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Materials/equipment



Sea White sketch-book, Winsor/Newton watercolour paints, Art-line drawing pens, Cosmotop nr. 12 brush, Daler-Rowney Nr. 2 “Rigger” brush, Fabriano “studio” watercolour paper, masking tape, eraser and kitchen roll paper.

Travelling with a brush!

03. JUNE

4 o'clock in the morning and the phone rings. "Hey, yes, I'm up". That was Per and his wife Lone, checking to see if I'm awake. They'll be round in a quarter to five to pick me up and give me a lift to Copenhagen. Today's the day – the start of my travels.

I have traveled before, but never this far. I've been through the most of Europe – Spain and Portugal having eluded me so far. In the east, I've been as far as the Ukranian border with Poland, to a small town called Krylow. I drove there one summer after finding the place on the internet. I took a lazy trip across Poland, drawing along the way. When I reached Krylow I met some locals. That was the first time they had met a Krylow in Krylow!

My family originated from the north east corner of the 'old Poland' – the Poland before the second world war. They came from a village that now lies in the north of White Russia. The name of this village, Krylow, is quite coincidental.

When I travel I draw. I have been drawing since childhood. I have an old photograph of me standing in front of a blackboard,

in the kindergarten. I have just drawn a house. Not bad for a four year old. The perspective was a bit off, however!

When I visit a place and have not drawn something from the locality, then I haven't been there! I have been to Krakow in Poland several times, but have never had time or opportunity to draw the "Sukienice" – the long building in the center of the old town square, used in the old days as a cloth market. That bugged me no end. So on the way back from Krylow I just had to make a detour. I drove to Krakow and drew the old building as I waited for my lunch at a pavement restaurant.

I now possess a large collection of sketch books. The drawings or sketches are always made on the spot. I also have my camera on all trips and photograph profusely, but it's not the same. To photograph a scene takes a millisecond. I know some will say that you have to choose the motive, decide the aperture and the depth of focus. But that's not the same as sitting there glued to the scenery for an hour or two. Imbibing everything that occurs around one. Sometimes when I look through my sketch books several years later, I can smell and hear my surroundings as they were.

As mentioned before, I have always drawn. It's been my hobby since childhood. Most children draw in their early years, and then stop when they reach their teens. They start again when they get pensioned off at 60. This didn't happen to me. I can't remember drawing much during my three years at University reading Nutrition – the only thing I remember drawing at that time, was the sticker for the “rag week” collection tins. Drawing and painting was my hobby when I worked as scientist at the Meat Research Institute outside Bristol. In 1980, I left for Denmark. It was difficult to get a job in my field in a land with an impossible language. I didn't even try! I fell back on my hobby. Something I had become good at. Should never have been a scientist. Put it down to experience! Quickly I found a book publisher who liked the way I drew, and the fact that I had a background in biology also helped. I started on my career as a book illustrator. At first biology school books and later books on other subjects.

It was about that time that I started teaching watercolour painting. I went to a school providing evening classes in most things under the sun. My one evening of teaching washes and splodges grew quickly to six. I realized that I liked teaching. Why the heck have I been probing into carcasses for the last 10 years. People were learning and coming again. For seven years one could only join one of my teaching groups was when one of the original members died!

After the last evening of the spring term, just before I was about to leave on my travels, the members of my painting group took me for a Chinese meal and gave me three small

cloth flags. A Polish, an English and a Danish flag to be sewn onto my rucksack. Now I was ready to leave.

We reached the 6 o'clock ferry at Ebeltoft with time to spare – then up onto the top deck to read the paper. Lone was on her way to a teachers meeting in Copenhagen, Per wanted to browse through some bookshops and see the new gallery at KØge and I had a plane to catch.

We took off on time heading for Paris. Quit strange really, as I should be going the other way, to Singapore. Charles de Gaulle airport was empty when I arrived. There were still 5 hours to kill and the others weren't as keen as I was. I got a ticket for a free drink which I used without delay. The beer drowned the micro oven heated “cheese on toast” sandwich and made me feel just a little bit less hungry.

So there were four hours left. After seeing Edberg loose the first set at Wimbledon, I got out my copy of ‘The Lonely Planet’ and flicked through the pages. This copy was for Indonesia, and it should tell me all about where to go, what to see, where to stay, what and where to eat and how much it will cost me. It gave me a sense of security.

Why Indonesia? As I mentioned before, I had by that time, traveled mostly in Europe. It was about time I ventured a bit further a field. One of my friends had just returned from a trip to Indonesia, and told me in glowing terms of his experiences. I had to see if it was true!

I wondered into the lounge and watched the jumbos being unloaded, loaded and refueled. I decided that my plane was the one without the hump. It seemed to be standing in the right place. At 6.30 we were allowed to go on board – funny they're all Chinese.

We took off half an hour late and I could follow our progress on a large screen right in front of my nose. Two tall africans sitting next to me couldn't get their legs folded enough – so they moved – more room for me!

For the first meal there was a choice of chicken or fish. I had had fish on the flight from Copenhagen to Paris, so I ordered chicken. When it came for me to be served, the stewardess apologized – “you're sitting in the middle of the plane, all the chicken has been eaten by those at the front and at the back”. So it was fish again!

04. JUNE

The 13 hours went by quickly enough. It was 33 degrees outside. Inside the plane, the temperature was quite comfortable. I seemed to be the only one wearing a jacket. Well, I had to have it in Denmark – but what should I do with it now? My rucksack was full of all the most essential things and there was no room for my jacket.

I took a bus into the center and found the railway station, a rather grand facade to a disappointing interior. Next stop Kuala Lumpur – or so I thought. The next train leaves at 6.00 pm and

gets there after midnight. That's no good. I'll be staying with friends in Kuala Lumpur and I can't go knocking them up after midnight. I jumped into a taxi which took me to an airline office. The next plane was full, but there was one the next day, at noon. It would take three quarters of an hour to fly there and would cost 130 US dollars.

I decided to save my money and get a train the next day. I had to remember that I was on a low budget and it would serve no purpose spending my money on plane fares before I even got started. I decided to stay the night in Singapore.

I found a taxi again and asked the driver if he knew of any cheap hotels. Yes he did. He stopped outside the “New Asia hotel”. Five Singapore dollars for a night. It was a smelly little room with a mouldy shower and a TV, with ghost images where the picture should be. I tried moving the aerial and the picture disappeared. Still the TV was in colour and it's only for one night!

I walked into the town center and found a place to eat. The place looked nice, with waiters dressed as Swiss jodlers. The menu looked all right – I gave it a try. I ordered a meat fondue. No idea what it was. The waiter came with my plate, a little stove, a cooking pot and some pieces of raw meat. Great! I'll have to cook the thing myself. The waiter look bemused. “You stick the meat on this fork, then you put it in the boiling oil and after 30 seconds it's done. Thanks mate. When the meat was cooked, I had a choice of six dips. Tasted a treat – must have been hungry. There was also a plate of fresh raw salad. Oh

dear! Must not eat raw salad – you don't know how it's been washed. Ah! This is still Singapore so it must be OK – so I ate it!

The evening starts at 6 pm around here. That's when the sun goes down and the shops begin to sparkle with electric light. I wasn't going to buy anything, just look. See that! Just been propositioned by a "lady of the night". Put that down to experience.

On the way back to the hotel I got lost. The best way to visit a new city is to get lost in it – they say. But this was night time, and after wondering round for a while, admiring the scenery with illuminated skyscrapers, I called a cab and after finding the hotel visit card in a far corner of my pocket, managed to get home.

Called Dave and Charlotte and recorded a message on their answering machine that I shall be at their place in Kuala Lumpur tomorrow.

05. JUNE

I survived the night at the '*New Asia Hotel*'. In the morning I had a shower – having to hold the shower unit, as the fixture on the wall was broken. Not easy trying to wash ones hair one-handed. Anyway, I checked out and found a little cafe, where I could swallow my malaria pills helped on their way by a cup of strong coffee and a Danish. Next stop was a burger bar and a coke to take away the bitter taste of the coffee. I bought a large bottle of '*French Spring Water*'. Now I was ready.

I wondered into Chinatown. The market was in full swing with all its sights and smells. The rain started slowly with a few drops – then the umbrellas went up. I hid myself in a taxi. It was still peeing down when we reached the railway station. Although the driver stopped as close to the entrance as he could, I still got drenched, running the five yards. But now I was safe – Three hours to kill on an old fashioned station. Lunch consisted of an Indian curry pasty (not bad) and a coke. Something tells me I'll be drinking a lot of coke on this trip!

Half an hour before departure, they checked the tickets, and then the passports – fill in a form – then another check of the passport and form – then onto the train. 1st class to Kuala Lumpur.

2A was a single reclining armchair next to the window and not too far from the telly. The train left on time. I was glued to the window. Palm trees – old shack – palm trees. Ah! This must be the end of Singapore, we're over the water, racing against cars and lorries. So this is Malaysia – palm tree plantation – palm tree plantation – palm tree plan.... The telly flicked into life. Welcome to the '*Railway Channel*'. A Phillip Marlow film. Outside palm tree plantations. Oh what was that! A collection of shacks built of wood with corrugated iron roofs. Do people really live there? Of course, look, each one is topped by a TV aerial. Oh, look a temple – a great big black elephant seated on a throne.

"What would you like for lunch?" It was the waitress, a little slim thing dressed in a flowery jacket and a long skirt – didn't

look more than fourteen. I expect she must be older. They all look very young and very pretty. “What is there?” I chose the chicken and rice. Eh! This is good – just like the plane. A free meal. “That will be 8 dollars 30, sir” What! I don’t have any Malaysian money – only Singapore dollars. “that’s OK, that will be 6 Singapore dollars”. Oh well, bang goes the free meal.

“Oh, by the way – is that a palm tree plantation, or a palm tree forest?” I asked looking out of the window. “Yes” she answered. “Yes what?” I looked at her. “Yes sir!” They’re very polite her!

Seven hours of palm tree plantations and a couple of films later we pulled into Kuala Lumpur. No, I can’t see anyone I know. Better get a taxi. Still raining. Got to the taxi rank and said where I was heading for. “Have you got a ticket?” A ticket! “Yes, over there”. Went over to a queue and asked the girl what this was all about. “You buy your ticket here, then you don’t get ripped off, OK”.

Don’t have any money – well not Malaysian. I rushed back into the station and stopped a man in uniform. “Where can I change some money?” Too late, all shut, go into town, he said pointing that way. The rain had stopped – one bit of luck. Half a mile down the road was some sign of life. In one department store I found a money dispensing machine. Card in, press buttons – 200 dollars. No money, just a piece of paper. Try again – the same. The woman standing behind me tried to help – the same. The next department store had a man behind a counter. “Do you take travelers cheques?” “Yes”, and I got my

200 dollars. Couldn’t stop a taxi on the road – apparently held my hand the wrong way! Reached some parked taxis. “Where to?” Jalan Ampang. “20 dollars”*.

We reached the block of flats without accident – not a joke. Life expectancy of a Malaysian motorist must be a couple of weeks – they are bloody mad! Official statistics say 2,500 motorists killed on the road every year.



Travelling with a brush

Map of the journey. 

Malaysia



06. JUNE

Dave and Charlotte were gone to work when I woke up to a sunny day. After breakfast I took my painting things and went down to the pool, in the center of the complex. I decided to paint a little watercolour of the waterfall by the pool which I could give to my hosts. I had to sit in direct sun in order to get the view I wanted. I did remember my factor 12 sun tan oil. It's hard being an artist! The sweat was pouring off my lilywhite torso – the left hand corner of the picture was painted not with paint, but with my sweat. The picture took 2 hours! (fig. 2)

2 Watercolour of the waterfall at The Ampang complex.



We had arranged to meet in town, at *'The Sharks Club'*, when their working day was finished. They had left me a map and some phone numbers.

I caught a bus into town (the bus ride cost me 50 cents) and hopped off in Chinatown. Now I could take some photographs, stroll around, take it easy and meet Dave and Charlotte at 7 pm at *'The Sharks Club'* before going with them for an Indian meal.

"Hallo, where you're from? – nice to meet you". I looked round. It was a grinning Malay in a highly coloured shirt. I told him I was from Denmark. "Denmark! – I'd like to talk to you. My sister is studying in Copenhagen and my mother is very worried about her – perhaps you can come and pacify her". Being a very kind sort of person, I could not see anything wrong with talking to an old lady and telling her that Copenhagen is quite a safe place and there was no reason for her to worry herself to death. "OK" I said.

"Come, we'll go and have a drink – Oh, by the way this is my other sister". Behind him was a Malay woman, about 30, a little bit plump with a nice brown face. We entered a McDonalds and sat chatting over an iced coke. "Really pleased to meet you – how long you staying – what are you doing her – where's your family?" "Couple of days – on holiday – alone". "Very pleased to meet you" he repeated himself. "Wait, I'll just go and phone my mother, you talk to my sister". She soon got round to 'are you married' and 'how old are you'. The grinning Malay returned and said that his mother would like to speak to me, and it was just round the corner. Outside the McDonalds he

hailed a taxi. “I thought you said it was just around the corner – I’ve got to meet my friends at 7 o’clock”. “It’s just round the corner – I’m really pleased to meet you” Something was telling me that things were not quite right, but things happened so quickly that before I knew what was happening I was sitting in a taxi with a strange woman showing me how to eat some spiky red fruit, which had to be broken open to reveal a wet white fleshy berry surrounding a large red stone which one spat out. She began touching my leg and arm as she told me that I needed someone to look after me, wash my clothes and make my food.

After a quarter of an hours drive, the taxi stopped outside a house. The woman paid the driver and after the taxi drove off we walked back around the corner to a house we passed on our way here.

Inside was a short, fat Chinaman together with a young woman singing karaoke to a TV. They introduced themselves and we sat and chatted. No mother. She had just gone to the hospital.

The grinning Malay was a croupier working at a casino outside Kuala Lumpur, at Genting Highlands. “Have you been to a casino?” he asked. I told him “no”. “Do you know what one plays at a casino?” The only things I could think of were “Black Jack” and “Roulette”. “Yes, and I’m the croupier for “Black Jack”. “Do you know that it’s possible to always win at Black Jack – especially if you know the croupier.” Sounds logical, I thought, wondering how the hell I got myself into this!

“I can show you – come with me” He led me to a bedroom on the first floor. In the room stood a square, green card table, with some chips and a pack of cards.

“I’ll show you the way to play – we won’t use money – we’ll use these chips”. That’s nice of him, I thought. We played a couple of hands of “Black Jack”. “Oh you can play – but look here” and he told me the rules.

“Never be the bank – you’ll always loose. Never play for more than one hour – you’ll loose your concentration.

Remember, the croupier cannot twist on 15 or over”.

I can also tell you what the next card is going to be – watch my hand. He did some gymnastics with the fingers of his free hand and explained how he could tell me whether the next card is an Ace, 10, 9, etc. The whole thing was based on quick movements of the fingers of the free hand.

The thumb held at right angle to the hand for a split-second told me that the next card was an Ace. Somehow the croupier knew the order of the cards. A quick stretching of the index finger told me the identity of the next card. The split-second movement of each finger or combination of several fingers revealed the identity of a new card.

We played again, I followed the rules and I won. “You learn fast” he said.

“Do you know where Brunei is?” he suddenly changed the subject. “Yes, North Borneo” I answered. “Yes, the people there are very rich but stupid. They have a lot of money, drive Rolls-Royce and Mercedes but are stupid. I showed this system to a man from Brunei and he won 200.000 Ringet. Do you know what he gave me? What percentage of the winnings would you give me if you won so much?” Not wanting to make enemies just yet, I said 10%. “I can see you are a generous chap – I like you”, he said. “You know, he gave me 200 Ringet – the Bastard”.

Well, I could only agree with my host!

“But he is here again and I want you to play against him”.

“Don’t be silly, I can’t play” I protested. “Don’t worry, you play with my money and we score!”

This is it. This is where I get off! I stood up and went to the door. He sat there with his mouth open. “I can’t do this – I can’t play this game. I’ll get nervous and forget all the rules – no!” I think the last sentence brought the reality of the situation to this criminal.

“I’m really sorry you don’t want to help me, I think you could win a lot of money”, he said packing up his cards. I was surprised the whole thing fizzled out so easily. My adrenalin was being pumped down to my running muscles, but no, I didn’t need them at the moment. He followed me downstairs and said something “foreign” to the other two. The fat Chinaman stopped grinning.

“What sort of credit card do you have in Denmark?” the Malay asked. “Visa card” I replied without thinking. “Have you got it, can I see it. Never seen a Danish credit card”. By now the penny had dropped. It had made a hell of a noise as it fell to the bottom of the empty barrel”. I patted myself over my trouser packets and over my breast pocket of my shirt. “Don’t have it, I’m afraid, must be at home”. I was a bit surprised that they dropped it at that. Later I could imagine having nightmares, being frisked and shown to be a liar.

They offered to give me a lift into the city. As they drove me to The Sharks Club, the grinning Malay expressed the wish to meet my friends and have a drink with them. “OK” I said. They dropped me off. When they were out of sight, I found a telephone and rang to Charlotte. I told her that we could not meet at “*The Sharks Club*”. I couldn’t tell her why now, but could she suggest another place and inform Dave of the change of plan. She suggested the “*Shangri-la*” hotel.

I kept well away from the Sharks club district and got to the “*Shangri-la*” an hour early. Charlotte arrived on time and we went for a drink while we waited for Dave. I told them my story.

Charlotte and Dave had read in the newspapers of tourists that had fallen into the hands such people and got ripped off of all their money. I must have been lucky!

We went for an Indian meal on Jalan Ampang, a large outdoor eating place, with hundreds of people. The Tandori chicken tasted fantastic and after a few Carlsberg’s, I went tired to bed.

07. JUNE

When I awoke, the world's tallest building had a narrow cloud shrouding its middle. The cloud started to the left, by the telecommunications tower and stretched across the middle of the twin towers. How about that for an artistic challenge! Out with the sketch book and "hej-presto" the scene captured for posterity. (fig. 3)

The sun never broke through the clouds that morning, so I decided to stay at home and listen to some music.

In the afternoon the sun did come out. I wandered to a local Hindu Temple. (fig. 4) While wondering about, my eye caught

3 Cloud shrouding the middle of the "Twin Towers". 

sight of a coin lying in the grass. Then another and another. Have you ever had that dream, where you find lots and lots of money – of course it's all gone when you wake up. But this was for real.

Once, walking down a street in Denmark, I spotted a small brown coin on the pavement. I picked it up and looked at it. It wasn't what I expected. I expected it to be a copper 25 Øre coin, worth almost nothing. When I rubbed this one with my fingers the brown colour changed to gold.



4 Entrance to the Sri Raja Rajeswary Temple, Ampang - Kuala Lumpur.