

Introduction: beginning the trail

‘IT! IT!’¹

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Prologue: ‘Eddy’ leaves South Wales

In 1969 ‘Eddy’ was 17 years old and lived in South Wales. He had a group of close friends: they listened to music by bands and singers like Country Joe and the Fish, Bob Dylan, Pink Floyd and Roy Harper, they went to concerts, they read authors like Aldous Huxley, Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg, they searched in their local library to find out about meditation and yoga, and they experimented with drugs. At one point in 1969 ‘Eddy’ came across a copy of the *News of the World*, and read one of its sensationalistic exposés about the horrors of travel to the East, which described in prurient detail the easy use of drugs, the casual approach to sex and the ill-disciplined rebelliousness of the travellers. ‘What is happening to our young people?’ the reporter asked. ‘Eddy’ thought about it, and decided that these horrors sounded pretty attractive. He quietly resolved to find out more for himself. Over the next two years he worked in London and South Wales, and saved some money. For a while he was a roadie for a Hindu-inspired London-based rock group, Quintessence. He told his friends about his plans to travel: a couple seemed interested in going with him, but only one saved any money.

In 1972 he set off with ‘Mike’. ‘Eddy’ knew his parents would be worried, and so told them he was going to Greece, which he thought sounded more respectable and less dangerous than going to India. ‘Eddy’ had never been outside Britain before and spoke no foreign languages, but together with ‘Mike’ he hitched and caught trains, and six weeks later they were in India. ‘It was like someone had opened

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the curtains,' he remembered when he was interviewed, 'it was the Real Thing'.² He stayed there for two months, but became quite ill. He returned to South Wales in January 1973, and later became more committed to Buddhism.

This book tells the extraordinary story of ordinary people like 'Eddy'. Several hundred thousand of them travelled from North America and Western Europe to various 'points east' between 1957 and 1978. In the late 1960s, their route became known as the 'hippie trail'. For many, it was a life-changing journey.

Meet the travellers

There is an odd issue that we face when writing a history of the hippie trail and its travellers: the trail had no official existence. No ceremony marked its opening or its collapse; no flag identified its territory; no organisation directed its travellers; no leader wrote its manifesto; no prominent philosophers attempted to make sense of it; no major novelists have written about it; and no archive has been created to preserve its memory. In order to identify it, we need to impose our own parameters on the ceaseless, immeasurable and often unpredictable flows of history.

Our access to the trail began with some conversations with a few friends, and then a decision to place a small ad in *Private Eye* in 2012, asking if there were any hippie trail travellers who were willing to be interviewed. About forty replied: we got to interview some of them, who in turn recommended other people to us, and we also made use of friends, relatives and further contacts to find others. We interviewed 34 travellers between 2012 and 2016, and we sent 11 questionnaires to travellers we could not meet. We also searched for relevant published works through Google, Amazon, Abe Books and Smashwords, and we made frequent visits to the darker recesses of second-hand bookshops. In this way we found 35 related works, some of them accounts of travel, some religious meditations or drug-orientated stories, others longer autobiographical sketches which included substantial sections about a trip to the East. Put together, these sources allowed us to reconstruct 80 journeys. We cannot claim that this is a scientifically selected cross-section that represents the hippie trail community; we are well aware of the limitations of our data. Still, a database concerning 80 journeys seems sufficiently substantial to illustrate some general trends, and a good place to start our story.

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The vast majority of our 80 travellers were born in the 1940s and 1950s. Their average age when they first travelled on the trail was just over 23; the youngest was 16, the oldest 42; 12 of them were teenagers, 55 were in their twenties and three in their thirties or older. About three-quarters of them were men, and there was no significant difference in the age at which men and women started travelling. (We return to the topic of female travellers in Chapter 2.) Their methods of travel varied. They included hitching, travelling in their own vehicles, taking trains and public buses, commercial coaches and minibuses, sea voyages and a few plane flights. Frequently travellers would mix buses and trains with hitching. We are certain that our sample underestimates the number of travellers who went by coach, which was very probably the most common means of transport to the East in the 1970s. There is a simple reason for this limitation to our data: coach passengers usually have less interesting stories to tell. The hitch-hikers and car drivers recall their adventures as sagas, and are therefore more willing to talk about them. The coach passengers sometimes resembled tourists – an issue to which we will return in Chapter 3.

For most of our 80, we have some indication of their education. If we restrict our focus to our 55 British travellers, we find that 14 of them had attended university before they travelled; another five had benefited from some sort of post-secondary school higher education, whether art college, polytechnic or teacher-training college; in total about a third of our sample. There were 621,000 students in various forms of higher education in the UK in 1970, when about 8.4 per cent of 18 year olds went to these institutions.³ The travellers were about four times more likely to have benefited from higher education than the mass of the British population. This difference suggests the relatively privileged status of many of our travellers. On the other hand, this point should not be exaggerated: it remains the case that the majority of our sample did not benefit from higher education and – as will be seen – there were plenty of working-class travellers on the hippie trail.

It is often difficult to understand what motivated people to take the hippie trail. ‘Eddy’s’ story of a chance reading of the *News of the World* is, in a way, quite typical. Sometimes random events just seemed to push people along the path. For example, the mystical Dominic Quarrell was smoking a joint in September 1976 when he heard a voice inside him say: ‘Go to India, find a Guru, put god to the test.’⁴ He left almost immediately on a four-month journey. Such anecdotes

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record chance encounters: it is clear that they only make sense within a larger context which – somehow – seemed to encourage a certain type of young person to consider travelling.

When asked to explain why they went, our interviewees often fell back on vague terms such as ‘a quest for adventure’ or a desire to see ‘something exotic’. Attempting to identify clear reasons for their travel may well oversimplify a complex decision, in which peer pressure, ambition, a cosmopolitan, open-minded sense of ‘one world’, a desire for learning or self-improvement, and a search for thrills were all involved. However, having made that qualification, it is clear that alongside the frequent vague references to a search for the exotic, two reasonably articulate arguments were used to justify doing the trail: a search for drugs (whether cheaper, better or just more easily available drugs) and a spiritual quest. Marjorie Kirchner found that these two issues featured again and again in her conversations with other travellers. ‘Are you travelling to India for meditation or for drugs?’ they would ask her; she got so tired of this question that eventually she’d reply: ‘Neither, I’ve come to see filth and squalor.’⁵ In fact, about a quarter of our sample referred explicitly to drugs as an important motivating factor, and another quarter point to spiritual factors.

India was clearly the most commonly visited country: over four-fifths of our travellers went there. The next most commonly visited countries were Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan, although in some cases these were simply places that hippie trail-ers travelled through. While Kathmandu in particular and Nepal in general were often celebrated as the ultimate goal of the hippie trail, only about half of our travellers reached there. There is some sense of historical evolution in destinations. Morocco was popular in the 1950s and early 1960s. As the trail developed in the late 1960s, its centre of gravity moved eastwards, drawing travellers to India and Nepal rather than to North Africa.

This brief glance at our database suggests the variety of the travellers: they used different means to travel; they went to different countries; they gave different reasons for their journeys. While they were usually young (early to mid-twenties), this was not always the case, and there were precocious teenagers mixing with thirty-somethings. The single point that clearly unites them is their decision to travel east.

Their similarities become clearer if one examines their accounts as a bloc. Putting aside the minority who travelled to Morocco, most accounts tell of a swift journey through western Europe, which was

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considered too expensive to stay in. Most then travelled through Yugoslavia or Bulgaria, countries which never attracted the travellers' admiration; there is no hint of respect for Soviet-style communism among our travellers, not even from the most committed leftists. Greece was usually the opportunity for a break from travelling, and many stopped for a few days at a Greek beach. Then they crossed into Turkey, which is often cited as a border-nation, sometimes because of the obvious, striking presence of Islam, sometimes by reference to the Bosphorus as the geographic feature that separates Europe from Asia, and sometimes also because of a looser social or cultural perception that this was a radically *different* type of country from those of western Europe. A surprising number mention visiting the famous 'Pudding Shop' in Istanbul, a café which quickly began to cater for hippie trail-ers, and taking the chance to see the nearby Blue Mosque. Travel through eastern Turkey was often difficult; there were many areas here in which the travellers were not welcome, and they encountered stone-throwing and the aggressive sexual harassment of women travellers. Iran by contrast, seemed a more modern, civilised place, in which there was less open hostility, although women travellers still reported some harassment. None of the travellers admired the Shah's government.

Afghanistan then came as something of a relief: drugs were easily available there and more-or-less tolerated, Afghan people rarely showed any hostility to travellers, and often would be positively welcoming and hospitable. Places to stay were usually primitive, but were always cheap. By contrast, Pakistan appeared crowded, often unwelcoming, and not particularly interesting. India was overwhelming; many travellers were struck by the strange contrast that, after struggling with Turkish, Farsi and other foreign languages, now they could be understood in English. The variety of the country astonished the travellers, and – correspondingly – extremely different experiences are recorded. Finally, travellers expected Nepal to be memorable; some were searching for a spiritual experience there. A semi-permanent hippie colony was established in Kathmandu in the late 1960s. It could be rather cosy, with a range of specialist shops, cafés and lodging houses, often quite grubby, and – for a while in the late 1960s – cheap drugs were readily available there. These basic observations feature in most accounts, whether from interviewees or from published works.

This basic summary of the route and the most common experiences

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leaves out one important factor: it focuses on the ‘external’ journey. Many travellers found that there was another, equally important, dimension to their experience: their inner journey. In other words, travelling along the trail affected them. In the chapters that follow, we will concentrate on this inner journey.

Studying the sixties: a minority experience?

The exact number of people who travelled east on the hippie trail will never be known. Certainly there were hundreds of thousands, probably there were a few million (we will return to this issue in Chapter 3). But however their numbers are calculated, they were clearly a minority of their generation. These points suggest a well-known argument concerning the 1960s as a whole: the astonishing cultural changes that we most frequently associate with the sixties were only a minority experience, and most of the fundamental features of Western societies did not change. John Lennon himself made these points in an interview in 1971. ‘The people who are in control and in power and the class system ... is exactly the same ... Nothing’s really changed. It’s the *same!* Nothing changed, we’re a *minority*. We’re a minority like people like us always were.’⁶ And, sticking to the Beatles for a moment, one can cite more evidence for such arguments. In February 1967 the Beatles’ memorable double-A side ‘Penny Lane/Strawberry Fields Forever’ was released in the UK. It entered the charts almost immediately, but it never reached Number One: instead, Engelbert Humperdinck’s self-consciously old-fashioned ‘Please Release Me’ was the record-buying public’s favourite. The same story can be told in the album charts: in 1967 the Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper* held the Number One position for 27 weeks in the UK charts, but it was easily beaten by the soundtrack to *The Sound of Music*, which was Number One for an astonishing 70 weeks in 1966 and 1967.⁷ The evidence of the cultural weight of the conservative majority is clear.

So, why study a minority experience?

Similar arguments could be made about eighteenth-century Europe and its cultures. The proportion of Europe’s eighteenth-century population who would have been able to read Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* was small – probably about one tenth – and the proportion who actually read it must have been infinitesimally tiny. But a historian is entitled to argue that a study of eighteenth-century Europe which simply ignored the *Social Contract* and allied works by

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Enlightenment philosophers would be disappointing. One can make a value judgement, and argue that these works have an importance beyond their immediate audiences. Similar arguments can be applied to sixties culture. And just as 'Strawberry Fields' is more important than 'Please Release Me' for the development of popular music, so the experiences of the hippie trail travellers are more important than their numbers and minority status suggest. Their travels express some of the great, lasting cultural shifts that emerged from that period: they opened up 'routes to the east', which were later exploited by more commercially minded companies; they contributed to a deepening Western fascination with Eastern religion and – more specifically – to the development of Western Buddhism; they were inspired by the 'Eastern turn' in Western popular music; they represented a post-colonial generation which was largely able to put aside the distorting lens of the imperial legacy in order to look again at the East; they represented a new and original form of youth culture.

In recent years, there has been a steady trickle of self-published, autobiographical material from this generation (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). Taken collectively, these works suggest that many in this generation now remember their weeks or months 'on the road' as *the* formative period in their lives, representing a freedom that they have not encountered since. Is this just nostalgia? To some extent, there's no doubt that the travellers' memories are sustained by and contribute to a certain cultural fixation with a vaguely defined 'sixties', exemplified by tribute bands, re-released CDs and even museum exhibitions (such as the Victoria and Albert Museum's 'So You Say You Want a Revolution', 10 September 2016– 26 February 2017). On the other hand, our interviewees were usually pleasantly surprised to find that academics such as ourselves were 'at last' taking an interest in the hippie trail, and were generally unaware of attempts to document or commemorate it. Most of the self-published authors of the trail were under the impression that they were the first to write about it.

What can initially appear as a romantic, nostalgic tone in these works and memories may really be something different: a bitterness, a frustration that their youthful hopes were never realised in their later lives. In other words, their memories are a challenge to the manner in which the world has developed since those days. If for no other reason, these points suggest that their minority memories are worth reconsidering.

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Studying the sixties: dangers, fears ... and hopes

'A boy's own tale of adventure through dangerous places in less dangerous times' is the first line of one recent account of the hippie trail: a neat summary of how attitudes to travel have changed.⁸ The sentence echoes the easy romanticism that often seems to accompany memories of the period. Of course, some things were easier in the 1960s. 'Nowadays, there was a job for anyone who could read and write' observes a character from a C. P. Snow novel set in the early 1960s.⁹ Our interviewees often seemed to prove that this comment was correct: they had the confident assumption that they would always be able to find work when they wanted it. But the belief that travel in the 1960s and early 1970s was much safer than today can be questioned. The hippie trail was marked by violence and danger. Jack Parkinson, who did the trail in 1977, listed revolution, famine, banditry, exotic ailments, natural disasters and armed border skirmishes as the possible risks he faced.¹⁰ Isolated travellers in unfamiliar places could fall prey to local thieves and criminals. Sometimes things got still more serious: in 1974 the serial killer Charles Sobhraj murdered at least ten people, mostly Western travellers on the hippie trail, and his total murder count may have been higher.¹¹ International conflicts also affected the trail and its travellers. The Vietnam War rumbled on from 1955 to 1975, resulting in the presence of American soldiers and military police in the Far East, and of veterans and deserters along the trail. The Suez Crisis of 1956, the Arab–Israeli conflicts of 1967 and 1973, the India–Pakistan conflict of 1965 and the India–Pakistan–Bangladeshi war of 1971 all set limits to travel along the hippie trail.

In fact, there was good reason to feel afraid in the 1960s. Glancing through the essays presented at the celebrated 'Dialectics of Liberation' conference at the Roundhouse in London, held in July 1967, one gains a sense of the worries and fears that were gripping wide audiences. R. D. Laing warned of the 'total irrationality' of the world system.¹² The pioneering American ecologist Gregory Bateson seemed to take for granted that 'We are rapidly ... destroying all the natural systems in the world.'¹³ The radical American sociologist Paul Goodman seemed equally certain of the risk of nuclear war in the next decade.¹⁴ The Black Power activist Stokely Carmichael reminded the audience that 'We are now being shot down like dogs in the streets by white racist policemen.'¹⁵ The New Left theorist Herbert Marcuse spoke of 'the progressive brutalization and moronization of man'.¹⁶ The lan-

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guage the speakers used was certainly melodramatic, but none of the themes they evoked would have been surprising to the audience. The television pictures of the extraordinarily violent conflict in Vietnam provided constant and convincing proof of the ever-present possibility of horrific destruction: some 9,353 Americans died in Vietnam in the year the conference was held.¹⁷ In total, over 58,000 Americans died in Vietnam, and many more suffered physical and mental trauma. But even these figures pale in comparison to Vietnamese casualties, which may have been as high as three million.¹⁸

The 'Dialectics of Liberation' conference can be criticised for ignoring one important issue: the confusion that the so-called sexual revolution had introduced into women's lives. Some of the effects were undoubtedly positive. The end of a sense of shame about sex and sexuality meant that a generation of women could confidently reject the ethics of 'pious femininity' that had constrained the lives of their mothers.¹⁹ On the other hand, the practices of the sexual revolution could be equally limiting. Jenny Diski recalled that 'we were spectacle whether we wanted it or not. We were always visible, even when alone. It is almost impossible to be a young woman and not imagine yourself being looked at.'²⁰ It was out of these contradictions that a second wave of feminism was born.

Doubts and fears in the 1960s were not confined to a radical, alternative minority. Discussing sex education and ethics, the social commentator Michael Schofield noted: 'We live in a state of transition and this is not temporary. This situation of instability is going to continue for a long time.'²¹ In truth, his comments could have been applied to almost any aspect of society in the 1960s. While historians have debated at length the issue of how 'real' or how deep were these much-publicised social changes, one point is certain: there was a widespread perception that Western societies were going through a series of unexpected, bewildering, even frightening changes. A sense of self-doubt was growing among conservatives and authorities. Works like David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William Whyte's *The Organisation Man* (1956) had raised important questions about the nature of American society.²² A decade later, such concerns had become almost mainstream. For the religious studies lecturer Harvey Cox, 'The spiritual crisis of the West will not be resolved by spiritual importations or individual salvation. It is the crisis of a whole civilization, and one of its major symptoms is the belief that the answer must come from Elsewhere.'²³ For conservatives, the development of

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hippie culture seemed to confirm their sense of a dangerous decay and weakness within their own society. Steven Pinker's surprisingly flawed survey of violence in history provides a useful recapitulation of these fears. Beginning with the observation that the 1960s marked a short, but significant, break in a long-term trend of declining violence, Pinker condemns the counter-culture. Through refusing all inhibitions, the counter-culture denigrated sanity, showed contempt for the family, flouted 'standards of cleanliness, propriety and sexual continence', glorified dissolution and indulged in violence.²⁴

Often conservative fears centred on youth culture. Conservative commentators studied the behaviour of young people to ask what form the future might take; such studies became habitual in the USA and UK after the Second World War.²⁵ A collection of newspaper articles by the respected social commentator Bryan Wilson summarises and expresses these common worries: his introduction to the work declared that 'the 1960s have been a decade of violence and disturbance'.²⁶ Wilson warned of national demoralisation, the rise of a consumer society, rapidly changing work practices, passive forms of leisure, the slavish following of American culture, the decline of the liberal spirit of the old universities, the rise of a 'distinctive, semi-delinquent and sometimes riotous, youth culture'²⁷ in the West, the 'techno-demagogic' appeal of the new mass media, and the animal, primitive instincts of youth culture. 'More *has* meant worse' was his comment on the opening-up of British universities to a larger number of students, but it could be taken as his final word on the consumer society that developed in the 1960s.²⁸

These points suggest a different image of the 1960s from that suggested by romantic nostalgia: these were also years of fear. The first reaction by many young people to these conditions was to seek a way out by creating places of their own. Their initial moves were banal: the presence of a different kind of youth hanging about in cafés was noted by the pioneering cultural analyst Richard Hoggart in 1957, who was concerned that they represented a type of degeneration in working-class community values.²⁹ But coffee houses and cafés, catering specifically for young people, continued to grow in numbers.³⁰ By the mid-1960s signs of a distinctive, youth-orientated counter-culture were far easier to identify: the expansion of drug consumption (discussed in the next chapter), new types of music, enormous pop festivals (Isle of Wight in 1968, 1969 and 1970, Woodstock in 1969), new political tendencies, the boom in the underground press

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and new forms of spirituality. All of these developments contributed to a new sense of strength. Summing up the papers at the end of the 'Dialectics of Liberation' conference, David Cooper struck an optimistic note: 'Now I think, it is our time!'³¹ For many, the perception of the world as dreadful and the sense of hope for the future reinforced each other; it was *because* the world was so awful that it would have to change. In this work, we are specifically interested in what happened to this form of youth culture when it went mobile.

Of course, there were precedents for travelling out to the East. In previous generations, artists and poets had celebrated the joys of travel to particular places which seemed to hold the promise of some spiritual charge. In the early nineteenth century Wordsworth, Coleridge and other poets celebrated the wonders of the Lake District.³² In the USA, Henry David Thoreau praised the tranquillity of life in the woods in the 1840s.³³ In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century German and Austrian tourists visited the Alps for similar reasons. The German sociologist Georg Simmel recorded their reactions to the sight of those mountains:

It gives the feeling of tremendous excitement and charge in its incomparable merging of forbidding strength and radiant beauty, and at the time the contemplation of those things fills us with an unrivalled intensity of feeling, prompting undisclosed inner feelings as if the high peaks could uncover the depths of our soul.³⁴

A new form of recreational excursion – Alpinism – was born. These journeys all resembled the hippie trail in some important ways. But the trail went further and involved more people: it crossed continents, blurred religious and cultural boundaries, and so was more challenging.

Beginnings and endings

In order to analyse these experiences we need to impose some limits on our study. Of course, such parameters can appear arbitrary or, worse still, simply inaccurate. But without doing this, it would be impossible to write a history of the trail.

It is easy to identify a year as the beginning of the hippie trail: 1957. In that year two events on separate continents suggested a revolution in forms of travel, one in India, one in the USA. At some point early in 1957 Paddy Garrow-Fisher, an ex-RAF engineer living

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in India, looked critically at his converted van.³⁵ Garrow-Fisher had been conscripted in 1939, and had served in Asia and the Middle East. Like a handful of other British soldiers and airmen, he liked the local cultures he met, and had learned to speak both Hindi and Farsi. At the end of the war he decided to stay in India, and even the advent of Indian independence in August 1947 did not change his mind. At first he travelled up and down the country on a motorbike, trading vehicle engine parts. His business expanded in the 1950s, and so he bought a second-hand bus, which he converted into a van to carry the parts he sold. While driving along India's roads, he picked up hitch-hikers, and – as was the custom – he usually asked them to pay a small fee. In 1957 he began to think that converting his bus into a van had been a mistake: it was not the best way for him to make an income in India. He re-converted his vehicle into a bus, and then founded the Indiaman coach service. At Easter 1957 Garrow-Fisher offered the first coach journey from London to Delhi, which was quickly followed by a second journey in August 1957. A regular service was established, and in years to come a series of other travel companies copied his initiative, offering a variety of forms of travel. The well-known Magic Bus simply carried people as fast as possible from London or Amsterdam to India; other companies offered slower, more relaxed routes, through specific points of interest, while at the top of the range, air-conditioned coaches, run by companies such as Penn Overland, took travellers from one hotel to another.

Prior to Garrow-Fisher's coaches, people who wanted to travel between London and India or Pakistan had little choice. Air flights were expensive and sea travel took weeks. Those looking to spend less could go round the cheap hotels and lodging houses used by Asian migrant workers in London, and consult their noticeboards. They usually carried appeals by car-drivers for passengers to share the costs of a journey to India or Pakistan.³⁶

It is not clear who travelled on the first Indiaman coaches. Some of Garrow-Fisher's customers were probably Indian and Pakistani migrant workers. One, Peter Moss, was an Anglo-Indian who took the overland route to return to the country where he spent his childhood.³⁷ Others were Australians and New Zealanders travelling to or from the UK, and trying to cut costs. For these groups, the journey was a simple matter: merely a question of getting from A to B as cheaply and easily as possible. But alongside them, there was a new generation of young travellers: people like Derek Lewis, a genuinely

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exceptional Welshman, as demonstrated by his claim to be (almost) the only Liberal in the Labour stronghold of Pontypridd. He travelled from London to Lahore in a shared car with two Pakistanis and one Indian man in January 1962 and stayed in India for the rest of the year. There was also Gerry Virtue, a New Zealander who decided *not* to fly from Calcutta to London in January 1960, and instead went hitching across Asia with Jules Watt, an Australian he encountered by chance in the Salvation Army Hostel in Calcutta. Their journey lasted six months.³⁸ Lewis, Virtue and Watt's journeys represented a new sort of travel: they were not travelling workers, migrants or commercial travellers, but equally they were not tourists, following a clear itinerary in a guide book. What had inspired them?

This new generation of travellers were often directly or indirectly inspired by the other event in 1957 that marked changing attitudes to travel: the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in the USA in August of that year. We were alerted to the importance of this work by our interviewees. We always asked them which books, films and forms of music had inspired them to travel. Approximately half were deeply interested in the books they had read and wanted to talk about them. Ahead of works by Herman Hesse, Timothy Leary and Aldous Huxley, *On the Road* was the single most popular work among our travellers. The reasons for this are obvious. *On the Road* suggested a new approach to travel. Kerouac was not interested in a swift journey from A to B, nor in an organised, tourist-style itinerary along pre-selected points of interest. *On the Road* suggested that travelling in itself was an interesting and worthwhile experience, even a liberating experience, particularly if the traveller could approach it with an open, receptive mind. Kerouac celebrated both this new form of travel and a new type of inspired traveller: the Beat, which for him was an abbreviation of 'beatific'. The word was then twisted into 'beatnik' by an American journalist in 1958; he was drawing inspiration from the Russian satellites, the Sputniks.

Of course, not everyone liked *On the Road*. Its hyper-masculinist approach to women and sexual relationships left many readers cold; others complained that Kerouac's attitude to black culture was patronising. *On the Road* could also appear pretentious; some felt that they had travelled further than Kerouac with far less fuss. But it is impossible to ignore how well it drew together new ideas about travel. One theme that it mentioned and that features in many popular works among the travellers is a lesson concerning how to understand and

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appreciate new sights and sounds. This sensibility is also evoked in Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*, another popular work among travellers. In one scene the central character listens to a river: 'He learned incessantly from the river. Above all, it taught him how to listen, to listen with a silent heart, with a waiting, open soul, without passion, without desire, without judgement, without opinion.'³⁹

In the opening sections of Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* – that is, in the few sections that most people can understand of this extremely complex and demanding work – Pirsig compares the experience of car travel and motorbike travel in a similar manner.

You see things vacationing on a motorcycle in a way that is completely different from any other. In a car you're always in a compartment, and because you're used to it you don't realize that through that car window everything you see is just more TV. You're a passive observer and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame.

On a cycle the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You're in the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming.⁴⁰

These authors suggested a new way of experiencing and understanding the world: a form 'without frames', which is free of intellectual abstractions and the barriers created by racial or social prejudice. This new form of vision is suggested by all three authors, but sometimes it is hard to understand precisely what is being evoked. Kerouac provocatively just speaks of 'it'.

'I want to be like him. He's never hung-up, he goes every direction, he lets it all out, he knows time, he has nothing to do but rock back and forth. Man, he's the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you'll finally get it.'

'Get what?'

'IT! IT!'⁴¹

The exact nature of what is being promised by this new vision is – obviously – never made clear, but the promise is a seductive one. Kerouac offered readers this prize in a thoroughly modern context, with a soundtrack of ecstatic jazz music and a backdrop of contemporary American cityscapes; his prose was tough, muscular, and pointed.

Perhaps the newness of Kerouac's book can be exaggerated. After all, throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s one of the simple pleasures

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of car ownership in both the USA and UK was *just* driving. The United States had a well-developed automobile industry by the 1950s. By 1955, domestic auto sales had approached 7.2 million, and there were around 1.5 million miles of interstate highways on which to drive.⁴² Car culture shaped the physical landscape and generated economic growth as industries and businesses developed to service automobility. For example, a network of motor hotels (motels) had been developing since the mid-1920s, reaching a highpoint in the 1960s with 61,000 motels.⁴³ Few Americans had passports and most vacations took place within the United States (including Hawaii). Almost everyone could afford an automobile; indeed, families often had multiple automobiles and they were often given as high school graduation gifts to teenage children. As noted in a number of celebratory travelogues published during this period, including John Steinbeck's *Travels With Charley, in search of America* (1962) and William Saroyan's *Short Drive, Sweet Chariot* (1966), automobiles gave even the poorest Americans an opportunity to travel and a taste of freedom which often eluded them in their everyday lives.

Similar trends can be identified in the UK. An opinion poll conducted in 1970 found that the most popular outdoor activity for the British public was driving (58%), ahead of going to the pub (52%) or walking (47%).⁴⁴ This activity is evoked in Ray Davies's 'Drivin' on the Kinks' *Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*, recorded in 1969, and Pete Townshend's 'Going Mobile' from The Who's 1971 album *Who's Next*. 'Drivin' offers a deliberately nostalgic vision of a Sunday afternoon drive complete with sandwiches, a flask of tea, gooseberry tarts and beer, past the birds, fields and trees of such exotic places as Barnet Church and Potters Bar. The song speaks of a time when the roads were less crowded, when there were no speed cameras, and when car ownership and the ability to drive still seemed sufficiently special to justify a certain sense of pride. Pete Townshend's 'Going Mobile' adds a touch of sixties rebellion to the genre, making reference to the 'hippie gypsy' whose travels help him to avoid the police and the taxman. (Similar themes are also evoked in John Mayall's 'Took the Car', from his 1970 album *USA Union*.) By the late 1960s driving was no longer an experience reserved for the rich. Car ownership was becoming more common: in 1955, there were about 3.6 million cars in Britain; in 1969 about 9 million.⁴⁵ Obviously, car ownership could be still viewed pragmatically as a simple means to travel from A to B. But

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these songs suggest another approach: to see driving as a leisure pursuit in itself.

The people who feature in this book share something with this approach, but they wanted something more from their voyages than gooseberry tart and a flask of tea. For example, Billy Wells, a working-class hippie from London, was fascinated by cars; he discovered rock'n'roll and American cars at the same time in the late 1950s. While in his mid-teens, he would watch the older boys driving up and down Merton High Street. He could still remember the excitement of those sights some fifty years later.

They always came in immaculate old American cars, 30's Buicks with twin side mounts, they had a mint early 50's Bucktooth Buick, one of them had a '37 four door Cadillac Tourer with Gangster Whitewalls.

All in convoy.

Loaded with geezers in Drape jackets with Teddy Boy haircuts and their arms out of the windows.⁴⁶

What was Kerouac offering that was *really* new? Was the promise of *On the Road* much more than a long Sunday afternoon drive or the parade of glittering American cars gliding down Merton High Street? The answer is more complex than 'yes' or 'no'. Kerouac's genius was to connect a relatively mundane, simple experience, available to growing sections of middle-class society and to the rising working class, with something that promised to be very different. The promise remained a vague one, open to different interpretations. Wells reduces Kerouac's work to its simplest elements.

All our little team had read *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac.

It sounded great, all that travelling about partying, we decided to buy an old American convertible, head off South for the winter and have a laugh.⁴⁷

Wells found no Buddhism, no unmediated visions of 'IT' in *On the Road*. He only saw having a laugh in a big car with style; perhaps he was right. But other readers found different themes. *On the Road* could also appear as a vision of freedom, a spiritual affirmation, a call to embrace other cultures, an invitation to experiment with drugs and even a critique of consumer society.

When Kerouac's writing met Paddy Garrow-Fisher's coaches, a new type of travel along a new route could be imagined: the hippie trail began. Of course, many who followed the trail did not read *On the Road*, and for the trail's first decade, coach passengers were definitely

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only a minority of the travellers. We are not suggesting that in some literal sense Kerouac or Garrow-Fisher were planners or leaders of social change; their initiatives were mere symbols of a deeper transformation: a vast, silent, successful revolution in forms of travel. This new style of travel is neatly summed up by a passage from the briefly authoritative BIT guide to travelling to India from 1973. It advised travellers:

It's best to have no definite plans or time schedule, just go where you want, when you want. Border crossing is easy if you don't look too freaky. Travel as lightly as possible as you may well be adding to your pack along the way. Be willing to adjust to local food, customs and conditions. Language is no real problem as you'll soon find ways of communicating non-verbally and also pick up basic words of foreign languages. Remember that wherever there are people, there is food, accommodation and transport of some description, no matter how primitive. And the further off the beaten track you go, generally the more interesting the scene is.⁴⁸

The Kerouac-ian tone in this advice is clear: a new form of travel, a new approach to travelling had been imagined.

Another way of demonstrating the same point is to compare – for example – 1961 and 1971: the contrast in attitudes to the journey out to the East is astonishing. In 1961 the principal travellers to the East were people like Derek Lewis, Gerry Virtue and Jules Watt, who correctly recognised themselves as an exceptional minority. In 1962 India 'was not yet a place to which tourists wanted to go', comments V. S. Naipaul.⁴⁹ By 1971 everything had changed. When 'Edward' got married to L., they were looking for somewhere to go for their honeymoon. They had arranged two weeks skiing in Switzerland, and then thought of also travelling to India. 'Edward's' first idea was to buy a Land Rover, but they both agreed that this might be uncomfortable. Coach travel seemed safer and easier, and the coaches run by Penn Overland were the most reliable of all. They left London in March 1971, travelled across Europe and Asia and arrived in Perth, on time, in May 1971.⁵⁰ We can also cite the example of K., who finished university in 1975; he was 21, and not sure what he wanted for his birthday or which career (if any) he wanted to follow. A way to avoid facing both questions suddenly seemed obvious: he asked his parents to buy him a coach ticket to Kathmandu. At first, his parents were taken aback by the proposal, but his father had served in India during the war and recognised some of the places that K. was talking about,

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and so they soon accepted his proposal.⁵¹ According to one estimate, in 1973 some 30,000 British young people travelled east on coaches run by some 150 operators.⁵² 'Everyone did it' commented M. when we interviewed him: his comment is not literally true, but it does capture how easy, how obvious the idea had become in about a decade.⁵³ (M. travelled to Nepal in his own car in 1974.)

If the beginnings of the trail are easy to identify, then so is the end: it is marked by the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79. This ended the hippie trail in two ways. First, the border was closed. It was no longer possible to drive from Turkey, through Iran, into Afghanistan or Pakistan. There were no other available land routes: to the north lay hostile, closed Soviet republics; to the south, the Persian Gulf. Then in 1978 the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan effectively closed that country to foreigners, and also initiated a prolonged cycle of violence. The protracted Iran–Iraq war (1980–88) made the idea of travelling through the region even more forbidding.

But the Iranian Revolution also ended the hippie trail in a second sense: the gentle, exotic dreams of enlightenment or joy in the East no longer made sense after the 1980s, during which the West became increasingly horrified at events in Iran. The changes in attitude are easy to identify. In 1973 Sarah Hobson left London to travel to Persia to study how carpets were made. She clearly felt respect, even reverence, for the religious cultures that she found there, and in this sense her journey is similar to others taken by young people travelling east in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁴ Following the Iranian Revolution, this type of attitude seemed to evaporate. Works such as Betty Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter* (1988) exemplify the new approach: they suggest fear, horror and even hatred, first of Iran and its version of Shi'a Islam, but also – secondly – of the region in general. The story to be told changed. Hobson automatically, even unthinkingly, expected to find something to admire in the cultures of the East, while Mahmoody states openly that an American would have to be mad to admire Iran. More recently, something similar has happened concerning the stories told about Afghanistan: in the travellers' memories, Afghanistan features as a rugged but friendly, laid-back, cool sort of place, where smoking hashish was tolerated and where women did not get hassled. Today, it is principally known as the den of the intolerant Taliban.

Other factors also contributed to the decline of the trail. The initial proposal that the land route was the cheapest way to travel between

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Asia and Europe no longer made sense in the epoch of cheap air flights. The small coach and minibus companies found it increasingly difficult to compete in these circumstances, and tended either to evolve into more commercial tourist agencies, or to collapse. More seriously, there is a widespread perception that the world has become a more violent place, and that therefore travel to faraway places is not prudent. In the last thirty-five years, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan have repeatedly suffered the results of modern warfare and political violence. The extreme violence of the US–UK intervention in Afghanistan (in 2001), and the two military interventions in Iraq (1991 and 2003) were confrontations of a different order from previous regional disputes. Here, the massively destructive resources of two modern Western states were mobilised in exercises of ‘shock and awe’. The hippie trail no longer seems to lead to a zone of tranquillity, but through some of the worst examples of organised military and political destruction in the world. The backpackers who trek out to exotic locations today are usually more savvy than their hippie grandparents: they have access to more information, they show a greater awareness about their personal safety, and while they may fly to more faraway places than their grandparents, they generally plan more limited trips once they arrive.

The hippie trail is therefore clearly marked out by a series of cultural, economic and political events: it can be seen as a confluence of these factors. But this chronology of the trail, by itself, teaches us nothing: we want to study those who travelled on it.

Hippie / not-a-hippie

Returning to the travellers, we run into an immediate problem: there is an important drawback associated with the word ‘hippie’. Dictionary definitions are little help. While it is interesting to learn that the word probably originated from the early twentieth-century black American slang term *hip* or *hep*, meaning up-to-date or in-the-know, and to know that the term ‘hippie’ began to circulate first in the USA after 1965, and then in the UK after about 1967, this information does not help us to understand what ‘hippie’ meant to our travellers in the 1960s and 1970s.

The term is associated with San Francisco. In 1967 the city’s Haight-Ashbury district began to attract young people from across the USA.⁵⁵ They refused ordinary jobs, and immersed themselves in the

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new psychedelic music, alternative spiritualities, the underground press, and hallucinogenic drugs. Initially they were referred to as 'the hip community', a term which then transmuted into 'hippies'. Warren Hinckle celebrated the birth of a new social identity in an article published in March 1967.

Turn-on music galvanized the entire hippie underground into overt, brassy existence – particularly in San Francisco.

Hippies do not share our written, linear society – they like textures better than surfaces, prefer the electronic to the mechanical, like group, tribal activities. There is an ecstatic, do-it-now culture, and rock and roll is their art form.⁵⁶

Their presence was arguably at the heart of the so-called 'Summer of Love' in mid-1967.

Back in London, they were referred to several times by participants in the July 1967 'Dialectics of Liberation' conference as a clear, real social presence. The American Marxist John Gerasis was rather dismissive of them: 'all we seem capable of doing is pulling out. And so we pull out and we become diggers, hippies, drug addicts, whatever else there is.'⁵⁷ The New Left theorist Marcuse was more positive; he acknowledged their 'clownery', but considered that 'If we are talking of the emergence of an instinctual revulsion against the values of the affluent society, I think here is a place where we should look for it.'⁵⁸ Others also noted them. The normally conservative commentator Bryan Wilson seemed to look at the hippies of Haight-Ashbury with relatively favourable eyes: they were 'a spectacular but bloodless revolution of young urbanites ... [Their] central quest is the pleasurable search for the expanded mind, not the anguished search for objective religious truths.'⁵⁹

Haight-Ashbury's hippies were even regularly visited by tourist buses. One guide's patter informed visitors:

We are now entering the largest hippie colony in the world ... Marijuana, of course, is a household staple here, enjoyed by the natives to stimulate their senses ... Among the favourite pastimes of the hippies, besides taking drugs, are parading and demonstrating; seminars and group discussions about what's wrong with the status quo; malingering; plus the ever-present preoccupation with the soul, reality and self-expression, such as strumming guitars, piping flutes, and banging on bongos.⁶⁰

Truly, a new species had been identified.

However, Haight-Ashbury's moment of hippie fame only lasted a

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few months. In October 1967 its inhabitants staged a 'death of hippie' funeral procession.⁶¹ They considered that the promising social experiments in the quarter had been stifled by the intense media interest and by social problems such as overcrowding, homelessness, poverty and drug addiction. There was also more than an implication that the term 'hippie' had been a media invention, which the locals rejected. After that date, the word 'hippie' became a loaded term, which many were reluctant to use.

We always asked our interviewees if they had thought of themselves as hippies; only a few said yes. 'Joan' gave the best answer of all. First she laughed, and then she said: 'of course I was a hippie ... I had bare feet, like Sandy Shaw.'⁶² 'George's' initial response was similar: 'I was a hippie ... I got married in a red, black and gold kaftan.' He went on to identify some other points: he liked a certain type of music (Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix), he was interested in psychology and spiritual matters, and started reading about Buddhism when he was 20.⁶³ (He also dabbled in drug-taking, but did not see this as important.) These points, he considered, marked him out as a hippie. 'Denise' gave the question some thought, and eventually commented: 'I was an *aspiring* hippie.'⁶⁴ She'd been head girl at her school, and had worked on a farm belonging to a local Conservative Party official. Joining the Anti-Apartheid Movement, working briefly for the Labour Party and deciding to follow the hippie trail were all aspects of a brief period of rebellion in her early twenties.

One can also find some similar expressions of explicit hippie affiliation in some of the self-published works written by travellers. Tom Widdicombe records that in 1967, 'The Beatles released the single "All You Need is Love". I was living in a shed ... The song blasted out on my little transistor radio, and from that point on I knew without any doubt that I was a hippie.'⁶⁵ In 1969 medical student Robert Schulz had one ear pierced, and then inserted a gold stud a few days later. 'I was now officially a hippie!' he commented.⁶⁶ But, first, these explicit avowals of being a hippie are rare, and secondly, they are quite superficial: bare feet, red, black and gold kaftans, ear-rings and an appreciation of good music are not really enough to constitute a social identity.

Most of our interviewees tended to firmly reject the label. 'Lynda' expressed some puzzlement about this: 'we always said we preferred the names freaks or travellers ... we always protested when we were called hippies, I don't know why.'⁶⁷ Some saw the term as limited to

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a particular epoch: 'Harry', who caught a train to Istanbul in 1977, considered that the old hippies of the sixties no longer existed when he travelled out.⁶⁸ Others had clearer ideas about what constituted a hippie and why the label did not apply to them. Sometimes this was a pragmatic choice: 'Kismet' was warned that if he looked like a hippie he would get hassled by border police. He therefore never wore jeans, never grew a beard and kept his hair short.⁶⁹ DP's comments on this topic were quite thoughtful:

the local children used to shout hippy at us and I'd guess that we would have been classified as such by the outside world – some of us looked the part (myself included), with long hair droopy moustaches etc, but I think that by and large we were just a bunch of mainly middle class kids out to see the world before real life caught up with us.⁷⁰

For others, it was a matter of principle. 'Allan' explained that he was not a hippie as he had no intention of dropping out, and did not expect any lifestyle change as a result of his coach trip to Kathmandu.⁷¹ 'Eddy' grew more interested in Hinduism as he travelled in India, and so felt he had stopped being a hippie: 'I saw myself as a seeker', he explained.⁷² L. had firm views on this topic: on being questioned about this point, she bluntly declared 'we were squares'.⁷³ 'Graham' was part of a British Army expedition which travelled by Land Rover from Britain to Nepal and back. He was clearly not a hippie, nor did he self-identify as such.⁷⁴

Yet the term 'hippie' exists. Some recently published works on the trail include it in their titles:

- *Remembering the Hippie Trail: Travelling across Asia, 1976–1978* (2007)
- *Snapshots of the Hippy Trail* (2008)
- *On the Road with Geoff and Jules; Adventures on the Early Hippie Trail 1959–60* (2013)
- *A Little Madness: Travels on the Hippie Trail* (2013)

On the other hand, most published works do not use the term:

- *Flash ou le grand voyage* (1971)
- *L'antivoyage* (1974)
- *The Shortest Journey* (1981)
- *Hideous Kinky* (1992)

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- *Christmas in Kathmandu* (1992)
- *The Paradise Trail* (2008)
- *Memoirs of a Dervish* (2011)
- *An American in Hyderabad* (2012)
- *Travelling for Beginners: To Kathmandu in '72* (2012)
- *The Trail* (2013)

Looking at this second list of titles, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the authors have deliberately chosen to avoid using the H-word.

We also asked our interviewees what term they would have used to describe themselves in preference to 'hippie'. They suggested: backpackers, beatniks, campers, freaks, groovers, heads, hippie trailer-ers, hitch-hikers, intrepids, longhairs, nomads, overlanders, revolutionaries, seekers, shoestring travellers, spiritual tourists, world travellers. Two tendencies can be seen in these terms. About half of them seem to disapprove of 'hippies' because the word suggested some wild, disorderly attitude. They wish to identify themselves by words that indicate unorthodox, low-budget forms of travel. These people were usually camping rather than staying in hotels, hitching rather than paying for more expensive forms of travel, travelling across Asia by land rather than flying, and so on. For the other section of our interviewees, the term 'hippie' lacked authenticity: it was a plastic, manufactured, artificial word. They preferred terms that suggested their affinity to counter-cultural themes, for example, beatniks, heads and seekers. In such cases, their journey was not simply cheap, but also a self-consciously different path to something that was valued.

This list of terms also suggests the diversity of people travelling on the road to the East. Parkinson develops this point in a colourful manner.

The trail people. Who are we? Not all are hippies, and we are definitely not all cast from the same mould. Some of us are wayfarers, yes, even beggars and deadbeats occasionally. You'll also find pilgrims, hustlers, flower children, intellectuals, runaways, and simple travellers. Trail people are generally free spirits seeking new thrills, strange sights and maybe cheap drugs. We are compulsive voyagers, high school dropouts, and vaguely idealistic wanderers. Among us are hedonists, ascetics, freaks and acidheads, musicians, dissidents, mendicants, followers of Zen and Tao, and even, sometimes, just idle tourists.⁷⁵

This perception of diversity is reinforced in some of the recently published descriptions concerning coach travel along the trail; in nearly

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all of these, there is a scene in which the writer takes stock of his or her fellow travellers. Richard Gregory noted the diversity of his fellow passengers when he caught a coach from Totteridge tube station in August 1974. He immediately felt a sense of affinity to Clem, ‘the only other longhair’. As for the others:

Apart from Clem, there were two 19 year old girls, Bridget and Stephanie, travelling together, a twenty-something named Malcolm from Birmingham, two young couples from England and another from Australia, an American man with his young daughter, a neurotic Welsh girl, an experienced English traveller who had been to Timbuktu, an accident-prone English guy who first got culture shock in Austria, and a grumpy Indian man in his seventies who had somehow secured the whole row of back seats for himself and his many cases. There may have been others I have forgotten, about twenty of us altogether.⁷⁶

Travellers on the trail were also divided among themselves by the frequent assertion of a moral hierarchy, exemplified in the superiority asserted by the independent travellers over those who travelled in coaches or minibuses run by commercial firms. This attitude is nicely summed up by Carolyn Kingson as ‘one-downmanship’: those who travelled in the cheapest or simplest manner won.⁷⁷ The rationale for this hierarchy was expressed in Kerouac’s language: the hitch-hikers were getting the more immediate experience; the coach travellers were actually separated from this new world by their vehicles.⁷⁸ The BIT guide issued an authoritative condemnation of coach travel:

Paying a lot of bread to go on a packaged tour is a pretty unadventurous way to travel. You miss so much and cut down your contact with the locals and even when you do contact them it’s often in the company of half the other members of the tour so you never really stray from the ‘safety’ of your doorstep. Seems a bit of a fraud somehow going this way.⁷⁹

Some of our coach-travelling interviewees were irritated about this scale of values, a point we will explore in Chapter 3.

On the other hand, there was a sense of unity which drew these diverse strands together, and which could override the hitchers’ claim to moral superiority. This was most obvious at meeting points. All our travellers make reference to ‘the grapevine’: the continual exchange of news, advice and gossip between travellers as they met at lodging houses, campsites, cafés, teashops and borders; in every town between London and Kathmandu specific places developed for young travel-

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lers, providing cheap lodgings, food and information. With no internet, and with precious little detailed information available in printed form, this continual exchange was vital for their journeys. But also, at such points, the diverse strands of travellers came together to form something resembling a single community, 'a vast, unconscious international community' according to Richard Neville.⁸⁰ Near the end of his trip, Michael Hall stopped at a beach in Thailand, met some young people and immediately felt 'a sense of international comradeship which was strangely reassuring'.⁸¹ Travelling to Singapore on a ferry, Kingson encountered 'International youth culture, 1970. On the deck the young travellers from the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa – the diaspora of Mother England – and from the UK herself, lounged, grooved, rapped and laughed as never before. This was the life.'⁸² On another ferry in the same year, this time near Albania, Ciarán de Baróid found twenty young travellers. 'Everyone was everyone's friend,' he remembers – as neat an expression of a sense of community as you could hope to find.⁸³ In a gentle, informal manner, such meetings demonstrated that the various travellers, from different countries and on different routes, shared similar aims and experiences.

The difference between the coach passenger and the independent hitcher can be overstated. It should not be assumed that the coach journeys were simple package holidays for tourists. As will be seen in Chapter 3, they were often rough-and-ready affairs, and there was frequently a sense of participatory democracy along them: passengers cooked collectively, made collective decisions about where to sleep and could decide that they wanted to spend longer in one place, or that they wanted to modify the suggested route. Some coach passengers agonised over the point of whether they were nothing more than tourists. Most hoped the answer was yes.

If we take a step back, the similarities between the travellers, the freaks, the hitch-hikers, the druggies, the spiritual seekers, the coach passengers and the practical overlanders become more obvious. For a variety of reasons, nearly all defined themselves as not being tourists. Most of them went expecting something *special* from their trip, and many of them found it. One fascinating point about our interviewees is that *all* of them, without exception, were emphatically positive about their journeys. (This has led us to wonder if there is a cache of miserable, disillusioned travellers hiding somewhere ... but we haven't found them.) Even the point about not-being-hippies is not so difficult to resolve: while only two or three of our interviewees

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willingly accepted the term hippie as a self-description, the majority conceded that they were called hippies by others, whatever their preference. And, finally, *none* of them challenged the validity of the term 'hippie trail'.

In sum, the hippie trail worked in this manner: it attracted many people who would usually never call themselves hippies (recall L.'s defiant 'we were squares'), but who felt that the trail offered them something special. In using the term in this book, we recognise that we are applying it retrospectively. Derek Lewis, Gerry Virtue and Jules Watt – our first travellers – certainly did not (and could not) apply the term to their journeys in the early 1960s. But, with hindsight, the term 'hippie trail' allows us to make connections. Garrow-Fisher's coaches, Kerouac's joyfully meandering odyssey, Derek Lewis contemplating some (metaphorical) form of 'long journey' as he listened to all-night jazz concerts in a club off Leicester Square, Geoff Virtue's realisation that the 'beauty of travel' lay in the adventures and encounters, and not in the route, 'Kismet' carefully shaving so as not to look like a hippie, 'Anne's' lingering frustration at 'only' being a coach traveller, and 'Edward' and L. deciding to celebrate their marriage by taking a trip on Penn Overland all add up to something.⁸⁴ The hippie trail is what brought these people together: for a few weeks or months (sometimes even years) they travelled along the same path.

Representing the trail

It is sobering to think that despite the hundreds of thousands of people who made this journey, *Hideous Kinky* – the film rather than the book – is probably the one commercially successful portrayal of their experience. The film, boosted by Kate Winslet's admirable performance as a ditzy mother, is a cheerful romp through the hippies' Morocco. However, *Hideous Kinky* has validated a simple, dismissive caricature of an experience which gripped and inspired so many. The excitement, the new visions, the simple fun experienced by our interviewees is not registered in this film, or in other more aggressive caricatures. There's little alternative perspective available to the general public. Rory MacLean's *Magic Bus* (2007) is a spirited attempt to recapture the spirit of the trail, but its odd mix of travel-writing, fiction, meditation and history fail to give the reader a more rounded picture. David Tomory's *A Season in Heaven* (1996) is an extremely useful edited collection of revealing inter-

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views, but it fails to present an analysis of the trail. And while there has been a sustained academic interest in the cultural and political explosions of the 1960s, most of these studies fail to consider the hippie trail as an integral part of the radical changes of that decade. Julie Stephens's *Anti-Disciplinary Protest* (1998) is one of the rare exceptions, but even her useful chapter on 'Consuming India' fails to include any consideration of representations of the trail by the travellers themselves.

Our aim is to investigate the mental and cultural world of those travellers. In many ways, this seems the right time to do so: the steady trickle of self-published works by 60-something and 70-something travellers indicates that they feel an urge to re-think and re-present the experience of the hippie trail before it is too late. There is something poignant about these works: they are indications that many of this generation, now in retirement, have decided that those weeks or months on the road were *the* formative experiences of their lives. Their arguments, memories and claims demand investigation and analysis, for they raise important cultural questions. Put simply, they travelled between the Age of Imperialism and the Age of Islamophobia; they were not aiming to build empires, to exploit natives, to convert non-believers or to wage war on terror. Their travels could be seen as the largest, longest pacifist demonstration in history. Undoubtedly they made mistakes, and even the most starry-eyed traveller's account includes a number of rueful smiles concerning the foolishness of their 20-something selves. But even these mistakes are interesting: they say something important about the limitations of this Western-based attempt to embrace the Other.

We have rejected two obvious ways of structuring this material. First, we will not be presenting a date-by-date narrative of the trail from 1957 to 1978. This was an easy decision: we want to discuss themes that sometimes took years, even decades to develop. Tying ourselves to a date-by-date narrative would have made it impossible to discuss these themes in depth. Secondly, we decided not to structure the book geographically. Tomory's *A Season in Heaven* adopts this format, and this work does successfully link particular experiences with particular places. However, we decided that the points we wanted to make could not be connected in this manner: travellers might have had similar experiences in Morocco and Afghanistan. Instead, this book's four main chapters can be seen as dialogues with the evidence we have gathered, almost like questions and answers

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around the most important themes. ‘Wasn’t it all about drugs?’ is the main question in the first chapter; the second considers love, sex and some linked issues about identity; the third asks whether the travellers really were so different from tourists; while the fourth chapter compares the hippie trail travellers to pilgrims. The fifth chapter is a little different: here we discuss how the trail has been represented on screen, in fiction and in travel-writing since the 1960s.

Throughout the work, we aim to draw together diverse sources, to synthesise narratives and to identify common experiences. We have found that the stories told in self-published sources and in face-to-face interviews are similar; we have found that American, British and other travellers experienced similar joys and similar worries. In the chapters that follow, we will stress these common points, and therefore we will not constantly remind readers that this information comes from a self-published source by an American, and that that example comes from an interview with a Brit. (Dedicated readers can always check the footnotes if they want this level of detail.)

A brief note on terms and names

Due to the problems with the term ‘hippie’, we will refer to the people who took the hippie trail as ‘travellers’ or, for the sake of variety, as ‘hippie trail-ers’.

Many of our interviewees have insisted that their privacy be respected; we therefore make no reference to their present-day positions, and only refer to them either by their chosen pseudonym (usually just a first name) or by a single letter.

Notes

- 1 Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991 [1957]), p. 127.
- 2 Interview with ‘Eddy’, 2 May 2012.
- 3 Paul Bolton, *Education: Historical Statistics* (London: Library of the House of Commons, 2012), p. 14.
- 4 Dominic Quarrell, *Pilgrimage to India*, undated, unpaginated, www.indiaoverland.biz/media/india1976.doc (accessed 5 April 2014).
- 5 Marjorie Kirchner, *The India Traveller; Overland 1973; Returns and Reflections 1983, 1997; Bharat Darshan* (Portland, OR: Gottlieb Press, 2013), p. 51.

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- 6 Jann S. Wenner, *Lennon Remembers* (London: Verso, new edn, 2000), p. 107.
- 7 <http://www.udiscovermusic.com/sgt-pepper-vs-the-sound-of-music> (accessed 12 June 2016). See also the relevant warning notes in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2013 [2005]), pp. xvii–xxiv.
- 8 George Bulcock, *Crossing Bolton Road: a boys [sic] own adventure with The Society of Heretical, International Travellers* (self-published, Amazon/Kindle, 2011), unpaginated; reference is given to Kindle locations: 3–4.
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