

Glamour fades when the writing begins

By CORINNE ABATT
Lots of people think about throwing on a rucksack and traveling the world like a gypsy. Most simply dream. Few make it a reality.

Bill Dalton of Birmingham is one of the few. In seven years of gypsy-style travel, he covered a good part of southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East. And in the process, he developed a successful career as travel writer and publisher.

Now, back in Birmingham, at least for a while, Dalton is still writing and publishing.

The latest edition of his "Indonesia Handbook," is due to be distributed rationally within a month or two. The time is vague because the book is printed in Hong Kong, and thousands are sitting in a carton in the port of New York.

The handbook started as a four-page mimeographed piece which Dalton put together and sold in Australia for 50 cents when he needed money—a constant problem for this type traveler.

AN INVETERATE NOTETAKER,

Dalton had his first, and only, novel rejected when he was a student at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. The disappointment, plus a \$1,000 inheritance from his grandmother, was enough to make him buy a rucksack and start moving.

He said that in 1972, "I took off and never looked back once." The inheritance lasted 18 months, and he ran out of money in Bangkok. From there he hitch hiked to Cambodia where he taught English for seven months to what he describes as "junior echelon executives of companies."

For a while, the finance minister of the country was in the class, which was essentially oral English.

"I loved the country. Cambodia is such an exotic place."

"The war was still on, most of those men are probably dead now, the windows would rattle in the night from the B-52s and the plaster would fall from the ceilings while we had class."

The classes were in Phnom Penh where Dalton said a teacher has the status of a monk—highly respected and revered

"There were five American expatriates teaching there at the time. They would take us with them on their leisure trips, and I saved \$1,300 in seven months."

"But the bombs drove me out—the city was under siege at the time, and I got scared." The major cities of Laos and Thailand, Dalton said, were controlled by the Khmer Rouge, so he left for Java and Bali.

There are lush, green jungles that are breathtakingly beautiful.

"Life was so unique that I stayed for five months in a little fishing village."

With luck and a winning smile, he was able to get a visa for Australia. He ran out of money again in Townsville, Australia, and went to work in a botanical gardens.

It was then that he realized that how many people were asking him questions about Indonesia and encouraging him to write down what he knew.

He compiled and made 800 mimeographed copies of "A Traveler's Notes" and sold them all at a Woodstock-type music festival at Nimbin.

A Sydney printer suggested he put the sheets into booklet form so they could be sold in bookshops, and he did, under the name Moon Publications. He still retains that name.

He was working on a book on the Australian counter-culture, hippies, communes, women's lib and gay lib, when he was asked to leave.

"They have everything down there that we have here, in microcosm. I was a writer, and they were waiting for me to go on the dole."

"The gate went down in Australia in 1973. They really tightened up, and this blew my chance to stay there. I love Australia."

LIKE SO MANY before him, Dalton sensed the great potential of the country.

"For a young man with a lot of energy, everything's ahead there. Native publishing is in its infant stages. The same is true of air-conditioning and steel garages, for instance."

"A young person willing to work very hard for three years could become a wealthy man."

After Australia, it was on to Singapore, New Guinea, Celebes, Borneo and the Moluccas (the Spice Islands).

Although he was in many off-beat corners of the globe, Dalton was never without fellow Americans.

"Americans are so affluent they are everywhere on the earth—even in

the remotest, tiniest islands in the Java sea. There must be 100,000 hardcore American travelers roving around the earth's surface."

Most, he said, range in age from 21-27, and the majority are single men.

He explained the age group.

"You usually have one chance in a

lifetime to travel when you are emotionally free and able to go. A single woman is a rarity—occasionally two women will be traveling together."

Travelers, Dalton said, talk among themselves and exchange tidbits of information on the countries they have visited.



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Bill Dalton finally got tired of the traveler's life after seven years. (Staff photo by Dick Kelley)

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