

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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The Around the World Caravan

Last month's article about Heritage is a great lead in for this month's article about the 1963-64 Around the World Caravan (ATWC), since the 47 WBCCI numbers used on that caravan have been designated as Heritage Numbers. Currently, six Airstreams that participated on the ATWC are owned by WBCCI members and we hope to get at least three of them to the 2018 International Rally in Salem, OR for the largest such gathering in decades. We are also in the initial stages of planning ATWC related activities for Salem, and hope to have some ATWC participants make a visit. All of this makes now the perfect time to review this historic caravan.

The ATWC was Wally Byam's biggest dream. His ever more adventurous caravans were a lead up: Central America in 1951 and 1958, Europe in 1956, and Africa in 1959-60. By the time of the African Caravan, Wally was convinced that roads existed to allow Airstreams to make a trip around the world.

Wally had his cousin, Helen Byam Schwamborn, begin planning the ATWC in 1960 and as he got sicker, he made Airstream Ohio Plant President Andy Charles promise the ATWC would happen, even if he did not live to see it. Sadly, Wally passed away on July 22, 1962, but the ATWC was in good hands.

Helen's contributions to this caravan were huge. She wrote hundreds of letters to embassies and municipalities around the world and she traveled the USA arranging visas for caravanners. She traveled with the Caravan to Singapore finalizing details and setting up caravan committees and then flew ahead of the caravan to a dozen or more cities around the world making arrangements.

Andy and wife Connie Charles went on to lead the ATWC and their children Nick (21) and Christine (17) were the



advance scouts, often traveling ahead of the main group to check the roads and find camping locations, fuel stops, and local markets.

Planning for this caravan included a scouting trip by famous caravanners Oscar and Etta Payne, WBCCI #165. The Paynes extended their trip after the 1959-60 African and 1960 European Caravans and pulled their 16' Airstream Bubble to India and the Far East scouting a route for the ATWC.

Learnings from the African Caravan resulted in better screening for potential ATWC participants. Prospective caravanners had to participate in at least one caravan prior to the ATWC and had to attend orientation meetings where they were evaluated to see if they had the temperament to deal with the difficulties they could expect to face, such as schedule delays, poor roads, broken equipment, constant attention, language and communication difficulties, and

people of differing political and religious beliefs. A series of bulletins advised potential caravanners on a variety of subjects including: money and currency, customs regulations, passports and visas, insurance, inoculations, food and water, clothing, packing, shipping, tow vehicle recommendations, spare parts, cameras, CB and ham radios, and recommended pre-caravan reading.

The pre-trip cost estimate for the caravan was \$10,000 to \$15,000 per couple, not including the purchase of their Airstream and 4-wheel drive truck. All Airstreams had to pass an inspection to make sure they were up to the anticipated rigors of the caravan. Torsion axles were required and three Airstreams had their leaf spring axles converted to torsion axles before the caravan.

In the end, over 200 potentially interested families were whittled down to the 47 families (including 5 staff families) that began the ATWC. The 105 Cara-

vanners from 19 states and 1 Canadian Province included 92 adults ranging from 37 to 72 years old and 13 children and young adults ranging from 1 to 21. The 45 Airstream trailers ranged from two 1959 models to one brand new 1964 model, with most being from 1962 and 1963. Lengths varied from a 16' Bambi to two 30' Sovereigns, with 26' being the most common length. The 4-wheel drive tow vehicles included Fords, Chevys, GMCs and Internationals, with the recommended Ford F250 4x4 pickup making up the majority. The scouts and mechanic traveled in Ford C700 4x4 medium duty trucks with Airstream bodies.



The caravan shipped out of Los Angeles on September 23, 1963, with the caravanners traveling on the S.S. President Cleveland and the trucks and Airstreams on the Hopecrest. The caravanners made stops in Hawaii, Japan, and Hong Kong on their way to Singapore where they waited until their rigs arrived. The overland journey began when they towed their Airstreams out of Singapore on October 24.

This was a very challenging caravan. In Thailand, the roads were sometimes not much more than elephant trails and the mud was deep, often requiring ropes and muscle power to keep the rigs moving.



The rigs had to be shipped around Burma when they were refused entry at the border due to safety concerns. The tight switchbacks leading to Katmandu, Nepal had to be closed to other traffic to allow the caravan to pass.



In many places bridges were primitive and had to be repaired by the caravanners. Countless streams were forded where bridges didn't exist or were unusable. The ferry across Kotor Bay in Yugoslavia left the longer Airstreams hanging precariously over the water.



Trucks and Airstreams broke down frequently and several traffic accidents occurred. One Airstream was totaled by a delivery truck in India, but its hardy owners continued with the caravan camping in the back of their pickup! The mechanic's support truck, including all his tools and spare parts, burned to the ground in a gas station fire in India, but one caravan couple gave their truck and Airstream to the mechanic and flew home. Replacement tools and parts were procured and the caravan continued.

For enduring these hardships, the caravanners were rewarded with a lifetime of adventures. They saw countless ancient ruins, temples, and palaces, including



Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the Taj Mahal in India.

They rode elephants and camels and swam in the Dead Sea. They met Maharajahs and Ambassadors and entertained locals in their Airstreams. They camped amid Roman ruins in Jerash, Jordan and parked in front of the Kremlin in Moscow.



Most families completed the hardest part of the caravan through Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. A few then shipped home early. In August 1964, 34 rigs went behind the Iron Curtain to Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Russia, before continuing to Scandinavia and western Europe.

On October 31, 1964, the ATWC reached its terminus at the furthest west point on the European continent at Cabo Da Roca, Portugal; 403 days after departing Los Angeles and 31,000 miles and 31 countries by trailer after departing Singapore. During the poignant Closing Ceremony on the cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, Caravan Leader Andy Charles put some mixed sand from the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans in the shoes of each caravanner to commemorate their historic journey.



The caravanners then shipped home individually, with some lingering in Europe for up to two years before returning home.

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Pete Turner, African Caravan Photographer Dies

Pete Turner, the world-renowned photographer that accompanied the 1959-60 Cape Town to Cairo Caravan passed away on September 18, 2017 at the age of 83. The African Caravan assignment came early in Pete's photographic career and it is because of his work that Airstream was able to release many publicity photos of the African caravan as well as the Cape Town to Cairo film.

In the 1960s, Pete earned quite a reputation for color photography, delving in abstract photographs and developing ways to manipulate the hue and saturation of color photographs to make them more dramatic. Pete is also well known for having produced the cover photos on many jazz and pop/rock albums from the late 1950s into the early 1970s as well as for many iconic advertising photos.

Pete's work inspired many young people to take up photography as a passion and career, so we can truly say that the African Caravan was photographed by one of the best. Pete was a lifelong friend to Dale "Pee Wee" Schwamborn. He will be missed by many inside and outside the Airstream community. You can see many of Pete's amazing color photos at <http://www.peteturner.com/>.



Pete's Truck on 1959-60 African Caravan
(Pulling Wally's Gold Trailer)



Pete Turner and his photo "Push"



"Rolling Ball" by Pete Turner



"Giraffe" by Pete Turner

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The 1963-64 Around the World Caravan was a journey in the right place at the right time. It couldn't have been run earlier due to a lack of roads nor later due

to political instability in several nations through which it traveled. We can all be thankful, though, that there were some hardy caravanners ready to tackle this

historic journey and thereby inspire us and future generations to get out and see some of this world in our own Airstreams.