

# On to L'Abri

The following day, 50 years ago on April 23, the plane landed in London at 3 p.m. after a refuelling stop in Beirut. I was glad that I had accepted the Stringham's generosity. The custom's agent wanted to see how much I had in cash and Traveler's Checks before the Brits were going to allow me into the country. Someone had tipped me off that the Blackfriar's Youth Hostel was a good deal and centrally located in London. So, that's what I put on my embarkation card. When I arrived it was sunny, and warm, but the weather soon settled into typical London weather—cold with a light drizzle.

| EMBARKATION CARD   |  | ALIENS ORDER, 1953  |                        | B.R. 13564/4<br>1B29A              |  |
|--|--|---|------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Surname (in block letters)<br>Nom en caractères gros<br>Familiennamen in Druckschrift<br>Cognome in Stampato                                     |  |   | Port of disembarkation |                                    |  |
| } MAFFIN   |  |   | BOMBAY INDIA           |                                    |  |
| Forenames<br>Prénoms<br>Vornamen<br>Nomi   |  |   |                        |                                    |  |
| } PAUL REES  |  |   |                        |                                    |  |
| Date of birth<br>Date de naissance<br>Geburtsdatum<br>Data di nascita  |  | Place of birth<br>Lieu de naissance<br>Geburtsort<br>Luogo di nascita                             |                        | Sex<br>Sexe<br>Geschlecht<br>Sesso |  |
|  |  | } WASH. DC.<br>U.S.A.   |                        | } MALE                             |  |
| Nationality<br>Nationalité<br>Staatsangehörigkeit<br>Nazionalità   |  | Occupation<br>Profession<br>Beruf<br>Professione  |                        |                                    |  |
| } U.S.A.   |  | } LIBRARIAN   |                        |                                    |  |
| Number of Passport<br>Numéro du passeport<br>Passnummer<br>Numero del passaporto   |  | (or, if a national identity card is used in lieu of a passport, number of national identity card) |                        |                                    |  |
|  |  |   |                        |                                    |  |
| Full address in United Kingdom<br>Adresse précise en Grande Bretagne<br>Genauere Adresse in Grossbritannien<br>Indirizzo presso in Gran Bretagna |  |   |                        |                                    |  |
| } BLACKFRIAR'S YOUTH HOSTEL  |  |   |                        |                                    |  |
| Signature<br>Signature<br>Unterschrift<br>Firma  |  |   |                        |                                    |  |
|  |  |   |                        |                                    |  |

The reverse cultural shock wasn't as bad as I had anticipated. Even after my immersion in Eastern culture and Zen Buddhism, it was clear that I was essentially still a Westerner at heart. While in London, I enjoyed a surfeit of food, beer and

sounds. I managed to get tickets to a concert by The Incredible String Band, a quirky group that was a favorite of mine at the time (the year on the ticket is wrong). A couple nights later, I returned to the Royal Festival Hall for an all-Bach organ recital.



I had a final task to complete before boarding the boat train from London to Switzerland. As a Zen Buddhist practitioner in India, I had shaved my head completely bald. By the time I landed in London my hair had grown out about half an inch. I went to a barber and had my head completely shaved. I was determined to arrive at L'Abri on my own terms, making a clear statement that I was interested but not really *needing* what they had to offer. So it was that on April 28 I boarded the train for Dover. I was able to book the entire trip from London to Paris, through Lausanne, and on to Aigle, where I would catch the Postal bus up into the mountains to Huémoz, where L'Abri was located.



The trip went without a hitch, given the legendary Swiss efficiency. I was able get on the correct Postal Bus heading in the direction of Huémoz, I was dropped off at the door of Chalet les Mélèzes, the central chalet of the L'Abri community. Since I don't have a picture, you'll have to form an image in your mind of the bizarre creature that washed up unannounced on the shores of this Christian community. As I've mentioned, my head was freshly shaven, adorned with small, wire-rimmed "Gandhi glasses." I was dressed in a completely

green outfit from Nepal, with skinny arms and legs. On my back was my huge red backpack, which contained all my worldly goods. To my surprise, I was received warmly, as warmly as if I had been dressed in a 3-piece suit.

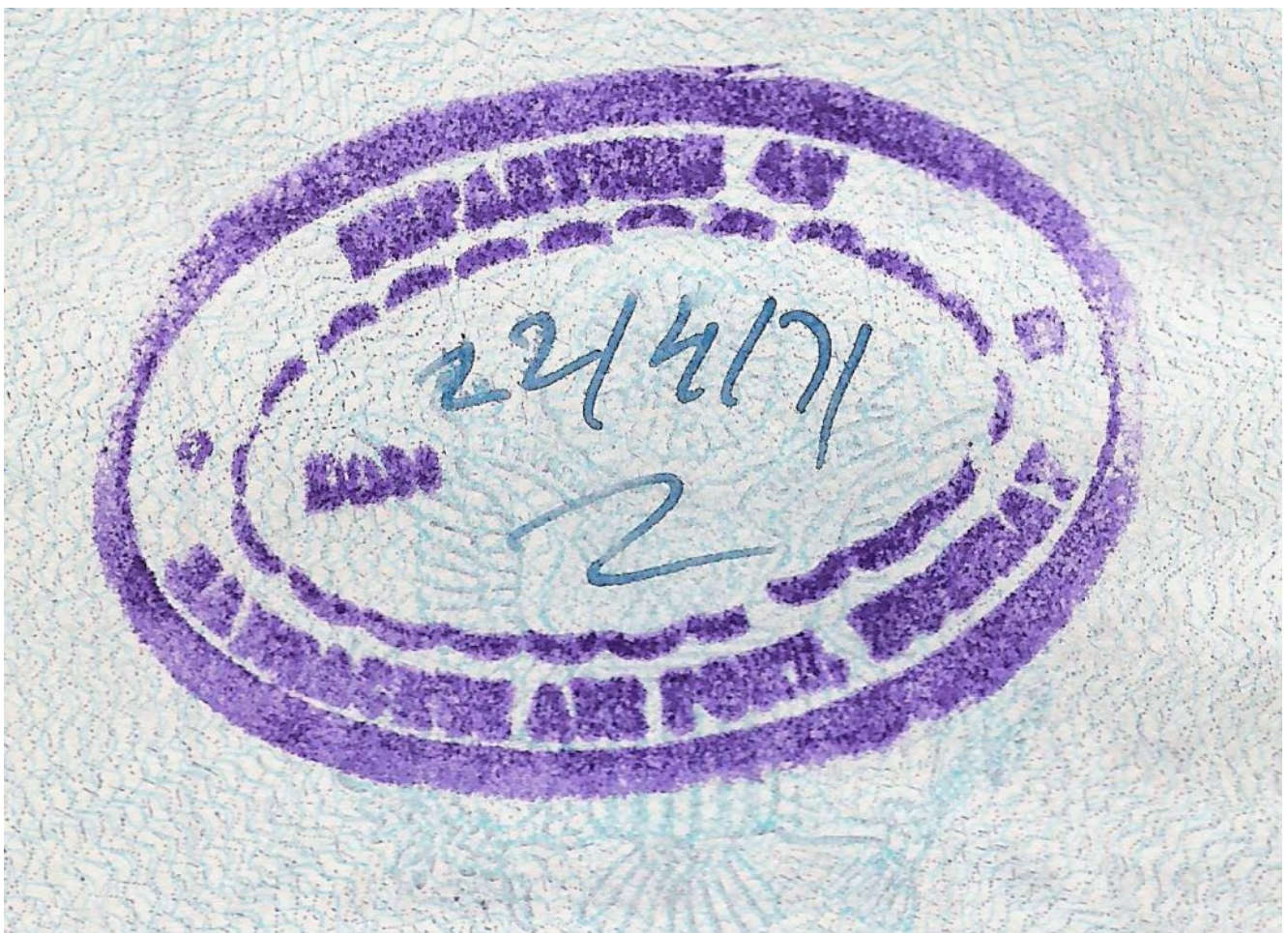
My future wife, Margaret, saw me the morning after my arrival. I will let her give her first impressions. "See him, I did! The sun was reflecting off his bald head and he was shoveling down the oatmeal with gusto. He was at the far end of the breakfast table so I was not able to get the full effect of the green outfit. Leaning over to Debbie Middelmann, I whispered, 'Who's that?' She whispered back, 'I don't know but his name's Paul and he just came from India.' Since I was preparing to head off on a journey by thumb with a friend, the bald guy in the green suit was not given much more thought."

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## **An Unexpected Blessing**

When I crossed back into India from Nepal, I had made up my mind to head back overland to Switzerland backtracking the route I had come beginning in September 1970. I wasn't overly excited about the journey, since it would probably involve traveling most of the way alone. I had written the Stringhams from Kathmandu to tell them that I had decided not to continue the formal Zen Buddhist meditation, planned to stop with them, and then head back overland to L'Abri, the Christian community in Switzerland. Shortly after I arrived they asked me why I didn't fly to Europe. The main consideration, of course, was money. I would arrive in Europe with only about \$70 to my name.

Jim asked me how much more I would need to consider flying. I replied that I thought I would need about \$100. Jim said that he and Charlotte had agreed not to try to influence my decision to go to L'Abri, but that if I decided to go, they would give me \$100—a significant amount, about \$650 in 2021—to help me get there. Ordinarily I would have refused. But the fact that the Stringhams worked more on leadings of the Spirit than whims convinced me that there was some reason for me to get to L'Abri quickly (and certainly more safely). So I accepted. I found a company called Worldways and was able to book on a BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) charter flight for London leaving on the 22<sup>nd</sup>—the last day of my Indian visa—for \$230.



After several enjoyable days with the Stringhams, I traveled

for the last time by my beloved 3<sup>rd</sup> class sleeper to Delhi. It turned out that this Worldways charter company was rather “sketchy”. I found out on the 19<sup>th</sup> that the flight was leaving from Bombay (present-day Mumbai) rather than Delhi. The travel agent was not going to pay my airfare to Bombay at first, but we dickered and finally settled on half the airfare; it would have cut it too close to travel by train. I flew to Bombay the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> and spent the night in a cheap hotel. I showed up at the BOAC office the next day. The agent for Worldways was there but had no tickets as yet, because of the underhanded dealings involved. In order to fly charter, you had to be part of an organization—the Yehudi Menuhin Circle in this case. The agent sent the names to London, and they sent back a “revised,” backdated membership list.



**First Class: such luxury!** Elegant decor, superb armchairs, sumptuous seven-course meals served on crested china from a buffet trolley, your choice of the finest wines, spirits and liqueurs, an atmosphere of whispered luxury. You'll arrive fresh and relaxed, ready for the boardroom or that important social function.

First Class by BOAC VC10 is a rewarding experience for any discerning traveller.

The departure time on April 22—the last day of my India visa—was 8:15. I showed up at 5:30—still no tickets. The other

passengers and I went to the airport with the agent and finally got our tickets *one* hour before departure! A little too close for comfort. The luxury of the BOAC VC10 soon settled my nerves after the ticketing drama. I found myself in the First Class cabin. I can only imagine what my urbane fellow travelers felt about sitting next to a largely unwashed hippie. I was on the way to London and clearly headed back into Western culture. As you might guess, I never refused anything that the stewardess offered to the First Class passengers.

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## **Trekking toward Everest**

Armed with our precious trekking permits, Richard and I began our climb into the foothills of the Himalayas on March 31, 50 years ago.

उपरोक्त जवानलाई लेखिएको अवधि भित्र लेखिएको जिल्ला गाऊहरूमा मूल बाटोभै जान आउन श्री ५ को सरकारबाट इजाजत दिईएकोछ । उक्त जवानले आफ्नो भ्रमणको सिलसिलामा अनुरोध गरेमा शक्ति खर्च निजैले बहनौं गरी चाहिने मद्दत दिन, दिलाउन सम्बन्धित श्री अञ्चलाधिस, सहायक अञ्चलाधिस, प्रमुख जिल्ला अधिकारी चेक पोस्ट तथा स्थानीय भन्ज्याङगीहरूसंग अनुरोध गरिन्छ । ईजाजत प्राप्त जवानले नेपालको उत्तरी सीमाना बाट कमले कम २५ माइल बढी रूढी मान तोकेको अवधि भित्र भ्रमण गर्न पाउने छ ।

The bearer has been granted permission by His Majesty's Government to trek to and from the places mentioned overleaf via main routes. He/She must, however, keep twenty-five miles of the northern borders of Nepal.

The ministry of Home Panchayat Affairs appreciate any such courtesy and assistance as he / she may stand in need of by the Anchaladish [Zonal Commissioner] Sahayak Anchaladish Assistant Zonal Commissioner ] Pramukh Zilla Adhikari [Chief District Officer] Check-Post and local people concerned, at his/her own expense, in the course of the trekking.

श्री ५ को सरकार  
गृह पञ्चायत मन्त्रालय  
(अध्यागमन)



नेपाल भित्रका स्थानहरूमा भ्रमण गर्न पाउने  
इजाजत पत्र  
TREKKING PERMIT  
HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT  
Ministry of Home Panchayat Affairs  
KATHMANDU

सि. नं. २०५१००० काठमाडौं  
श्री ५ को सरकार  
गृह पञ्चायत मन्त्रालय  
(अध्यागमन)  
मिति १९७१/०३/१०

नेपाल भित्रका स्थानहरूमा भ्रमण गर्न पाउने इजाजत पत्र  
नाम Mr. Paul Reed  
नागरिकता U.S.A.  
पासपोर्ट नं. A1484352  
ठेगाना Waterloo  
जान पाउने ठाउँहरू (नियमित इलाका बाहेक)  
Sundarjal, Polikhajung, Halesi, etc.  
इजाजतको अवधि 10 April  
भ्रमणको उद्देश्य ...

S. No. - 2147/027 KATHMANDU  
Date 2071  
HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT  
Ministry of Home Panchayat Affairs  
TREKKING PERMIT FOR PLACES INSIDE  
NEPAL

Name Mr. Paul Reed  
Nationality U.S.A.  
Passport No. A1484352  
Address Waterloo  
Places for which the Permit is valid  
(Expect the Restricted Areas)  
Sundarjal, Polikhajung, Halesi, etc.  
Duration 10 April  
Object of journey ...



थप म्याद र ठाउँहरूको निमित्त  
(Extension of the Period and Places)

10. अध्यागमन अधिकृत  
K.B.R.  
IMMIGRATION OFFICER

Our route was to the northeast of Kathmandu. The first day we did nothing but climb and end the day at the "high point" of our trip, a small village of six houses on an 8,000 foot peak. Most of our trip, the weather was quite hazy, but we were fortunate in having the sky clear just before sunset for a



superb view of the snows. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to capture a picture of that moment, but I do have a picture of the village.



Almost every village on the main trekking routes has one house that provides meals and a place to sleep. The second day, we descended to Patibhanjyang, which is in a 6,500 foot mountain pass, had lunch and climbed the 7,800 foot peak on the other side. Descending, we somehow got off on a side trail and ended up in a small village that hadn't see too many Westerners. After several tries, we managed to communicate with the inhabitants of one house that we were willing to pay if we could sleep there and eat with them. We got the royal treatment including chhang, which is the local "home brew" made from corn.

The third day we did a short hike to Talarang, which is at the juncture of two fairly large rivers. We had most of the afternoon to swim—there was a pool deep enough to dive into. We also got to cross one of the bridges for which Nepal is famous—one board suspended between two chains. We put in a full day the next day, ending up in a beautiful village on top of a medium-sized hill. We had a short walk the next morning to the China road, where we caught a bus into Kathmandu.



The beauty of the land and people of Nepal is something that can't be put into words or captured in pictures. The Sierra Club's first Everest book did a credible job as far as pictures are concerned, and it was my inspiration for the trek. I had the disadvantages of haze and a cheap camera. The Nepali have deep black eyes and expansive smiles, which would draw even Ebenezer Scrooge into a jovial mood. Most available arable land is terraced and planted in wheat or barley and is

an otherworldly green.



After Richard and I returned to Kathmandu, I spent a couple days and then bid farewell to the members of our Zen meditation group. I was back on the road again, heading back to India for a final visit with the Stringhams and then back on the road alone for the return trip overland to Switzerland (or so I thought). I crossed the border back into India on April 6. My tourist visa allowed me until April 22 to leave India. I ended up cutting it perilously close.

*Enly*

POLICE CHECK-POST

IMMIGRATION OFFICE

*Visas*

MAXAUL

Date *9.4.71* SC 2266

From

~~To~~

Nepal

*Enly*

C. P. O. MAXAUL

*9/4/71*