 2012).

Author's Interviews:

'Adele', via email, February 13, 2014.

'Adrian', Melbourne, Victoria, February 5, 2014.

'anonymous', Malmsbury, Victoria, March 24, 2014.

Atlas, Deena, via email, June 18, 2014.

Attrill, Alex, Melbourne, Victoria, February 4, 2014.

'Bill', Apollo Bay, July 9, 2014.

Copeland, Alexandra, via email, July 7, 2014.

Copeland, Leigh, via email, July 7, 2014.

Deering, Rod, Apollo Bay, Victoria, March 28, 2014.

Derrick, Paul, via email, March 15, 2014.

Friedman, Robert, via Skype, July 1, 2014.

'Goa Girl', via email, June 9, 2014.

Gross, Jane, Apollo Bay, Victoria, July 9, 2014.

Hawkins, Josephine, via email, March 26, 2014.

Hay, Debbie, Melbourne, Victoria, February 22, 2014.

'Jean', via email, June 15, 2014.

Keynes, Peter, via email, March 5, 2014.

Koller, Christopher, Melbourne, Victoria, January 30, 2014.

'Laurie', via email, June 27, 2014.

Malderner, Chouchou, via email, June 24, 2014.

Mayers, Michael, via email, July 4, 2014.

'Megan', via email, June 16, 2014.

Milburn, Irene, via Skype, July 14, 2014.

‘Motya’, Melbourne, Victoria, April 1, 2014.

‘Phil’, Apollo Bay, July 9, 2014.

Powley, Kate, via email, June 16, 2014.

Price, Rose, Melbourne, Victoria, February 12, 2014.

Roodenburg, Hans, via email, February 21, 2014.

Schapel, Nanette, Melbourne, Victoria, February 22, 2014.

Scott, Gus, via email, May 25, 2014.

Shankarananda, Swami, Mount Eliza, Victoria, February 12, 2014.

Smith, Deb, via email, March 4, 2014.

‘Stephania’, via email, May 28, 2014.

‘Tim’, via email, May 12, 2014.

Tomory, David, via email, July 26, 2014.

Wheeler, Tony, Melbourne, Victoria, January 27, 2014.

Whelan, Mick, via email, July 1, 2014.

Worrall, John, via email, May 27, 2014.