

TRAVELS

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GREECE 1961

In the summer of 1961 at the age of nineteen, I set off with three friends on a great adventure. At the end of our first year at Balliol College, Oxford University, Steve Hodge, Ian "Griff" Griffith, Alistair Walsh Atkins and I aimed to drive across Europe and visit Greece. What follows in italics is my written account of that adventure, prepared just after we returned in order to fulfil my obligation incurred by a 15 pound travel scholarship that I had been awarded by Balliol. As such the account was read by Sir David Lindsay Keir, the Master of Balliol, and so was tailored for his consumption. In the application for the travel grant, I had stated my intention to study ancient architectural remains and so that aspect of our activities is emphasized, even exaggerated. Other adventures are omitted. Consequently, I now add and embellish the account with the non-italized insertions in square brackets.

<u>Chris</u>	✓ Tent spare poles pegs and ropes <i>1961</i>	<u>Griff</u>	Lilo ✓
✓ Spare poles pegs and ropes		Sleeping bag ✓	
✓ Mallet ✓		Sheath knife	
? Lilo		Cooking stove ✓	
✓ Sleepin bag ✓	Suggested clothes	Frying pan ✓	
✓ Paraffin lamp (<i>Robin's</i>)	✓ Track suit	2 Plates ✓	
✓ Sheath knife ✓	Hats	Knife fork and spoon	
✓ Hand torch	Shades	Bowl ✓	
✓ Cooking stove ✓	Unmentionables	Mirror	
✓ 4 dishes	5 Shirts	pan scourer ✓	
✓ 2 Plates ✓	NO Jacket	Dish cloth	
✓ mug ✓	✓ Jeans etc	Spade ✓	
✓ Knife fork and spoon ✓	Shorts	Bog rolls <i>veg</i>	
✓ 2 Dettol tins for water and paraffin	Swimming trunks	Hand torch	
Ladle	Old shoes	Yugoslav phrase book	
✓ Tins and jars for butter and fat	Flimsolls	Yugoslav and Italian maps	
✓ Tools for car + <i>small tools</i>	Sandals	Wooden spoon	
✓ 2 Spare tyres	Box	<u>Steve</u> 2 sleeping bags	
Puncture repair kit	Plastic mac	Lilo	
✓ Tyre pump		Radio	
✓ Tyre pressure gauge	+ things like	3 Ground sheets	
✓ Petrol and oil cans		Sheath knife	
Wing mirrors	Towels	Fish slice	
Amber headlights	Pyjamas	4 plates	
✓ Trunk for roof rack	Washing kit	3 mugs	
Axe	Which don't need to be gone into exhaustively	Knife fork and spoon	
✓ Union Jack		Meths container	
✓ Greek phrase book	✓ First aid kit	Tin etc for fats	
✓ 2 Biscuit tins		2 tea towels	
✓ Thermos flask		Italian phrase book	
✓ Musical instrument		<u>Alistair</u> Knife fork and spoon	
CAMERA + <i>film</i>		Lilo	
SUN TAN LOTION - <i>DEBIAH</i>	FOOD	Sheath knife	
		2 Biscuit tins (<i>small tins</i>)	
		Hand torch	

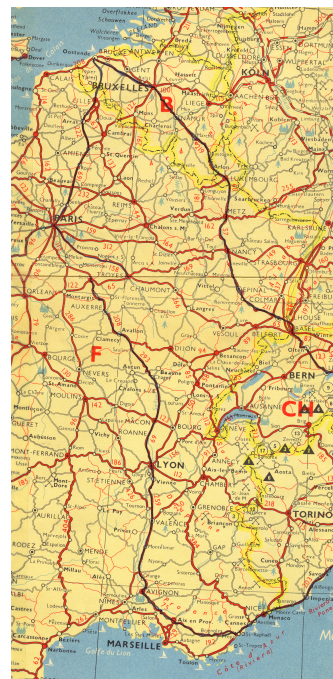
Lists of gear

We travelled in a red and white Ford Consul (vintage about 1958 or 1959) borrowed from my parents as was much of the camping gear. The list of gear each of us was to provide still survives. The tent was an ancient canvas one of traditional design with guy ropes and two solid poles though no groundsheet. For that we used an old groundsheet. I remember that we always slept in the same order, me furthest from the opening end, then Steve, Griff and Alistair at the door. The tent and an old brown trunk containing the cooking equipment travelled on a luggage rack on the roof. The stove we used was a traditional paraffin-fuelled Primus that belonged to Griff and which only he could light. The rest of our equipment, rudimentary at best, was stored in every nook and cranny in the vehicle.

The route we took was as follows:

- Jul.17, 1961. Larne-Stranraer ferry. Stayed in Leeds?
- Jul.18, 1961. Camped beside road in Kent.
- Jul.19, 1961. Arrived in Ostend. Camped at Marche, Belgium.
- Jul.20, 1961. Camped between Basle and Luzern.
- Jul.21, 1961. Entered Italy. Camped in Bergamo, Italy.
- Jul.22, 1961. Entered Yugoslavia. Camped at Bakar, south of Rijeka.
- Jul.23, 1961. Camped at Split.
- Jul.24, 1961. Camped south of Kotor.
- Jul.25, 1961. Camped at Djakovica, Kosovo.

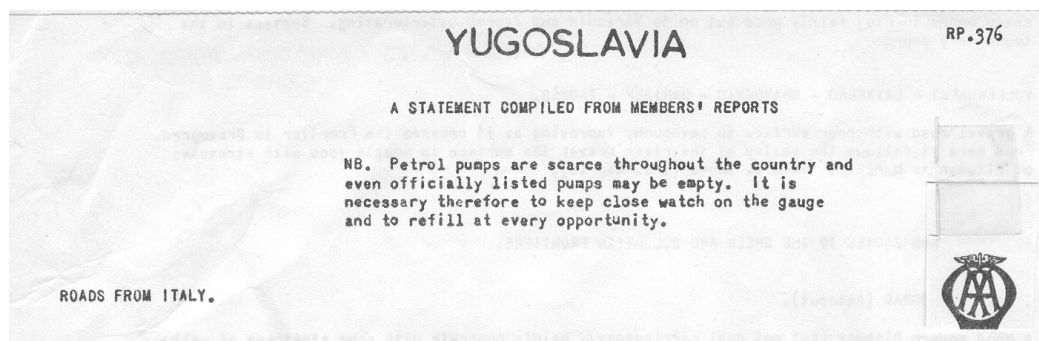
- Jul.26, 1961. Entered Greece. Camped in Thessalonika, Greece.
- Jul.27, 1961. Camped at Meteora, Greece.
- Jul.28, 1961. Camped at Delphi.
- Jul.29, 1961. Camped in Athens.
- Jul.30, 1961. Camped in Athens.
- Jul.31, 1961. Camped in Athens.
- Aug.1, 1961. Camped at Corinth.
- Aug.2, 1961. Camped at Tolon.
- Aug.3, 1961. Camped at Tolon.
- Aug.4, 1961. Camped at Katacolon.
- Aug.5, 1961. Camped near Mesolongian, Agrinian.
- Aug.6, 1961. Camped at Yannina.
- Aug.7, 1961. Left Igumenista, Greece, for Brindisi, Italy. Camped near Brindisi.
- Aug.8, 1961. Camped in Rome?
- Aug.9, 1961. Camped in Rome?
- Aug.10, 1961. Camped ?
- Aug.11, 1961.
- Aug.12, 1961.





The route we followed

The route we followed is marked on the above maps, the first four of which were maps of the time; the last four date from about 1971. We did our homework quite thoroughly, especially with regard to the roads we would travel. This was particularly important in Yugoslavia where we knew that many of the roads were very rough, and we would have to drive a long way on dirt roads. The British Automobile Association (AA) provided us with detailed route descriptions which are now lost and also a brief account of the routes in Yugoslavia (shown below) some of which sound ominous.



RIJEKA TO SKOPJE VIA THE DALMATIAN COAST.**RIJEKA - SENJ - KARLOBAG.**

A modern, wide, concrete and tarmac road following the curves of the coast to Senj. From here bitumen, still wide and smooth but more sinuous and therefore slower to Karlobag. Cut through solid rock in places and loose rocks fall onto road, especially after rain.

KARLOBAG - ZADAR - COAST ROAD - SIBENIK.

The coast road to Jasenica has a good bitumen surface with no steep gradients but winding and narrow in places. From Jasenica to Zadar tar and some concrete; mostly wide, some long straight level stretches. From Zadar the coast road is being rebuilt and is, at present, very rough. It is therefore recommended to proceed from Jasenica by a poor gravel road via Obrovac, Benkovac and Skradin. A small ferry crossing the 2 km. wide mouth of the river Krka gives a frequent service to Sibenik.

SIBENIK - TROGIR - SPLIT.

The coast road via Rogoznica to Trogir has a partly bitumen and partly bitumen and partly gravel surface, rough on some sections but mostly very fair. From Trogir a concrete road, rather worn and narrow in places.

SPLIT - MAKARSKA - PODGORA - VRGORAC - METKOVIC.

To Omis the road is very good, asphalt and bitumen, wide and fast. From here to Podgora it is rather rough, tarmac in patches, hard gravel in others. Turning inland from here the road is narrow and is generally poor gravel except for stretches of tarmac in and about the larger villages and towns. A poor gravel surface over the Pass to Kozica then fair to Metkovic. The coast road from Podgora to Metkovic is gravel with rough surface (loose stones, rocks and large potholes), except for the last 10 km. of tarmac into Metkovic.

METKOVIC - COAST ROAD - DUBROVNIK.

A gravel road with short lengths of tarmac. Narrow, winding and sometimes steep over the many low hills. The last few miles into Dubrovnik are tarmac in good condition.

DUBROVNIK - HERCEGNOVI - KOTOR.

Generally a poor gravel road with a loose surface to Herceg Novi. Then a fair gravel road with some good tarmac stretches. On the whole narrow and winding.

KOTOR - CETINJE - TITOGRAĐ - PEC.

A gravel road in good condition, well engineered and graded ascending through 26 hairpin bends to the summit of the Lovcen Pass. (Alternative road via Budva. Road quite good, well engineered, variable surfaces). On the descent loose and stony on the bends; the remainder is fair but with several blind corners to Cetinje. A narrow, winding, gravel and asphalt road across three mountain ranges with a 10 mile stretch of tarmac, on either side of Titograd. From here a poor gravel road, very tortuous, narrow, loose and rough on the mountain passes, with one good stretch near Matesevo, to the narrow gorge descending to the plain of Pec. From Andrijevice to Pec, in fair condition.

PEC - PRIZREN - SKOPJE.

To Dakovica good. From here to Prizren under reconstruction and poor. From Prizren better but after junction with the Pristina road it greatly deteriorates. On to Skopje particularly villainous.

SKOPJE - KATLANOVO - TITO V VELES.

To Katlanovo a good asphalt and concrete road. Onwards to Titov Veles tarred or cobbled and quite good. A new Autoput is under construction. There are difficult diversions.

We also knew that language would be a problem in Yugoslavia and Greece. Each of us spoke some French or German but we had to rely entirely on a Serbo-Croatian phrasebook in Yugoslavia. Greece was an even greater challenge due to the different script but Steve had some ancient Greek and that was occasionally useful.

I regret that I did not have a better camera but made do with a very inexpensive Kodak Brownie which took very poor photographs. Nevertheless the photos are included here.

July 17-18, 1961.

After a rather lucky start with respect to that black sheep of touring documents "the Green Insurance Card" we were at last on our way across the English Channel on the road to Greece. The car had been running well, ever since I left home and came down through Leeds, Grantham and Oxford, collecting the other three, and was obviously quite capable of carrying the large load asked of it without undue strain. We were all rather excited about the prospect of driving through four of the largest European capitals and venturing to a part of the

world, twice as far from home as any of us had ever been before. One might call it romantically, a journey into the unknown. We spent our first night in the tent and cooked our first breakfast amidst the Kentish Downs and we were at last leaving for Greece.

July 19, 1961.

After surprisingly little delay in Ostend, I ventured cautiously out onto the right hand side of the road prepared for anything. But this strange mode of driving proved much easier to get used to than I expected and it was extremely easy driving along the Autobahn from Ostend to Brussels. However, it was a different matter when a few hours later we entered Brussels with its six lane traffic and maze of underpasses. Eventually we found a quieter part of Brussels which seemed the equivalent of "Soho" and after an amazing conversation in Flemish sign language, we managed to get a meal and stock up with food for the next day. But Greece was our aim and we had to press on reaching Marche in the depths of the Ardennes just as the sun was sinking. On the whole tour we never found a more beautiful, efficient and cheap campsite than we did at Marche.

July 20, 1961.

The next day was comparatively uninteresting except for the rather lovely early stages through the Ardennes and Luxembourg where we halted for a few hours and were rather impressed by the magnificent glacial gorge which runs through the centre of it. That evening we had a meal in Basle and stayed overnight at a rather crowded site between Basle and Luzern.

July 21, 1961.

And yet again onward seeing just about the best cross-section of Switzerland through Andermatt and Luzern climaxed by the towering St. Gottard pass. However, the car did not think the St. Gottard was so wonderful and boiled over for the one and only time during the trip, mainly due to our inexperience with mountain ranges.

There were so many places we all would have loved to stop and see on the way but we had decided that it was Greece we wanted to see and that we wanted to have as long as possible there so we resisted the beauty of such places as Lugano and Como, Bern and Luzern.

We camped in Bergamo in Italy that night and, having made friends with the old likeable proprietor of the camp-site, he persuaded us to go to his "home" for dinner. So we set off through the narrow dusty streets with their huge crumbling buildings and numerous sidewalk cafes before he eventually disappeared inside one of these cafes. We ventured in after him and he presented us to presumably his wife standing behind the bar, after which he disappeared amidst a cloud of smoke, cards, wine and general clamour in one corner. After a rather fantastic conversation with his "wife" in which the only word which was common to both sides was "subito" we ate extremely well of a type of salad with chips, bread and wine.

July 22, 1961.

By this time we were all rather excited about the prospect of seeing the other side of the Iron Curtain and so we drove through Brescia and the tradition-veiled Verona to Venice. Here we decided not to resist the temptation and so we drove along the long promenade into Venice. But I am afraid to admit that that is as far as we got for the place was filled to the brim with tourists and there wasn't a single parking spot left in the whole of Venice. So we rather reluctantly set off again toward Trieste and Yugoslavia. On the road between Venice and Trieste we first came upon a "foreign type" of terrain at least to us; it was very low lying ground along the estuary of the river Po and the countryside was criss-crossed with stagnant dykes covered in huge rushes. The roads also began to deteriorate and in places were covered in sand and as we passed through Trieste we took our last look at the Western side of the Iron Curtain and a road race which held us up for some time as it occupied the only road out of Trieste into Yugoslavia.

However, at last we arrived at the border, passed as easily as we had done before through Italian customs and halted behind a long queue at the Yugoslavian border. It was rather frightening to see the two rows of barbed wire stretching across the countryside with two typically Communist soldiers patrolling up and down between them. During the long wait Griff got out our guitars and we all began to sing some typically Western skiffle, much to the amusement of the Yugoslav customs officers who although they seemed to be scrutinizing very carefully some of the other people in the car queue, merely stamped our visas and passports. We then realized that what they do at these Yugoslavian posts is to let a long queue develop and surveying everyone, some at a distance and others more rigorously, they then let the whole bunch through together retaining merely the few suspicious ones. We got through on the first inspection and started out toward Rijeka. The countryside now began to take on a quite different shape from that of the Po estuary. It was rugged barren terrain with great crags of white rock very sparsely covered in dark rock bushes with only a few pathetic farms and attempted cultivated patches to break the monotony. It was getting rather late when we entered Rijeka and pulled up at a level crossing gate. When the train came through we saw a sight very uncommon to us, anyway. The brake-blocks of the train and engine were white hot and issuing showers of sparks. In fact this was one of the very few rail connections between the Dalmatian coast and the inland and the railway itself is a remarkable engineering feat considering the rocky terrain and the precipitous nature of the mountains.

We had our first rain since leaving Britain that evening in the shape of a thunderstorm and we spent a rather miserable night under canvas in the little port of Bakar, on the sea shore.

July 23, 1961.

The following day we returned to Rijeka for petrol since the "Yugopetrol" stations are few and far between and after breakfast of Turkish coffee and biscuits and a vague conversation with an old Yugoslav in a wine shop about Tito, of whose achievements he seemed fantastically proud, we set forth again along the newly built tarmac road toward Zadar. We eventually found that there are only two completely distinct types of road in Yugoslavia; the stone-ridden, dust-covered cart track and the new asphalt roads built mainly with student labour and mainly for the use of tourists. The coast began to take on a shape which we were to find somewhat overbearing in the following few days; the precipitous craggy Dolomites "sweeping straight down into the sea" with the road perched on a ledge at a varying height above sea-level. All around the grey-white rock glistening, with the odd rock bush struggling to live: looking seawards, one could see the long islands of exactly similar terrain shing in the sun. Now and again the road would venture into a little village in a cove which suggested to us of what the French Riviera must have been like a hundred years ago; the fertile cove covered in lush sub-tropical palms

and cactii with the village's group of colourfully painted stone houses. Underwater all barrenness ceased and the sea-bed was covered in the most superb colours and shapes; the water was of course unbelievably warm compared with the semi-frozen Atlantic off Portrush.



Yugoslavia near Zadar

We carried on through Karlobag and Jessenice, just outside of which we came upon quite an engineeringly neat viaduct (bridge) over the Zadar fjord. What amazed me most about it were the long straight vertical supports which were in no way laterally braced.



Maslenica Bridge near Jasenice, Yugoslavia



View north from the Maslenica Bridge

[The bridge which is today called the "Maslenica Bridge" had only just been completed in 1961. Very similar modern photographs can be found on the internet. The bridge appears essentially unchanged in these photographs.]

We reached Zadar and, finding it rather uninteresting, we set off for Split. Unfortunately the new asphalt road ceased just south of Zadar and we bumped and battered our way first to Selenik and then to Split. Being very interested in architecture, I went along to see the remains of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian in Split and although not very impressed by it I was still very interested to see one of the few remains of the Late Roman Period. What did interest me was that it had a sort of lightness which was completely un-Roman and yet retained the ruthless axiality enforcing the idea of the power of the emperor.

That night we again found the usual well-equipped Yugoslavian camp site and it was there that we came across the Oxford University expedition to the Caucasus whose two Land Rovers seemed exceptionally overladen. They expressed the wish to get out of Yugoslavia into Greece the next day which seemed to us an almost impossible task.

July 24, 1961.

The following day we came across what seemed to us to be one of the most ludicrous examples of communal labour. On the overland route from Split to Metkovic we were held up because of a huge tree trunk stretched across the road and hauling away at this there seemed to be about forty men everyone of whom seemed to be a foreman. Being held up we got our to find out what they were doing and after the usual routine of begging us for English cigarettes we found out from one of them that they had to carry this huge thing overland for about three kilometres, which seemed some job considering the weight of the thing, their progress and organization, and the terrain over which they had to take it. Still, they all seemed happy. They were rather amused when we lent a hand and we all parted the best of friends. Eventually we reached Dubrovnik and when the guide books describe it as the pearl of the Adriatic they certainly were not exaggerating. We spent some time there looking at the typical late Byzantine castle and many beautiful modern and ancient chapels, all superbly decorated outside and in. The beaches, the sea and the landscape were all so beautiful that, although the place itself is so isolated, it wasn't surprising that it was crowded with upper middle-class Yugoslavs as well as foreigners. We very reluctantly had to press on, through countryside which grew more and more lush and less barren. After a long detour around the Kotor fjord we reached Kotor itself, which is another of the group of Byzantine towns here in the province of Montenegro, having no streets big enough for roads but all used as footpaths and a large central market place surrounded by arcades of shops and a square tower in one corner. Above the town on the cliff face of the fjord were perched a number of ancient monasteries some of which were now inaccessible according to the townsfolk. It was here I'm afraid that we exceeded the eight miles-an-hour speed limit and had to pay the princely sum of six shillings to a Yugoslav policeman who seemed somewhat taken aback when we put up no defence whatsoever and paid with a smile.



Coast south of Dubrovnik - Alistair, CEB and Steve

July 25, 1961.

In the morning we started the big climb over the Dolomites.

[The following two pictures were taken on the rough dirt road that climbed up the mountains near Bar. I have tried without success to identify on a modern map this section of road that climbed out of Bar. I suspect that it was essentially replaced by a more modern asphalt road.]



Yugoslavia - climbing from coast near Bar



Yugoslavia - climbing from coast near Bar

The first stage of the journey was completed when we reached Titograd, a practically completely new industrial city which seemed rather out of place among the static agricultural civilization around it which has stayed almost unchanged for hundreds of years. The Yugoslavs are only now beginning to get used to the idea of a new industrial civilization (in these remote parts anyway), a change which all ages group welcomed, I suppose because of its appearance in the material form of houses and factories and an increase in the standard of living. This is, I suppose, one of the reasons why Tito is so genuinely idolized among all Yugoslavs whom we met anyway; another is of course Tito's independence policy. However, although America tries to give the impression that there is a rift between Russia and Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia is still as much Russia's ally as she is Communist.

The Dolomites proved to be as tough a nut to crack as we had imagined. We passed over at least four extremely high passes on the way from Titograd to Pec; each was as high and even more scenically beautiful than the St. Bernard or Gottard. The roads however were appalling and here and there almost impassable with great hunks of bed rock showing or part of the road caved away. Most of the time we seemed to be travelling between a sheer face and drop on each side. Higher up in the Dolomites the terrain became rather more British with huge pine trees and lush grass, though the ground was still sandy and the roads dusty. The dust in fact proved to be our main enemy as it got into everything and filled the car. However, at last we made it and were coming down for the last time through a most magnificent gorge which was superly narrow and tall and the road travelled alongside the river in a series of caves and tunnels. When the gorge widened out we entered the town of Pec and were immediately struck by the difference in the town and people on this side of the Dolomites compared with that on the other side. The Dolomites, in fact, formed a distinct natural barrier and whereas Dubrovnik and Kotor were clean, relatively wealthy towns with a sort of western feeling about them, Pec and Djakovica were distinctly tending toward middle-eastern, being very dirty hovel like towns with great ox-carts and the sewer running down the middle of the road. I had read that there was a church in Pec which had a couple of superb icons and after an hour searching for it we decided that it musn't exist any more.

That evening we arrived in the best Yugoslavian camp-site that we had come across, near Djakovica. In the restaurant there we dined with a number of Belgrade University students, one of whom was teaching himself English and with whom we had a long conversation about Tito's Yugoslavia. They were all apparently working on nearby road schemes during the summer.

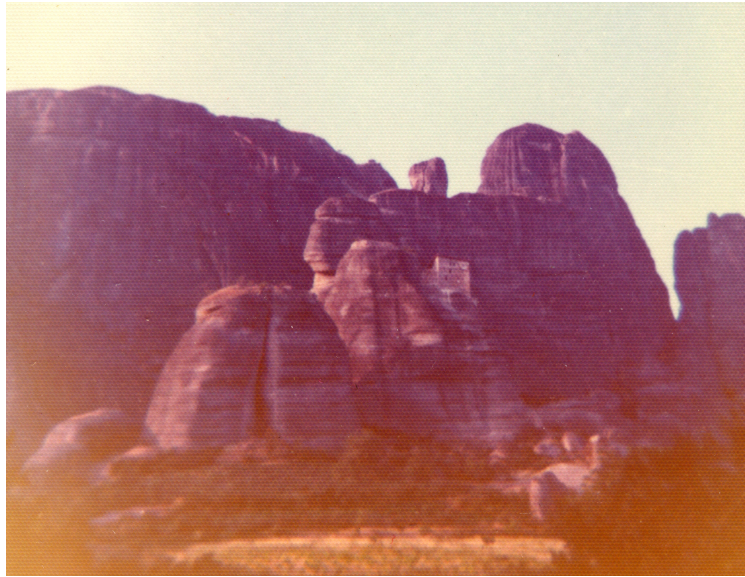
July 26, 1961.

Coming out of Yugoslavia an exactly similar procedure took place as took place outside Trieste and during the wait we made friends with a bus load of Birmingham students who had brought their own bus "Aphrodite" through Yugoslavia. We passed through the Yugoslav and Greek customs only to discover that we were penniless and couldn't get any money until the banks opened in Thessalonika the next morning. We managed to reach that city on our last drop of petrol and exist on sterling till the following morning.

July 27, 1961.

However we were all overjoyed at having reached Greece, and the minature Athens of Thessalonika with its pavement stalls, marketplaces and talkative, hospitable people immediately captured our imaginations. Incidentally on entering Greece we had immediately noticed the much greater agricultural wealth of northern Greece compared with Yugoslavia; no more begging along the sides of the roads, no more miserable half-cultivated land. The most interesting part of Thessalonika was its waterfront with the shore lined in brightly lit cafes and erotic Greek music playing everywhere. The whole Greek outlook on life was evident everywhere, even in the bank where the clerks were free and easy talking and friendly yet efficient with their flamboyant way of filling in the huge different coloured money order forms.

We spent some time looking round Thessalonika with its numerous ancient Byzantine chapels and its famous Church of the Twelve Disciples, which is a most interesting example of post-classical architecture, as well as touring the market places and stocking ourselves with food. We had one amusing experience in Thessalonika when one stall keeper halved the price of his sombreros for us when he heard that we were not German but English.



Meteora



Meteora

*Meteora**Thermopylae*

Our next port of call was Meteora and having passed Mount Olympus on the way we made our destination late that afternoon. There, in the late thirteenth century two rebel monks from the order of St. Augustine founded the Monastery of the Transfiguration and Our Lady on top of Great Meteora, one of a group of vast columns of rock in this peculiar volcanic phenomenon. Initially these two had had to climb the sheer face of the rock, an amazing feat in itself, but later when their numbers grew they let themselves up and down in baskets, and eventually a whole colony of monasteries were formed on top of some of the other pinnacles and in caves on the sheer cliff faces. We, however, reached the top of Great Meteora by the much easier method of a staircase built into the rockface fairly recently and discovered that one of the monks was an "England Papa" according to one of the guides. He turned out to be an English speaking monk who showed us round the monastery and the magnificently hand-decorated 15th century chapel and related most of the history of Meteora to us.

[The contemporaneous account fails to describe the events of that evening and night. We made our way across to the village close by the open field in which we had pitched our tent. In the local village cafe we ate a Greek dish of tomatoes stuffed with rice and drank "retsina". The locals were dancing and Steve remembers them asking him to dance. Later that night I became violently ill and crawled around outside the tent issuing from both ends. It took me more than a day to recover; despite this we continued the journey with Alastair driving.]

July 28, 1961.

We reached the pass of Thermopylae next having passed on the way numerous Springs of Apollo, the Muses and Venus. In a way we were somewhat disappointed with Thermopylae as nowadays one can only vaguely imagine where the sea came up to in Leonidas's day and how such a narrow pass could have existed. However, the modern statue erected in memory of Leonidas and his men is rather superb especially against the blue background of the sky, although there is only a small ring of stones a little further away to mark his grave.

On we went through the mountains of Aetolia, southwards over Yugoslavian type roads to Amphissae and on to Delphi.



Delphi



Delphi



Delphi



Delphi

*Delphi**Stadium at Delphi***July 29, 1961.**

Delphi turned out to be one of the few completely "touristized" classical sites in Greece and its lower slopes consisted of heaps of stones with notices saying "The Treasury of so-and-so" which seemed a little ridiculous. However as we climbed the hill we came upon the theatre, the Athenian Treasury, the Temple of Apollo Pythios, and a few of the later Roman remains like the stadium and the baths. We searched in vain for the Hole of the Oracle.

All these plus the many sculptural and historical treasures in the museum there tended to give one a refreshing and exhilarating feeling of age and wisdom as did the Acropolis and Olympia later on. Delphi seemed to be perched at the bottom of a cliff away up on a steep mountain side and even today, despite the hordes of American tourists, it still retains the character of the unreal and the mystic. We camped on the same hillside that the Greek armies did thousands of years ago. We moved off at the grey light of dawn in our steel horse.

We were now on our way to Athens and so keen were we all to reach our ultimate destination that we spent merely a few minutes at the ancient city of Thebes which seemed extremely uninteresting anyway. At last we ascended the last hill before Athens and there before us stood the city of Athens with the Acropolis floating above it as if belonging to another world.

July 30-31, 1961.

We spent about four days altogether in Athens and during that time I must admit that I became completely enraptured by the city and its people. Naturally enough we saw and learnt all about most of the classical monuments, with the Acropolis itself as the climax of our tour. We spent hours inside the Parthenon just talking about life in general and the age and serenity of the place seemed to inspire our thoughts. We all wondered at the sculptural beauty not only of the Parthenon alone but also of the Acropolis as a whole, sharply contrasted by the cone type form of Mt. Lykabettos and the sea of white buildings of the city itself below. We toured most of the classical sites in Greece and some in Italy on the way back but none could compare with the Acropolis. Perhaps this romantic feeling I have for it was inspired by the fact that we went to the English version of the "Son et Lumiere" on it; that is we sat on the opposite hill where besieging armies always camped and watched the lights and loudspeakers relate the story of Athens in a way that is truly ingenious and extremely effective. We all left the "Son et Lumiere" convinced that this is one of the few really original ways of artistic entertainment which has come to light in the last few decades, and when it uses such a magnificent building as the Acropolis, and a few ingenious lighting and sound effect tricks, it can create much better than any other existing art form the atmosphere of Ancient Greece.



Athens Acropolis



Athens Acropolis



Athens Acropolis



Athens Acropolis



Athens Acropolis

*Athens Acropolis**Athens Acropolis*

Most of the other ancient buildings like the columns of Olympian Zeus and the Arch of Constantine in Athens seemed so paltry compared with the Acropolis that we didn't give them much attention although we did spend many hours talking to the people in cafes and markets and it always seemed to be they who started and maintained the conversation. It was very interesting in a way to see how the Greek people lived under the shadow of the tradition and glory which had past. They seemed in some way resigned to this, in that they had already proved themselves long, long ago and that their country could live for ever on the memory of past glories without having to assert themselves as a power again. This I give as one of the reasons why I think the Greeks are such a happy people and in this way we all thought that modern Athens is as fascinating in some way as Ancient Greece.

August 1, 1961.

However we eventually had to bid farewell to a city which we all vowed to return to, and set off for the Peloponnese. We stopped briefly at Eleusis and on the bridge over the Corinth Canal, which incidentally is an astounding feat of engineering with its huge walls of sand and large liners looking like toys in the bottom. In Corinth itself we met a rather pleasant old Greek farmer who invited us to camp in one of his fields, and we duly accepted his not unusual Greek hospitality. The sun by this time on the tour was becoming unbearably hot during the middle of the day and we were forced to confine our activities to the early morning or evening and drive during the three or four hours when the sun was at its height, which at least provided a refreshing breeze through the ever-open windows. We also found that the only thing which we could bear to eat was fruit so this was digested in enormous amounts.

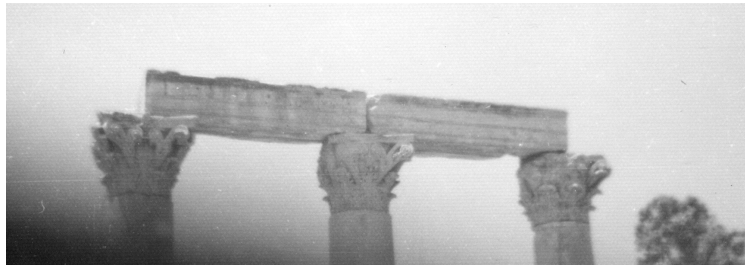


Peirene Spring in Corinth



Temple of Appolo in Corinth

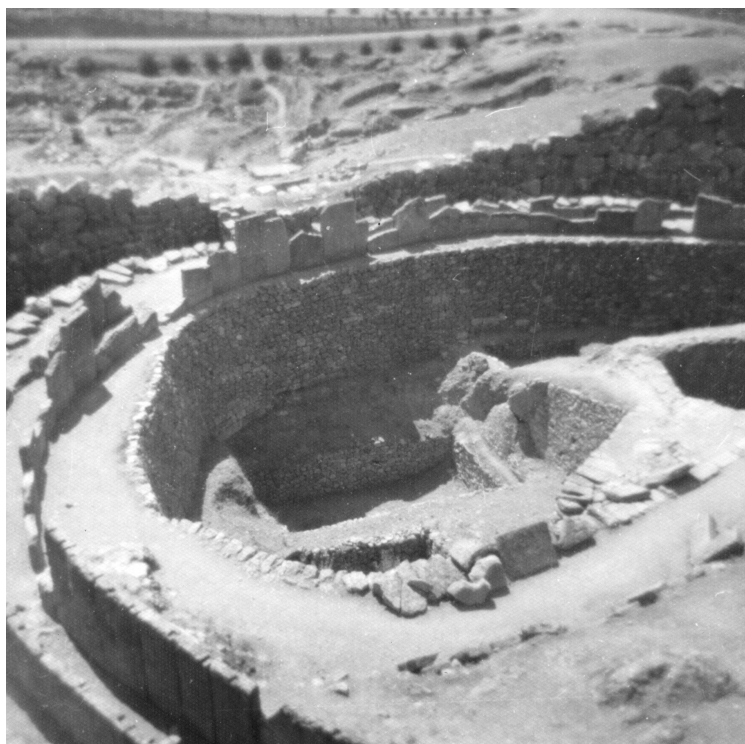


Corinth*Corinth*

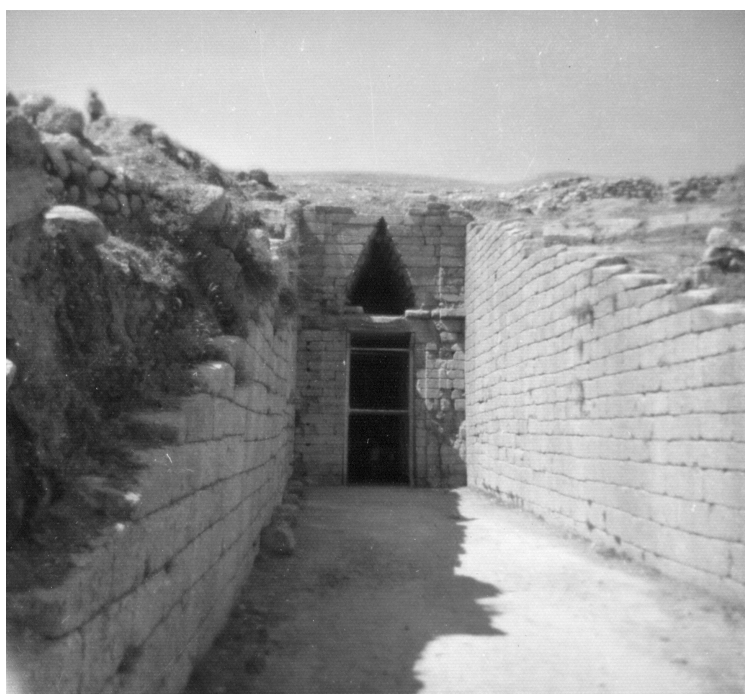
August 2, 1961.

Next day we toured the site of Ancient Corinth which has just recently practically completely excavated by a group of American archeologists, and found it rather uninteresting except for the Peirene Spring, the ageless Doric Temple of Apollo and a set of sculptured tableaux relating the adventures of Hercules in the very badly set out museum. Later, we travelled still further south to the group of Mycenaean cites centered around the gulf of Argolis. Mycenae itself was the center of the earliest known civilization on the Greek mainland, and it is thought to have been a branch of the earlier Minoan age which existed in Crete around 1500B.C. In fact, in its being completely different from Delphi, Athens and Corinth we found them pleasantly interesting although very little is known of the Mycenaean way of life. Standing on top of the hill of Mycenae itself one could see that it was quite possible that all three of the main sites, namely Mycenae, Argos and Tyrins were at one time on or near the sea shore in the shape of the Argolian Gulf. The site of Mycenae itself is quite interesting, particularly because of the two huge underground domes, whose exact history and use is still not quite clearly known, though they are thought to have been royal graves or ``treasuries'', since Mycenae itself is thought to have been merely a burial ground. Of the other sites, Tiryns seemed the most satisfactorily restored and one could see the impression of the whole ground plan of the fortress with its miniature acropolis or Megaron and upper and lower citadels.

*Mycenae*



Mycenae



Mycenae

By this time on the tour we had decided that we would rest for a day and so we took ourselves to the little coastal village of Tolon just east of Navplion where there is in fact another Mycenaean site known as Asine, situated on a rocky headland. We found a superbly deserted beach there and camped under the shadow of this headland.



Griff admiring his tan - "I muss get braun"

August 3, 1961.

We spent the next day luxuriously swimming and sunbathing and eating fruit. We felt rather like the Lotus-Eaters. At the same time a group of policemen always seemed to be wandering around and we discovered that they were in fact guarding the site of Asine on which practically no excavations had yet been made, but was due for complete excavation and partial restoration by the archeologists who were just finishing Tiryns. However, as tourists we were allowed to just wander over the site and in fact to pick up fragments of pottery still lying in the nooks and crannies on the bare rock surface.

August 4, 1961.

We were tempted to stay even longer at Asine but we eventually managed to drag ourselves westwards and continue our journey. We travelled through the rather quaint little village of Navplion and on to Tripolis. From there we crossed the mountains of Arcadia and eventually arrived at the home of the Olympic Games, whose Greek and Greek-Roman remains are now very well preserved. One of the interesting things about Olympia was the mathematical accuracy of sequence with which the buildings used by the athletes were set out in order including the stadium of which only the entrance remained before restoration. The workshops of Phidias with the remains of his unfinished tablets and sculptured pieces were also rather interesting with the Temple of Olympian Zeus and the original flame bowl from which the Olympic torch is still lit every four years. However, otherwise not much is left of Olympia except a maze of foundations, a lot of the Roman ones being built on top of the original Greek site.

That night we had just about the most exciting contact of the tour with the Greek people themselves. We decided that since we had enjoyed Tolon and Asine so much, that we would find somewhere on a coast again that night, so on reaching Pirgos we told the English equivalent of a barman about this and he directed us to the village of Katacolon a few kilometres away. We promptly set off for Katacolon and, on arriving there, we found that the main street of the village in fact consisted of the beach with all the houses and shops of the village built in the sandhills. The traffic, including buses, used the beach as it was the only road through the village to the harbour on the headland. We found a suitable spot on the beach opposite an un-built-up sandhill and decided to camp there for the night. So, as usual, we started by getting out all the cooking utensils and set to to make ourselves the usual Irish stew for dinner. However, within a few minutes of stopping, hordes of the local people crowded round to see what we were doing and began to tell us how and what to put in the stew. They all seemed fantastically amused at everything we did and insisted on tasting the final product, listening to Greek music on our radio, and finding out exactly how everything worked in the car. Unfortunately they didn't seem to be able to understand much of our Greek and only a few of them talked any English, French or German, but nevertheless we made great friends with them and especially with the teenagers. After dinner we got out our guitars and makeshift drum and washboard and began going through our usual repertoire, none of which they seemed to know until we came to "Nobody loves like an Irishman", whereupon they all joined in much to our amazement and pleasure. Another peculiarity was that the only western dance they seemed to be able to do was the Charleston, but these two common factors kept the party going till the on-looking mothers decided it was their sons' and daughters' bedtimes. That night, as had been usual for the last week, we didn't use the tent (mainly because the heat inside in the morning was suffocating) but merely lay down in the sand in our sleeping bags.

August 5, 1961.

The next morning when we woke we found that we were sleeping in the middle of a bus queue, surrounded by locals going to work in Pirgos.

However having got over this slightly embarrassing situation and had our morning wash in the sea, we were on our way again leaving behind us a few rather amazed Greeks, but also a lot of friends. This was really the end of our tour of Greece as far as we had planned and

we began to make our way to Igumenitsa in northwest Greece as we had to catch the ferry to Italy from there in a couple of days time. That day we travelled up round the coast of the Peloponnese to Patras through some very pleasant countryside. The west side of the Peloponnese has a much greater rainfall than the rest of Greece and is thus alot more fertile and luxurious in its natural vegetation, the road being lined with beautiful palms, cactii and sub-tropical grasses. This however lessened as we went northwards.

We drove onto the ferry which is incidentally a converted landing craft and very cheap, at Anderrion and crossed the mere three-quarters of a mile to the mainland at Rion. Between Rion and Mesolongion the mountains sheer straight down into the sea and we drove along an extremely picturesque coast road perched on the side of the cliffs. We thought that if this scenery continued that it would be a very pleasant journey northwards but very soon we found ourselves on the marshy, flea-infested plains around Mesolongian and Agrinian which didn't provide us with a very pleasant camp-site.

August 6, 1961.

However the next day we travelled up through the mountains again along very bad roads and comparatively uninteresting terrain to Arta and Yannina where we camped in a field.

August 7, 1961.

We arrived early next morning in Igumenitsa. This we found to be a rather quaint little town based around the ferry harbour as its sole industry and spent the last day in Greece looking round the antique and souvenir shops and generally taking our leisure.

August 8, 1961.

Early the next morning we boarded a very modern car ferry equipped with even a swimming pool and sailed via Corfu to Brindisi in Italy. When we landed in Brindisi after a rather tedious sea journey we started the big drive home and just as on the way to Greece we didn't seem to have much time for anything but travelling. However, we did stop for an afternoon in Pompeii and this we found definitely the most amazing and interesting of the Roman remains we visited. The murals in the Roman villas were especially interesting and the mummified bodies of men and dogs rather terrifying in that they illustrated the horror of complete devastation such as has been witnessed in recent years at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We travelled on to Rome where we stayed for a day and a half and crammed as much as we could into that time. We started where all tourists would start, at St. Peter's. It was somewhat awe-inspiring in its artistic and architectural beauty though I was somewhat disappointed with the widely-hailed Sistine Chapel. I thought, in fact, that in some way the various works of art in it, though beautiful in themselves, did not harmonize and thus created a sort of crushed atmosphere in the chapel. However, St. Peter's is very interesting architecturally in that Michelangelo gave us in this building the first hints of a deviation from Mannerism to the Baroque of the 17th century. In this Michelangeloshowed his genius in growing out of and beyond the Renaissance conceived styles of both the 16th and 17th centuries. We later made a brief visit to the Coliseum and the Roman Forum and it was the latter which really seemed completely "unaweinspiring" though it may be interesting if one knew the history of the various bits of brick; the Coliseum though quite impressive from the outside because of its enormity is again extremely dull when seen from the inside. This may be too harsh a judgment on these famous Roman remains but for me their red-brick and dull-brown stone did not hold any of the excitement and ageless serenity of the white marble of the Acropolis.

We found ourselves with very little time to spare and unfortunately had to drive through Florence, realizing that all its artistic treasures required much more time than we could afford at the moment. We did however stop in Pisa for a few hours and climbed the famous leaning tower. Its tilt seems much greater when one sees it in reality than, in fact, it does in photographs and it is really hair-raising to stand on top of it. Our last step home took us along the French and Italian Rivas of which we found the Italian Riviera rather boring with every resort seeming exactly similar whereas there were one or two very individual and enchanting little places like Villefranche and Theoule on the French side and in which we just could not resist stopping. Finally we really had to pull out all the stops to get to Ostend on time and Paris I'm afraid we had to dismiss with a flying tour in half an hour.

We welcomed home as weary and most definitely tired travellers and yet very satisfied with the trip, although we had only made en-route visits to France, Switzerland and Italy, countries which we realized required another visit. I, personally, felt that though we had seen and done almost everything we could have of note in Greece, I still had not captured or understood the real character of the people, and in this way would rather like to go back there again someday. Yet there are so many other countries that I would love to see that time seems against that.

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Last updated 7/30/99.

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