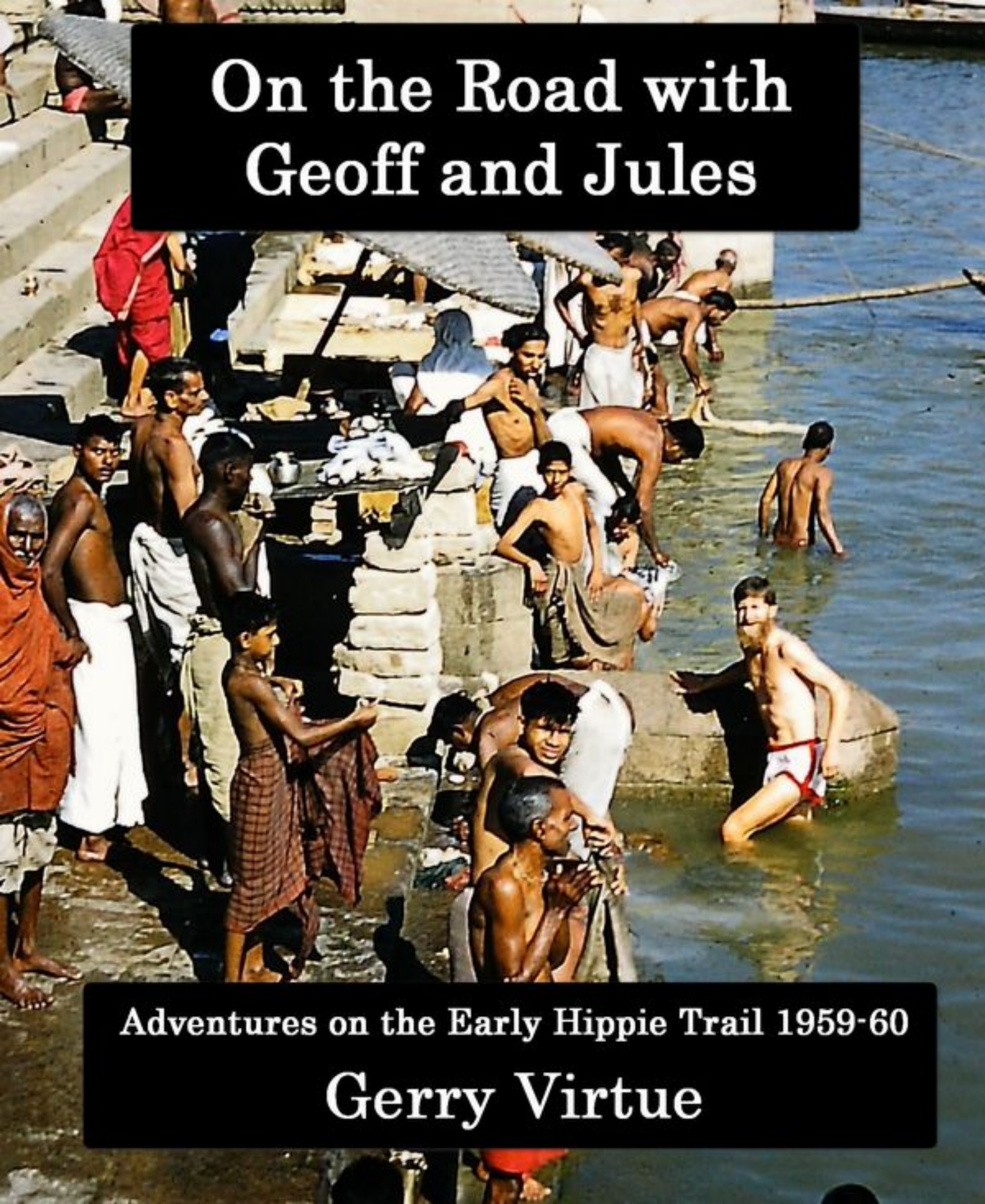

On the Road with Geoff and Jules

Adventures on the Early Hippie Trail 1959-60

Gerry Virtue

Excerpt From Chapter Two:

It was bitterly cold at Sandakphu, but there were great mountains to be seen. Kangchenjunga, of course, wreathed in clouds, loomed above us on one side, and farther away behind a long intervening ridge the Everest group stood out, misty and beautiful. The chowkidar was a good fellow and helped us build a fire in the cabin. He stayed for a while to warm himself but was rather shy and after a little, left us to ourselves. We soon had a meal bubbling thickly in our billycan: beans, rice and dhal, flavoured with onions and a little chilli, and fortified with an egg. We ate this concoction with great relish, then settled back contentedly with a mug of steaming coffee.

Huts at Sandakphu

'What more could a man ask, Jules? High in the Himalayas, with Everest out the window and Kangchenjunga round the corner. Beans on the boil, arse up the chimney. We've got it killed!' It was indeed a rare moment, and we enjoyed the warmth of the fire as we contemplated our good fortune.

‘Remember that round-faced fool in Darjeeling who kept telling us we’d come at the wrong time of the year? Well, so much for him!’ He raised his middle finger toward Darjeeling.

In the intense cold, a bucket of water the chowkidar had left was now completely frozen a mere five feet from the fire. This prompted Geoff to compose his Ode to Sandakphu entitled, ‘It's Bloody Cold, Mate!’

“There's a little frozen bucket
In a hut at Sandakphu
Where a couple o' beaten bastards
Are trying to boil their stew.
They'd give the game away, tho'
If they only bloody knew
That the temperature outside, mate,
Is minus 22.”

‘Do you know what day this is, Geoff?’ I mused gazing at the flickering fire. ‘New Year's Eve.’

‘New Year's Eve? Jeez! Is it?’ He jumped up and began to rummage through his pack. After a moment or two he held up a small, half-empty bottle of scotch. ‘Right! Here we are, Jules! This'll do the trick!’ And he carefully measured out half the whisky into my mug, pouring the remainder into his own. ‘Here's to you, old lad. Happy New Year!’

‘Same to you, mate. It's a good start to the new year. The best.’ We sipped slowly and in silence for a moment. It was the last day of 1959.

‘Did I ever tell you about Danny Reardon, Jules?’ He pursed his lips. ‘’e was a funny bugger. Lived in a valley that had been settled by Irish families way up in the hills near Sale. That's out in the eastern part of Victoria,’ he said, glancing over at me. ‘Loved fighting ... and the booze. I stayed with him for a while once, and he used to come in on Saturday afternoons and say, “C'mon Geoff, let's get down to the pub 'n get drunk 'n have a fight.” We used to put a few jars away together. Anyway, one day I'd been out in a paddock fixing a fence for old Danny when I spied him coming in at the gate down near the creek. He came across the paddock towards me but didn't see me because there were a couple of big, old gums in the way. So I thought, 'I'll have a bit of a joke on Danny,' and ducked behind one of the gums, thinking to jump out at him and give him a fright. But when he gets to the tree, he just stops around the other side, drops his strides and squats down to have a crap. Well, I thought, here's a go, and seeing Danny didn't know I was there, I quietly slid a big old piece

of bark around the tree and under his backside. Then when he'd finished, I just as quietly removed it. Danny stood up, fixed his pants, and naturally enough turned around to see what he had produced. When he saw there was nothing, he let out a squawk like a sick parrot, looked all around, up in the tree, then finally went off scratching his head, looking worried. He stayed off the booze all that week.'

Once started, the tales were brought out lovingly, one by one, and we sat yarning until the embers had died away and the freezing cold drove us into the warmth of our sleeping bags.

Our next day's hike was to take us to Phalut, about twelve miles away and at about much the same altitude. We rose early, in the half-light, and I spent some time with the chowkidar, hacking away at the ice on top of the water storage tank set in the ground. The ice was about eight inches thick, and we used his kukri (Gurkha knife) to break through sufficiently to get water. My hands became so cold that it was agonising when they thawed later by the fire. The mountains remained shrouded and hidden until mid-morning, and the track wound gradually but steadily along the ridge that led to Phalut. When the mist cleared, it became just warm enough that we sweated on the uphill stretches. The scene was enormously varied: deep valleys, forested slopes, with Birch and Silver Fir predominating, and always the massive bulk of Kangchenjunga to spur us on as we breasted each hill and rise.

About noon the track led upward again, so we stopped and sunned ourselves, absorbing the beauty of this high sanctuary. Off again and steadily upward, until finally we arrived at the bungalow at the top of the rocky path. There was nobody about, only a yak grazing peacefully beneath a fluttering, tattered prayer flag. We let ourselves into the cabin and, finding fuel and a half-used packet of Brooke Bond tea, made a brew and sat for a while before busying ourselves with the important business of preparing a meal. Panes of glass were missing from some of the windows, letting in gusts of icy wind, so we stuffed them with pillows, floor mats and other odds and ends. A little less cold, we had just settled down to eat when there was a sudden thumping on the door. I opened up, expecting to see the chowkidar, and found instead two broadly smiling Tibetans. One was little more than a youth, and the other older, perhaps his father.

I motioned them to come inside, and in they tramped, accompanied by a large, evil-smelling goat and blasts of freezing wind. The Dalai Lama had fled Tibet a few months earlier, after an uprising in Lhasa when the Chinese began shelling his Summer Palace. He had taken refuge in India. Had these two escaped Tibet at the same time? We never found out.

Tibetan stands at attention, boots intact, near the Phalut hut, Mt Kanchenjunga behind

I bundled the goat outside and beckoned the two men over to our fire, where they hunkered down, grinning happily. Not knowing Tibetan or Nepali, Geoff made eating signs, inviting them to join us as we tucked into our egg and vegetable stew. They refused but seemed to enjoy watching us, and squatted there smiling and nodding encouragement.

After we had eaten I offered them a puff of my pipe, but they indicated a preference for cigarettes, which we did not have. Geoff, however, had been admiring their marvelously ornate boots and began to covet them. They had thick hide soles and uppers brightly patterned in red over a black felt legging which stretched to the knee. After a while he tried a little tentative bargaining but without success. Then, pressing the matter, he tried by every means to persuade one of them to part with his boots, turning out his rucksack and offering them odd things he felt they might like. All to no avail. Indeed, they could not grasp what he was driving at and, still beaming, managed to convey a sense of compassion and empathy that I should be saddled with a companion so clearly unbalanced. Undaunted, Geoff made one last attempt, taking off his baggy and badly stained gabardine trousers, offering them as a final bargaining chip. But mistaking his intentions, they

backed away, smiling less confidently, and took their leave, bobbing their braided pigtails as they ducked outside into the cold night.

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Excerpt From Chapter Five:

Five

'A daring young man going west for a wheeze,
Was conning his way with remarkable ease;
This is his story; a series of sprees,
And all that he learns and he hears and he sees.'

Thus wrote Geoff in his diary before setting out to cash his Letter of Credit at the Delhi bank. Meanwhile I went in search of the dharamsala attached to the Lakshmi Hindu Temple. The dharamsala, however, was crowded with people come to Delhi for the fairs and festivities of Republic Day a few days hence, and there was no room. But I was taken in hand by a worshipper at the temple who informed me thus: 'Ah, never mind, my very good fellow, you may stay in the house of my friend, who is away from Delhi just now and who will be pleased for you to stay in his house.' So saying he spirited me away to an elegant residential area and installed me in the care of the chowkidar of a comfortable two-storied home. I never saw him again.

Geoff, on the other hand, was disconsolate. Nobody would cash his Letter of Credit. It had, by a cruel stroke of fate, expired the previous day. Somehow he'd never realised that it was valid for only twelve months from its date if issue, and was now quite useless. He would have to send it back to Melbourne and get the bank to forward what was left to him at some other city along our route. The balance was only about thirty-five American dollars, but that, together with another thirty or so which he expected to receive by mail from home was all he had to take him to England. So off he went to the Poste Restante at the post office for his mail. There were several letters for him but no sign of the draft he was expecting. That it had been sent was confirmed in another letter he received, so away he went to see the Inspector of Mails. Why was a registered letter marked PLEASE HOLD AND AWAIT COLLECTION not there. 'Oh,' said the Inspector of Mails sorting through reams of papers, 'it is very simple. You were not here to collect the letter when it arrived, so we have sent it to the Dead Letter Office at Amritsar. That is why your letter is not here.' In the face of this formidable argument there seemed little to be said, but Geoff dug his toes in. He would wait in the Inspector's office until he arranged to have the letter sent back from Amritsar.

No. Impossible to do such a thing quickly.

'I'll wait here anyway,' said Geoff cheerfully, unpacking his rucksack, laying out his sleeping-bag and setting up the stove to cook a meal. So a telephone call was made to Amritsar which revealed that the letter had inexplicably been sent on from that city to the Dead Letter Office in Madras, and from there it had then been returned to the sender in Australia. Formidable indeed. And a financial disaster for Geoff, who was now without any money at all.

There was other mail however, and amongst this he was much cheered by a breezy letter from his mother, in which she told him about her attempts to let the back flat in their Melbourne home. She related the story of one such attempt: 'I was showing this chap how to work the gas stove with the gas lighter. "Flick of the wrist," I said, "and Bob's your uncle. No matches!"

"Oh," said this chap, "Do you know my Uncle Bob?"

"No, no," said I.

"But you just said Bob's my uncle," said he.

Me: "No, no! He's nobody's uncle!"

Chap: "But he's my uncle!"

Me: "Look, it's only a saying. I don't know whose uncle he is."

Chap: "He's mine!"

Me: "No, no. I just mean 'Bob's your uncle', you know - meaning quick and fast."

Chap: "My Uncle Bob isn't quick or fast!"

Me: "I didn't mean he was anybody's uncle or that he was quick and fast." I had to leave it at that. I hope he didn't think I was silly.'

Geoff was much cheered also by our elegant Delhi residence, and we showered, washed our clothes and slept peacefully in great comfort, being woken finally by the chowkidar, the caretaker who insisted on bringing us breakfast. Such luxury. We hired bicycles and toured various places of interest in Delhi before Geoff returned to do battle once more with the Postal authorities and I presented myself at the Tourist Bureau to obtain tickets for the Republic Day Parade. It says a great deal for the officials of this Government organisation that although bearded, long-haired, with dirty dishevelled clothes and a rather down-at-heel appearance, we were always treated with great courtesy and made to feel that our wanderings were as important to them as to us.

Whilst in the Tourist Bureau a young American clapped me on the shoulder and asked abruptly, 'Say, man, have you been to Africa?' Startled, I confessed that I had not. He was flying to East Africa, he said, and wanted to hitch up into the Sudan and then into Egypt. 'I sure as hell do need

some information on that route. But I can't find anyone who's been there.' We talked, and I told him I was travelling with an Australian. 'Hey! You're not with a guy called Geoff Watt?'

'I am, yes.'

'Christ! I last saw that guy in Japan! Where is the old bastard?'

I took him off to find Geoff.

'Norm Frost! You bloody old ratbag! What are you doing here?' Geoff pumped his hand enthusiastically then stood off and eyed him curiously. 'Last time I saw this bloke, Jules, he was my manager at the Japanese Marathon!'

Norm was a genial fellow with rather a glib tongue. They had travelled together in the United States and then met by chance some months later in Hiroshima, where Norm had immediately declared himself Geoff's manager. Geoff had never had a manager and had no need of one, while Norm knew nothing about athletics of any kind, let alone the marathon. But this in no way deterred him from persuading a large Tokyo newspaper to sponsor Geoff and accommodate them both in a comfortable hotel.

We went with Norm and had a meal at the Delhi YMCA, where he was staying, and spent the afternoon there swapping tales. Norm told me how he first came to meet Geoff.

'I was in Detroit, see, and I got this job where I had to drive a Chevvy up to Alaska inside fourteen days. They gave me a hundred bucks for gas and off I went - five thousand miles right on to Anchorage. I was going through the Badlands of Dakota - before you get to the Black Hills - when I see this funny little bearded guy dancing around on the road up ahead. Well, I slow down and then he pulls out a big sign that says THE LAST BADMAN IN THE BADLANDS. So I figured that a guy with a sign like that sure as hell deserved some support.'

'Yeah,' said Geoff. 'I had another one that said THE BLACKGUARD FROM THE BLACK HILLS! People like weird signs and they'll pick you up if you've got a good one, but they keep right on going if you just stand there and wave your arms.'

'This crazy guy used to go off running along the road when we stopped to camp for the night,' Norm continued. 'I figured he didn't like cooking, but he reckoned he was in training.'

'I got some great runs along that road,' said Geoff. 'The first night on the Alaska highway we set up camp and I went off for a run. I set out to go about five miles, but it developed into a real gallop. I was just rolling along and knocked up five miles in no time. Then I turned round to run back. After a mile or so a car pulled up and I was offered a lift. These Canadians must be nuts, I

thought; can't they see I'm training. Then another car pulled up. I kept on running, and they plied me with questions. "Where are you running to?"

"Alaska."

"Alaska?"

"Yeah, from Dawson Creek. I'm running the length of the Alaska Highway."

"When did you start?"

"Today. I run a hundred miles each day. Takes twelve hours," I said, running along steadily.

"Do you stop at all?"

"Only at lunchtime. I stop for ten minutes while my mate gives me eggs and milk and sugar."

"Is there any money in it?"

"Oh, there will be soon, when it catches on."

"Where are you from?"

"Australia."

"Have a beer."

"Thanks." We drank a toast and went our ways. I hadn't gone another mile when another car pulled up. More questions ... same sort of thing.

"... to Alaska?"

"Yeah, a hundred miles a day."

"Well, how come you were running the other way when I saw you back a ways.'"

Geoff danced about, eyes gleaming. As he talked, a crowd had gathered and he held forth, the centre of a circle of grave, puzzled faces, all watching intently.

Later we wandered from New Delhi across into the old part of the city, which we liked better. It was, however, rather like going from Canberra to Calcutta, so extreme was the contrast. We stopped to watch a spruiker, who had a monkey beating a drum while he talked up a big crowd to see the fearful battle of the cobra and the mongoose. He was a polished conman and we admired the style with which he extracted two annas (about a penny) from everybody in sight. There was no show till the crowd was a good size and everyone had paid. Then a rather dazed-looking cobra was poked unwillingly out of a sack while a mongoose, tethered in the dust to a nearby stake, scurried over and bit the snake casually on the neck. The snake was finished and the show was over.

We caught a bus to the International Agricultural Fair where, we were told, there were fine displays from the Indian states as well as from other countries, notably the Soviet Union, China and other socialist republics. As we settled into the seats on the bus, people began to nudge each other

and murmur, "Rusko, Rusko." Because of our beards they believed us to be Russians. Rising to the occasion, Geoff got to his feet and, in a thick husky voice, addressed the passengers.

"Ve have come to Hindustan to sell you machines for the fields. They are good machines! Very good! But you must not buy machines from Amerika. Bad! Very bad!"

And, as the bus was stationary, he danced a little jig - his idea of a Cossack dance. It was a smash performance. His little speech pleased the people, but his jig delighted them even more. They fell about with laughter, hooting, snorting and doubled up with mirth, so much so that Geoff felt impelled to continue. "Today ve bringing you machines. Tomorrow ve make you part of Mother Russia! No?" And he stretched his arms wide in a heroic pose. More hilarity, slapping on the back and much laughter. It was, perhaps, the most good-humoured busload to arrive at the Exhibition that day.

Various foreign countries were competing with one another to show the Indians how excellent their system of living was, and how it was merely a matter of adopting their style for the problems of India to be solved. So there were smiling faces at each pavilion, with soaring production graphs and gleaming machines. East Germany outdid them all for interest by exhibiting a life-size plastic cow, fully illuminated internally and dissected to show all 'working' parts - veins, arteries and other organs. This fascinated the Hindus, and they gazed at their holy animal in wonder. Hordes of these gentle beasts wander the streets and roadways of India unmolested, living off scraps from vegetable stalls or handouts from storekeepers. In the cities they block traffic, cause general confusion, and their droppings lie everywhere, a hazard to pedestrians. The only thing to be said about it is that they provide a living for a few - those who collect the dung, dry it into little cakes and sell it for fuel. The roast-peanut vendors of Delhi use nothing else for their roasting, and those people who cannot afford kerosene have no other cooking fuel.

We were in the pavilion of the Socialist Republic of Outer Mongolia when Geoff was seized with an urgent need for a toilet. He tried to explain his predicament to a smiling Mongolian demonstrating a butter-churn. Unfortunately the man was not expert in English and could not grasp Geoff's meaning. Geoff uttered every word for lavatory he could think of without success and, in a final desperate bid, seized the butter-churn and squatted down upon it to demonstrate his need. A stunned silence. Then a horrified Indian attendant rushed over and snatched the churn from him indignantly, exclaiming, 'No, no, sir! It is not for that purpose. It is for making butter!'

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Excerpt From Chapter Six:

'You know, Jules, it's a year today since I started travelling.' We trudged off along the muddy alleys of Kabul, ankle deep in slush and melting snow. 'I set out to go to England via America, but now I'm in Afghanistan via Alaska ..... and I'm flat broke.' We tramped on in silence. It didn't seem to matter that I had very little money and Geoff had none. We had developed a fatalistic approach to travelling. We'd keep moving, see what we could and hope for the best. So far we'd been lucky. We reflected on the fact that we'd had no bills for accommodation since Calcutta. This had not been our original intention, but the fact was that our expenses had been only for food and a few train journeys, so at this rate we would make it to Teheran on the cash I was carrying, and Geoff's money should be waiting for him.

'G'day there!' Geoff called. We had come on to a main thoroughfare where a few high clearance Russian cars passed infrequently. And he'd spotted an American station-wagon some distance away, with two clean-cut young men about to climb in. 'There's a few construction companies here, Jules,' he muttered. 'We might get a lift.' We hurried toward the car.

'G'day!'He beamed expansively at the two men and contrived to look the very soul of innocent friendliness. 'Saw your car there and thought one of you might have been Nick Ford. Do you blokes know him?' The neat young men looked puzzled, as well they might, since Nick Ford was an instant invention.

'Hi. Nick Ford? No, can't say I know him. What outfit's he with?'

'I don't know for sure. Knew him in Boston some time back and he told me he'd be working here with some construction company. We're just here for a day or two and thought we'd look him up.' I squirmed but managed an earnest smile.

'I see. Well we're from Columbia University, here on a teacher-training program.' A pause. 'Say, why don't we run you guys out to Morrison-Knudsen to their construction office. They probably know him.'

'Thanks, that'd be great!' We climbed in and drove off. The two young men were having an argument, one beefing that the other had invited him to dinner and not invited a girl for him. He was quite put out. We listened to their conversation with interest.

One turned after a while and said, 'I guess you guys know that Kabul is a city of fun and fornication.' He went on, 'Bob, here, and I have a theory that it's the water that does it. Rhinoceros horns, you know, are an aphrodisiac. Well, we figure that a long time ago there must have been a big herd of rhinos grazing here in this valley. Then there must have been some great catastrophe, and they all got themselves buried. Now when you draw water from the wells here, there's a good deal of dissolved rhino horn in it … Well, it's just a theory, but I'll tell ya one thing, there sure is something that affects the girls when they get here. Wow!'

We arrived at the construction company's office, the two men let us off and drove on, still arguing. The construction office had air-conditioning, a row of typists, dark-suited men and memo-carrying employees scurrying about. The sight of such business efficiency in Kabul was depressing, but Geoff ran through his Nick Ford routine to a man with glazed eyes, quickly working round to the important subject of getting a lift to Kandahar.

'Hell no! It's winter, and we haven't sent a vehicle through there in two months.' Thanking him, we left and made off back into town to check on buses to Kandahar.

On the way we passed a huge, Russian-built bakery. Both the Americans and the Soviets pour aid into this very strategically placed country, each competing fiercely to be the major influence and to suck the little country into its orbit. In this 'hearts and minds' contest it was interesting to observe the different approaches. The Americans concentrate on mammoth schemes to build airports, dams and the like, gigantic activities which the ordinary Afghan regards in much the same way as he would the waxing and waning of the moon; interesting, of course, and important, but quite remote from him. The Russians, on the other hand, take a more seductive approach - a bakery which supplies the bulk of Kabul's bread, ungainly cars which are not very good, but cheap, and hundreds of miles of roads, stretching from the Russian border, ultimately to tunnel under the Hindu Kush Range as far as Kabul. The only casualties in this struggle are likely to be the innocence and simple lifestyle of the Afghan people. They are, naturally enough, unlikely to see that Progress, the Industrial State, a High Standard of Living, all of which they believe will solve their problems, are the very things which will rip the fabric of their lives to shreds.

A mail bus would leave for Kandahar next morning, 'Inshallah', and would, for a hundred and two afghanis - about two dollars fifty, take us there. Good value for over three hundred miles, but the 'Inshallah' indicated the chancy nature of the undertaking, it being in the hands of God just when the bus would leave and when it would arrive in Kandahar, or in fact if it would make the journey at all.

We insured against the cold with two Pushtun jackets bought in the bazaar. These brightly embroidered leather waistcoats have coarse wool linings and, although giving us the appearance of eccentric dandies, nonetheless kept us warm and comfortable in the biting wind. We were not to know that within five years such jackets would become essential gear for the aspiring hippie. We spent the night in a tea-house near the bus-serai and next morning took our seats in the Royal Afghan Mail Bus.

Kabul to Kandahar bus – Royal Afghan Mail

This vehicle bears description. Brightly painted like a gipsy caravan, an oblong, box-like superstructure was mounted on the chassis of an International Truck. Inside the seats were wooden-backed benches running the width of the bus, and on its top, along the sides, gaudily painted boards formed a shallow cavity where women making the trip were obliged to perch with the luggage, exposed to whatever weather might come their way. The two seats behind the driver were 'First Class' but differed in no way from the remainder, save for their position, all being engineered for maximum human discomfort. The space between the back of one seat and the front of another was just short of that needed to sit with your legs to the front. So you sat with them tucked to one side,

as did everybody else. When one person on the seat wanted to change position, it was necessary for everybody to rise as one man and do the same. The 'aisle' was taken up by little cross-seats to accommodate an extra person, so with the escape route blocked, getting in and out became a feat of gymnastics that involved climbing and crawling over all the other seats and passengers.

Our bus driver was a raw-boned, genial character clad in a turban, vivid green shirt, matching pyjama pants, and a khaki army greatcoat. He marshalled his passengers in a good-humoured way, seating us all with polished authority. Amongst our companions were two mullahs and a superbly dressed policeman, resplendent in what could have passed for the uniform of a four-star general. We encountered these grandly attired gentlemen fairly often, the country having a decided penchant for gold braid and glittering epaulettes, whether the wearer be a military man, a policeman or an attendant in a government office. Indeed, when ex-King Amanullah visited England in 1928, it was his custom to distribute twenty-pound notes amongst those who did odd jobs for him, and at railway stations he habitually saluted gold-braided station-masters, believing them to be cabinet ministers or admirals.

Finally preparations were completed, the last passenger had squirmed his way to the last seat, the driver had been harangued lengthily by the manager of the bus company, and the great machine lumbered out of the bus-serai, through the crowded bazaar and on to the road to Kandahar. Bump! Lurch! All that day our magnificent vehicle swayed and groaned as we climbed to more than eight thousand feet through stark, black hills streaked with snow. There were stops for tea at village chaikhanas, stops for mail, stops for breakdowns and stops for prayers. For the latter, all the men got out, spread their prayer-mats on the ground and bowed, knelt, prostrated themselves and rose in rhythmic unison, firmly overseen by our two mullahs. Whatever the stop, it was welcome, since it gave some relief to tortured legs and backsides, although only at tea-stops and prayer-stops could we get out and stretch our cramped limbs. The comradeship of the journey soon entered into us all, however, and before long we were good friends - except for the mullahs, who held themselves aloof, and the policeman who possessed a sour disposition.

Our final stop for the day was at midnight in a small settlement which sported a hotel with mud battlements, and a straggle of low mud buildings. Regarded as passengers of some distinction, we were expected to spend the night in the hotel with the mullahs, the policeman and the driver. But with persistent cries of "Nay afghani! Nay afghani!", asserting thus that our money was not so plentiful that it could be squandered on hotels, Geoff led the way back to a cosy-looking chaikhana where most of our companions were already installed. Inside it was warm and dim-lit, the mud wall

blackened with smoke from an ancient tin samovar, and our fellow passengers sprawled on benches, some already sleeping, others drinking tea and eating. Space was made for us, and declining hashish from a proffered hookah, we slept soundly in a corner.

Our chaikhana companions

We were well away by seven the next morning, without the benefit of breakfast or other preliminaries. There was still snow on the ground, but it was less cold. We had descended somewhat, and the countryside took on a different aspect. The mountains were still there, but quite bare. Without snow, they looked unreal - like a painted backdrop for a stage play. Snow had made all the difference - you could feel its cold, be dazzled by its brightness, but now there was nothing but sparse, open tussock country. All was brown, grey and black. Mid-morning, just when we were feeling the need for food, the driver pulled in to a chaikhana. We squatted expectantly in the sun with our companions until a young lad came round with tea in little china pots, and breads as big as snow shoes. With this inside usthe day brightened. There was now an interminable delay, so sitting there in the sun we produced the paperbacks we read on such occasions – "Mr Norris Changes

Trains" and "Brazilian Adventure." Geoff was reading the latter, in which Peter Fleming relates the story of the road upcountry into Brazil. Fleming's descriptions of that road tallied rather well with the one we were on, and oftimes as he peered around at our Afghan companions, Geoff would nudge me and say, 'By George, Jules, these Brazilians are colourful folk!'

Negotiating a particularly accursed creek-bed crossing in the afternoon we blew a tyre. And for an hour and a half were stuck at that little spot, with nobody permitted out of the bus save the driver and his mate. I suppose nobody expected they would take so long to change the tyre, so we sat like so many sardines and endured the wait. Near the end of this time there was a great lull. People had stopped talking and a long silence reigned. It was broken only when Geoff vented a great fart. At once the bus rocked with great gales of laughter. 'Ho! Ho! Ho!' the people went at this indiscretion.

Later, the afternoon was further enlivened by our 'General' attempting to settle a small grievance. He was an improbable character, swarthy, hook-nosed, balding, with a thin, drawn face, hollow cheeks and burning black eyes. Rather than dressed like a general in a musical comedy, he would have been better cast mounted on an Arab steed, burnous flowing and eyes flashing darkly. But the sad fact was that he spent most of the time hanging out of the window being sick. During one of these chunder sessions a young fellow behind him took his hat and hid it ..... his bright, shining, high-peaked cap with the peacock-blue trimmings. Recovering from a spasm and finding his hat missing, the 'General' rounded fiercely on the inoffensive man beside him, who happened at the time to be laughing but knew nothing of the missing cap. Pulling out his revolver, the 'General' shouted angrily at the man, firing off a shot which went through the roof and must have seriously alarmed the ladies squatting there. At once there was pandemonium. The driver applied the brakes, the bus stopped abruptly, and men began shouting and climbing over the seats in every direction. Two men grabbed the 'General' from behind, while another recovered his hat and placated him with soothing talk. He simmered down somewhat after a time, and we resettled ourselves when the bus restarted. But at intervals he would erupt again with an angry outburst. With the shooting over, however, it was entertaining and served to break the monotony.

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