

2 – PANGANDARAN, DIENG PLATEAU AND YOGYAKARTA



Sunday, 1 July

Because of the noise outside (which I heard this time), I did not sleep so well. I was woken at 4.30 a.m. by the sound of at least three imams calling the people to prayer over loudspeakers. Fortunately I drifted back to sleep again, only to be woken at about six o'clock by cars revving up in the street outside and people moving about noisily. I rose, washed and used the loo several times, which left me feeling rather queasy. I met my companions at seven and walked to our usual restaurant for breakfast; this morning I just had tea and toast. It turned out that none of us had slept well.

Back in the hotel we packed our bags, paid the bill and set off for Pangandaran. The first thing we needed to do was travel by minibus to Garut; fortunately this did not take too long. As we did not stop at the main bus station, the driver said that he would drive us there. However, as the price that he quoted was so outrageous, we got out and hopped into another minibus.

At the bus station we were led to the bus bound for Pangandaran. As the driver tried to overcharge us, we successfully beat him down to a more reasonable price. One certainly had to be on one's guard in this lawless environment. I guessed that the bus was privately owned and that the driver was on the make, as far too many people had been crammed on board. It was boiling hot inside.

It turned out that this bus only took us south-eastwards to Tasikmalaya, where we had to change to another one. We now had to pay for another journey. Although we passed through lush green countryside as we travelled south-eastwards once again, the journey was rather uneventful – except when a young Indonesian fellow got sick towards the end. There was no attempt made to stop the bus and help him; he just quietly vomited on the floor and sat up afterwards.

At last the bus reached Pangandaran on the southern coast at about 2.30. As all the cheaper losmens were full (or so we were told), we finally decided to follow a chap (who had been on the bus) to his hotel. We got into a *becak* (pedicab) and were brought to the

beach. The hotel turned out to be full and the others nearby were too expensive. However, Alain and Josephine managed to get themselves a room. I rested in it for a short while, then Alain and I went off in search of some place for me. Out on the main road, a fellow approached us and offered me a room in a cheap losmen. I looked inside and, as the rooms looked fine, decided on one. The deal done, Alain and I returned to the hotel, where I bought some postcards, collected my bags and walked back to my losmen. As I was not feeling up to much, I washed, changed clothes, asked for my dirty ones to be cleaned, and went to bed for a siesta.

As it was becoming dark when I woke, I discovered that the main neon light in the room did not work, and so called for help. A fellow swapped it for another light, which blew a fuse. While he and a companion tried to sort out the problem, I went downstairs to write some postcards. Because the light over the table suddenly refused to work, I had to take a chair and sit under another light! This finally gave up the ghost too and so I joined a young couple – a German lad and a Chinese girl from Canada – and chatted to them while they had a meal. I was just about to leave them when I was transferred to another room, which unfortunately was at the front, beside the noisy road.

I now walked back to Josephine and Alain's hotel and joined them for a party that we had paid for earlier. The young people were mostly European. We were given a good meal of rice, fish and vegetables, washed down with a cocktail drink of our choice. I spent most of the time chatting to a pleasant Danish girl named Heidi. An Indonesian chap, somewhat inebriated, joined us and waxed philosophical; Heidi had a good laugh at him. I also met two German girls from Cologne: Andrea and Claudia. It was a pleasant evening; an opportunity to let one's hair down. As I was in no hurry to return to my rather seedy place, I stayed to the end. As Heidi was quite satisfied with her room in the Holiday Inn next door at 4,000 Rp, I popped in with her to have a look, and was promised a similar one for the following day for 5,000 Rp, including breakfast. I left, said goodnight and walked back to my losmen, where I wrote my diary and went to bed.

Monday, 2 July

Up at my leisure, having been woken early by the noise of traffic outside. For breakfast I ordered boiled noodles with egg as my tummy was still not in good shape. While the meal was being prepared, I nipped out to the nearby post office to buy stamps for my postcards and letters. By the time I arrived back, my meal was ready.

I checked out after breakfast and walked to the nearby Holiday Inn, where I had been promised a room, but popped into the Swiss couple's hotel next door. As I was unable to find them, I concluded that they must have gone out. The staff tried to get me to stay in their hotel, offering me a room at 5,000 Rp rather than 7,500. I was non-committal and went next door to the Holiday Inn, where I was told to wait while a room was cleaned. While sipping a cup of tea, I chatted to a very attractive Indonesian girl who spoke English well. I finally was allowed to see a room; however, even though the fellow brought the price down to 4,000 Rp, in the end I decided to opt for the other hotel as the rooms were so much better. The staff were delighted to see me returning. I was given a room well away from the road and moved in after a very short delay.

Once I had organized my things, I left and took a pleasant walk along the beach on the western side of the small peninsula. Despite the hot sun, there was a cool breeze blowing in from the sea. There were plenty of people on the beach, but it was not crowded. I noticed that the Muslim women were modestly attired in one-piece swimsuits with tee shirts to cover their shoulders and upper bodies. Consequently I was quite shocked when I found a young Western couple sunbathing and the girl lying on the beach topless. I thought that this was a very thoughtless thing to do in a Muslim country.

I had noticed that although women here tended to cover their hair when outdoors, they did not wear yashmaks.



Pangandaran beach

I then entered the national park beside the jungle in the middle of the peninsula and walked around, slipping and sliding in mud at times, but it turned out to be rather disappointing. It seemed that certain areas were out of bounds; the only animals I saw were some monkeys and deer. I sat for a while in an observation post, waiting to see some buffaloes, but saw nothing. In the end I found my way to a fairly isolated beach and rested there for a while.



Fish market, Pangandaran

As it was approaching lunchtime and I was getting hungry, I now made my way along the eastern beach, from where I could see fishing boats. I soon discovered a fish market and a nearby restaurant, where I studied the menu and ordered a simple dish of friend rice with seafood, vegetables, and a bowl of fruit salad. By the time I had finished eating, I felt full, but my bowels began to protest once again. I left and headed back to the hotel just as it began to cloud over, but had to stop and use a public loo. By now feeling weak, I staggered onwards and just reached the hotel just as the heavens opened and a deluge of rain came pouring down. I made straight for the loo and emptied my bowels yet again.

Afterwards I gave myself a wash and lay down for a much-needed rest. Alain later woke me by knocking on the door to see if I was feeling all right. He kindly fetched some boiled water for me and I took some medication. The joys of travelling! I relaxed afterwards and later went to Josephine and Alain's room, where we sat together on the balcony, talking. By now we were all tired. At about 7.30 p.m. we went out for a meal. I just had some chicken soup and rice, which I mixed together. I felt a little better afterwards.

When we returned to our hotel, I gave the couple some information and chatted to the two German girls I had met the previous evening. I then went to the office and succeeded in buying a ticket for the journey to Wonosobo tomorrow morning. Afterwards I walked back to the losmen where I had spent the previous night; I collected my laundry, returned, said goodbye to Josephine and Alain (who were staying here for another day) and went to my room. I took some more medicine, wrote my diary and went to bed early.

Tuesday, 3 July

Up at about 5.15 a.m., feeling much better. Once again I had no real need to set my alarm clock, as the usual racket of imams, motorbikes, slamming doors and voices had begun well before this time! I was ready and waiting for my breakfast of banana pancake by about ten to six. The dining room was full of people who were due to leave this morning. I was expecting the bus to arrive at six, but there was no sign of my breakfast by this time. It was finally served and I had just swallowed the last portion of pancake when the bus arrived. Having paid 12,500 Rp for my ticket, I was expecting a large, plush coach, but it was nothing of the sort: it was an ordinary old 'banger' with far too many people squeezed inside. I sat in front beside a very tall and long-legged girl who was half asleep. After a short diversion to the tourist office in the main street, we were off to Kalipucang, from where we would catch the boat to Cilacap.

The bus journey north-eastwards to the village of Kalipucang and its ferry port was uneventful and took about half an hour. We drove through the village's narrow street bordered by tiny shops and thronged with local people in traditional dress, and were dropped at the port just before seven o'clock. I found a WC in a building nearby and, while waiting to use it, spoke to Andrea, one of the two German girls I had met at the party. She spoke English perfectly; I now discovered that she worked in a travel agency. She, her friend Claudia and I boarded the boat together and found seats in the aft along with other European tourists, including Heidi, the Danish girl. Normally I would have joined the local people, but now I was glad to have somebody to talk to.

We were surprised that the boat did not leave at seven, as we had been told; we had to wait until eight before it began its journey along the wide muddy river Ciseel that led south-eastwards towards the sea and the lagoons of Segara Anakan, a stretch of inland sea sheltered by a long island to the south. It was a fine day; the early morning mist soon evaporated and the sun shone from a clear blue sky. As Andrea and I realized that we would see nothing from our seats, we moved to the shade on one side of the boat, where we were in a good position to take photographs. It was very pleasant to avail of the refreshing breeze as we drifted along.

Within a very short time we seemed to be miles away from civilization as we sailed past jungle territory and mangrove swamps, stopping every now and then at little villages. In some of them, the houses were quite traditional and primitive. We saw villages bordering the river, whereas others lay hidden behind a thick tangle of palm and banana trees. It all looked quite fascinating. The local people on the boat were very photogenic and we took quite a number of photographs of them. Some of the girls were very beautiful. There seemed to be an extraordinary diversity of racial types and customs here.

In contrast to the general chaos in most of the places that I had seen so far, I now felt myself enjoying my rustic surroundings.



The River Ciseel, near Kalipucang, and local people on the boat

At one of the villages we saw a military establishment, complete with soldiers and guns. I discovered later that it was a jail for criminals, located on an island.

Andrea and I chatted for a long time, then began to feel tired. As there was nowhere to sit, the boat now being full to its capacity, we swung our legs through the protective railings and sat on a wooden board on the edge, facing inwards. By clinging on to the railings we were able to snooze for a while.

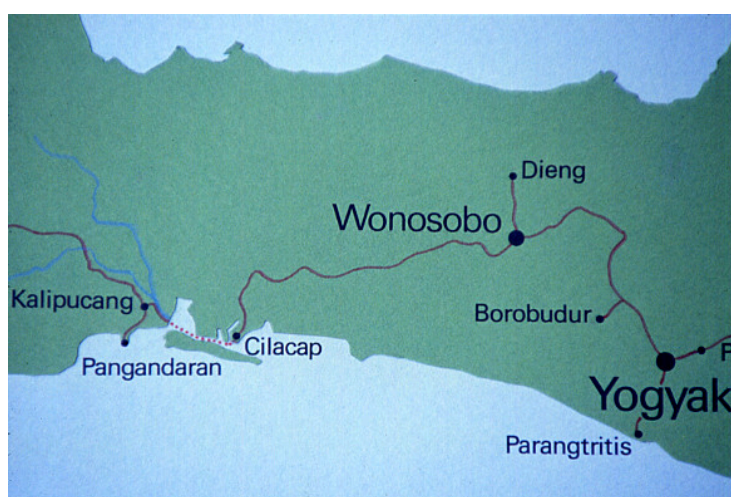
At last the boat entered a wide lagoon, passed an oil refinery (I think!) and docked at the port of Cilacap on the south coast. Our bus, which had driven eastwards on the mainland, north of the river and the lagoons, was there waiting for us. We all returned to our former seats and drove off over a flat, though fine landscape. Conversation with the tall girl beside me revealed that she was Italian, and that she was married to an Indonesian man who was taller than she was. She lived in Yogyakarta with her husband, who was an actor, and she studied medicine. As she spoke Indonesian fluently, she was able to chat to the driver.

On we drove until it started to lash rain. At this point we stopped at a restaurant, where we were able to take shelter, refresh ourselves and have something to eat. As the Italian girl advised me to eat the *nari ranes* (rice mixed with meat and vegetables), I tried it but did not like it. Unfortunately my stomach had started to trouble me again and I was in no mood to eat. I left the dish unfinished and instead bought a packet of salty biscuits and a bottle of water, which I found a little more palatable.

Later we tumbled back into the bus and set off again. I dozed for most of the time, which did not matter as the weather continued to be foul. We drove to a scruffy town (probably Purwokerto), where those going to Wonosobo had to change buses. Andrea, Claudia, a Danish lady and I got off, retrieved our bags and went over to the bus station. We were then joined by a tall fellow. We waited here for a good while, but there was no sign of a bus. Eventually a man who spoke English approached us and invited us to travel in a small minibus. When one with just about enough space in it pulled up, we squeezed inside and headed off eastwards towards Wonosobo.

We now wound up and around some mountains, but the view was rather obscured by the presence of a thick mist that had suddenly descended. It was a crazy journey that was made even crazier when we were joined by a very lively Muslim man who laughed and talked to us with great energy in his own language. Needless to say, we had no idea of what he was saying! He finally got off when we stopped briefly in some obscure village.

On we went; the minibus throbbed noisily at certain speeds and the journey was long and wearying. By now my stomach was beginning to feel very uncomfortable and I knew that I would soon have to relieve myself. Somehow I managed to hang out until we reached Wonosobo, which turned out to be a really dirty town with a most unpleasant atmosphere; the people did not look nice at all. Andrea and Claudia had decided to go on to the Dieng Plateau but the Danish lady, the tall lad and I had had enough of the long and uncomfortable journey. We walked around in search of a losmen, but found them all very seedy and noisy. We worked our way around to the bus station and suddenly I noticed Andrea and Claudia waving at me from a minibus window. I instantly made a decision to leave this dreadful place and jumped on the bus. I settled down for the journey, but the minibus showed no signs of moving. As I now had time to find a loo, I crossed the road to a losmen and asked to use theirs. I emerged feeling a good deal more comfortable.



The minibus quickly filled to bursting point and off we bumped and swayed on our way to the Dieng plateau. As I did not like the look of some of the people on the bus, I kept my eyes on the bags constantly, especially as Andrea kept nodding off. Later, as we

gained altitude and the temperature began to drop, I pulled out my light jacket and a jumper. I gave the jacket to Andrea, who by now was feeling quite cold.

Up and up we climbed, with most of the mountains hidden from view because of the rapid descent of darkness, and finally came to a stop in the little village of Dieng. Directly across the road was a losmen, which Andrea, Claudia and I looked at but, not being satisfied with it, we walked down the road to another one, which looked even worse. We then went to a third place, which was marginally better. The girls decided on a 'standard' room, and I settled on something more modest upstairs, where it was quieter. This I got for just 5,000 Rp.

We had intended to go out for a meal, but as I did not feel like eating much and Claudia was tired, Andrea and I went to a shop next door, where we bought biscuits and water. Back in the losmen we ordered tea, repaired to my little room, and dined on tea and various types of biscuits.

Our evening 'meal' over, we said goodnight and went to bed early, as we would have to get up very early the following morning in order to see the sun rise from the plateau: a spectacle recommended in all the guidebooks.

Wednesday, 4 July

I was woken at about 1.30 a.m. by people talking next door and failed to fall asleep again. Wondering if I was going insane by now, I rose at 3.15 a.m., washed, dressed, and was downstairs with everything packed for departure half an hour later. However, there was no sign of the German girls. I knocked on their door and after a short pause received a sleepy answer. It turned out that they had set their alarm clock to the wrong time!

After chatting briefly to the fellow at the reception desk, who believed that he was going to be our guide, I left and walked briskly to the Bu Jono losmen. There I joined some people who were about to start walking. While waiting, I swallowed a cup of tea. As the guide was anxious to get going, he left with his group, then an Indonesian family kindly offered me a lift in their people carrier. At this point Andrea and Claudia arrived with the guide from our losmen and so we set off with him along the dark streets. Both he and the girls walked at a terrific speed and I found it very difficult to keep up with them in my weakened state; they had to stop from time to time to let me catch up. Several times our guide asked if we could hurry up. The route seemed to be endless. We left the sleepy village, walked for ages along a road, then turned on to a narrow path which we could not see in the dark. At one point I slipped into a pothole.



Sunrise, Dieng plateau

We then began to climb upwards, stumbling on rough stone steps. This was the most difficult part, and I could only tackle it very slowly. We finally reached the top and continued walking along a wide but rough road. We increased our speed and walked as briskly as we could. We were obviously heading for the outer edge of this wide plateau – the remains of an extinct volcano. We could already see the sun beginning to rise. Several times I felt on the verge of collapse, but somehow I managed to keep going. The others climbed up a little hill but, as I was not feeling up to it and had a fine view of the sun and a panorama of misty mountains far below, I stayed put and sat down. I took some photographs and relaxed; soon I began to feel better. The sunrise was quite spectacular and worth coming to see, despite all the effort and discomfort.

Noticing the Javanese family heading down to their people carrier, I shouted to them and asked if I could travel back with them. As they had offered a lift to some other people, they said that I could if there was room. At this point the other group came down from the hill and I squeezed into the vehicle with them. In no time we were back at the Bu Jono losmen. I sat inside, rested and drank a cup of tea. By now cloud had enveloped the plateau and there was a thick mist outside. After a while it cleared and, feeling better by now, I set off on foot for some sightseeing before the German girls and I set off together towards the famous Buddhist temple at Borobudur. However, the Javanese family had offered me a lift to Magelang, a town near the temple.

By now it was a pleasantly warm and sunny morning; it felt wonderful to go walking on my own through such picturesque scenery. The place was very peaceful and, because it was still very early, few people were about. I now intended to visit some of the local Hindu temples, which had been built between the eighth and tenth centuries A.D. According to information that I had read, they were the earliest temples to be built in the region, which had once been a kingdom.



Hindu temple, Dieng plateau

I had not walked far when the people carrier drew up and I was invited to join the Javanese family once again. I hopped on board and was treated to a little tour of all the temples and sights in the locality. We stopped at three sets of small temples and a steaming, sulphurous crater. After I had taken photos of the sights and the family, we returned to the losmen, where I collected my rucksack and returned to the family. We piled back into the vehicle and set off.

The scenery we passed through when driving down from the plateau was very beautiful and dramatic: the best that I had seen so far in Java. As the family (the husband,

his uncle, his wife and four children – three girls and a boy) had been so kind to me, I was reluctant to ask them to stop so that I could take photographs. However, we did stop at one point as the wife wished to buy some potatoes, and I took a few shots. As we drove on, I came over very drowsy and dropped off to sleep for a while, no doubt missing more of the fine scenery.



Mountain scenery near Dieng, en route to Yogyakarta

I came to my senses when we stopped at a smart, clean restaurant for some breakfast. As I was hungry and thirsty, I accepted a small bowl of chicken soup with rice and vegetables; afterwards the husband pressed me to a helping of *ayam goreng* or fried chicken with egg yolk. I produced some photographs of my home and postcards of places in Ireland, and showed them to the family; I gave them a photo of myself and wrote down my address. When the husband (Mr Nugroho) saw my name, he told me that he worked as a gynaecologist in a Catholic-run hospital in Jakarta and that his best friend was a priest named Father Charlie, who was from Ireland.

When we had finished our breakfast, we climbed back into the vehicle and set off once again. This time I sat beside Mr Nugroho's seventy-one-year-old uncle. Overcome with tiredness again, I fell asleep as we drove towards Yogyakarta, Java's cultural capital.

Later, when I woke up, Mr Nugroho mentioned to me that his wife had suggested that I stay with them in their house in Yogyakarta. I thanked them for their kind invitation but refused it, saying that I hoped to be in Borobudur early the following morning in order to visit the great Buddhist temple. Later I realized that I would be missing a unique opportunity of staying in a Javanese home and regretted not having accepted the invitation. Realizing that there was no rush to see the temple, I cautiously returned to the subject in a roundabout fashion and accepted the invitation.

After a long and tedious drive, we finally arrived in the outskirts of Yogyakarta at around lunchtime. We drove into a quiet and rather exclusive housing area and finally stopped outside a nondescript building. Inside, it was luxurious, spacious and pleasantly cool; it was very obvious that these people were well off. I was brought to a spare bedroom and immediately the young people of the household set about tidying and arranging it for me. In the meantime I sat down in the large living room, which opened out on to a small enclosed garden, and sipped tea and an iced drink. I chatted to Mr Nugroho and his uncle, and later had a very welcome shower. We were then called to lunch, which the young people had prepared, and sat down to a tasty meal of satay and rice.



The Nugroho household, Yogyakarta

After lunch I retreated to my room and took a good and much-needed siesta. When I surfaced later, Mr Nugroho asked me if I was ready for a sightseeing tour around Yogya (as the city is normally called). A cover was taken off a large car and the uncle and I got in. Mr Nugroho just drove around the fairly large and well laid out city, pointing out various buildings and so forth. At this hour of the day, everything was closed. Although it looked far less busy and chaotic than Bandung or Bogor, it all seemed to be a rather nondescript and not particularly interesting.

We stopped at a large, high-class hotel to enquire about a *wayang kulit* or shadow puppet play and were told that there would be a performance in a building across the road at 9.30 p.m. We investigated the place and then went to a nearby smart restaurant for a good meal. I ordered a Chinese dish, but the uncle only drank a cup of coffee. Mr Nugroho chatted, joked and laughed, but I felt that it was all a little forced. No doubt it

was caused by a combination of tiredness and the strain of having to speak English for so long.

The meal over, the bill was paid and we drove back to the house; the uncle had looked thoroughly fed up during the meal! I retired to my room in order to write some of my diary and was ready to set off again at nine o'clock.

Mr Nugroho drove me very slowly back into town to see the shadow puppet play. We arrived well on time; the gamelan orchestra was warming up when we entered the small building, which was open on all sides. Soon the *dalang* or puppeteer arrived and set up his puppets. The performance started at 9.30 to an audience of just five people, including us.

Although the puppets tended to be more static than I had imagined, it was fascinating to see this novel form of entertainment. From time to time we watched the action from behind the screen, in the Indonesian manner, which I found far more interesting as we could see the *dalang* in action, selecting the various puppets and animating them. We could also watch the musicians playing the gamelan instruments.

Every now and then the action came to a halt and the *dalang* and musicians began to crack jokes. They all had a great laugh – probably at our expense. Mr Nugroho laughed heartedly and explained one of the jokes, which referred to the number of people in the audience. This light relief helped keep the small audience alert and brought the musicians to life, for they all looked as though they were about to fall asleep from boredom. No doubt they were performing the same music night after night.

This severely truncated *wayang kulit* show, designed for foreign tourists, finished an hour later with a few words of thanks and a 'goodnight' in English. We then left, drove home and went to bed. My host was tired by now; almost everybody else had gone to bed.