

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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The 1959-60 African Caravan Part 2: South Africa and the Rhodesias

We will continue the story of the 1959-60 African Caravan with a country by country review. In this episode we will start as the caravanners ship from the USA and will stay with them as they travel thru South Africa and Southern and Northern Rhodesia.

Union of South Africa

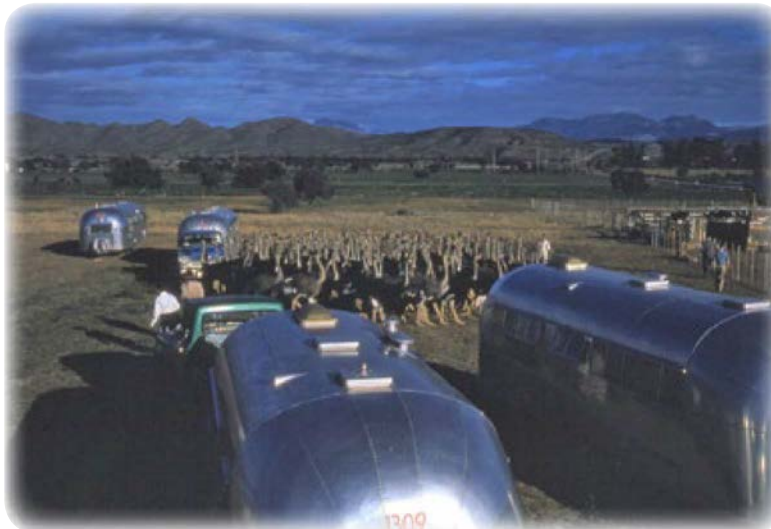
May 26 – August 24, 1959

To get the rigs from the USA to Cape Town, the caravanners used about a dozen ships. The first three rigs shipped out of New York City on May 8, 1959 on the S.S. African Lightning and 18 days later, on May 26, they unloaded in Cape Town, South Africa. These three rigs included Wagon Boss #50 Louis and Mildred Mousley as well as veteran caravanners #598 Joe and Toots Bos and #627 Guy and Louise Hawks. These three couples arranged for caravan campsites in Cape Town and in towns along the route to Jeffrey's Bay, South Africa, 475 miles away. The brand new, custom ordered "African Special" Airstream of Joe and Toots Bos was on its "shakedown" trip as the trio made their way to



Cape Town - Wally Addresses the Caravanners

Jeffrey's Bay and back, when it experienced the first mishap of the caravan – its battery cable shorted. Worse, their truck blew its engine. Good thing they arrived early.



Oudtshoorn - Airstreams at the Highgate Ostrich Farm

By the 1st of July 19 of the 41 rigs had arrived, with many caravanners travelling on the freighters with their rigs. These included Wally and Stella Byam and the scouts Dale Schwamborn and Nick Charles, who arrived on the S.S. African Enterprise. During their time in Cape Town, some caravanners were invited into the homes of local residents where they were surprised by the need to wear their coats. July is winter in South Africa, and most South Africans did not have heat in their homes because "the winter is only four months long".

By July 10, two ships had not yet arrived, so it was decided to split the caravan in two groups to allow one group to meet scheduled commitments while the other group waited for the late arrivals. They would reunite in Durban, South Africa.

The first group departed Cape Town on July 13, 1959, officially beginning the African Caravan. #2345 Mildred Frosch, with her three young daughters, drove out with the first group without Alfred Frosch who was still at home tending to their pickle farm.

Alfred joined the family six weeks later. The second group waited for the remaining rigs to arrive and departed on July 17. Both groups saw most of the same sights on their way to Durban, including the Highgate Ostrich Farm at Oudtshoorn, the Cango Caves, and the Addo Elephant Reserve.

Several receptions and barbecues were held for the caravanners in towns along the way to Durban. This section provided the first towing challenges in the form of mountain grades up to 18% with hairpin turns, though they were at least paved. Their Jeffrey's Bay campsite was right on the ocean, but due to rain the campsite became muddy and required the first use of four-wheel-drive to get out. Twice on their way to Durban, the Bos's trailer sprung water leaks when fittings to one of the two water tanks cracked. The tank and cabinets surrounding it had to be removed twice so the tank could be welded. Their stove also vibrated loose and the caravan had not even gotten to the "bad" roads yet.

By the time the two groups met in Durban, a couple of incidents worth noting had occurred. In the first group, the Wagon Boss, Lou Mousley, had one of the caravan doctors, #2058 Dr. Earl Andrew, look at a sore on his tongue and was immediately rushed to the hospital where it was diagnosed as cancer and cut out. Though Lou could not eat or talk very well, he continued to lead the caravan. In the second group, the Airstream of #2209 Adam and Helen Mackay experienced terrible sway and rolled on its side right in front of Wally Byam. Wally agreed to pay for



Durban - Wally Byam Gets a Zulu Rickshaw Ride at the Campsite

the repairs and the Mackays returned to Cape Town to have the trailer fixed, hoping to rejoin the caravan at Johannesburg. Ultimately, the Mackays stayed with the caravan until Khartoum, Sudan.

On July 24, after 1200 towing miles, the two groups reunited at Durban. Busses took the caravanners to the annual Shembe Festival where several Zulu Warrior groups performed tribal dances. Near Ladysmith, South Africa, they visited Royal Natal National Park, one of their first chances to see a wide variety of African wildlife. Some caravanners made side trips to the British protectorate states of Basutoland (now Lesotho) and Swaziland. At Kimberly, they toured



Johannesburg - Butane Delivery at Campsite

the DeBeers diamond mines and diamond processing mills.

It was becoming much warmer as they arrived in Johannesburg on August 7. The caravanners felt like "creatures in a zoo" as crowds flooded their campsite and continually tried to peer in their trailers. They had to keep the door, windows, and curtains shut, to have any sense of privacy, despite the heat. There they toured the gold mines and saw "gum boot" dances put on by several different tribes

that worked in the mines. Sixteen families took a 3-day side trip to Mozambique, then a province of Portugal, on their way to Kruger National Park.

One of the early highlights of the caravan was an 8-day stay in Kruger National Park for wildlife watching. Special permits were needed to enter with their Airstreams. The caravanners had to remain in their vehicles at all times, except when in the three different fenced compounds where they parked their trailers. The speed limit inside the 211-mile-long park was 25 mph, and they had to be inside the fenced compounds before the gates closed at 6pm each night. One day, #1986 Don and Genevieve Christie had to talk their way out of a fine when they were late getting to a compound, despite speeding, because elephants

had blocked the road for over an hour. Another time, an elephant pushed a tree down across the road and after the elephant moved on Guy Hawks had to get out of this truck and move the log for the caravan to continue to the next compound. Besides elephants, the caravanners saw zebras, giraffes, lions, baboons, hippos, Cape buffalo, impalas, wildebeest, crocodiles, and other exotic animals. At night they

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could hear howls, screams, and roars as they tried to sleep in their Airstreams in the fenced compounds. Though the roads would get worse as they traveled north, flat tires and broken leaf springs were already starting to afflict some rigs inside the park. Leaving the park, the Bos's broke the rear axle on their truck, blocking the road. They had to be winched up a hill to a flat spot where the axle was replaced while a park guard protected them from elephants and lions. On the rough road to the town of Louis Trichardt, the last stop in South Africa, one truck broke its transmission and had to wait several days for repair parts as the caravan pushed ahead.

Southern Rhodesia

August 25 – September 6, 1959

After crossing the border into Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the caravanners spent a couple days exploring the Zimbabwe Ruins that have been dated to between 500 and 700 A.D.



The Christies at the Zimbabwe Ruins

Then they visited the Wankie Game Reserve (now Hwange National Park) for three days and reported seeing even more wild animals than in Kruger National Park.

At Bulawayo, some caravanners, including Joe Bos, went big game hunting and one shot a 350 lb. kudu. The next major attraction was Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River. At over 300 feet high



The Mousleys in Wankie National Park

and over a mile wide, it is significantly bigger than Niagara Falls.



Frosch Family at Victoria Falls

During their three days there, some caravanners, including Toots Bos, booked sightseeing flights over the falls. Others, including Joe Bos and Lee Golden, son of #692 Virgil and Grace Golden, took a boat trip up the Zambezi River to go fishing for barracuda-like Tigerfish. In the city of Livingston, which is located near Victoria Falls, some caravanners went to see the American movie "Peyton Place", a small reminder of home. It was about this point on the caravan that many men started collecting native artifacts such as spears, axes, bows and arrows, masks, and animal skins from natives in villages and along the roads they traveled. This activity would continue until the end of the caravan or for as long as they had space for these items in their truck and Airstream.

Northern Rhodesia

September 6 – 11, 1959

After crossing the Zambezi River into Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) in early September, the roads were surrounded by centuries old termite mounds that sometimes reached 20 or 30 feet high, but wildlife was not frequently seen.



Northern Rhodesia Termite Mound

They passed thru the modern cities of Lusaka and Ndola that were centers for gold, copper, lithium, iron, coal, and bauxite mining. More trailers broke springs on the rough washboard roads. Interior damage like broken water tank connections and appliances and cabinets coming loose from the walls were becoming more common. So much dust got into their trailers during travel days that it took an hour of cleaning to get them inhabitable for eating and sleeping when they reached camp. Those that had dust masks wore them while traveling to make breathing easier. During their last night in Northern Rhodesia in Mufulira, reports came in that the roads in the Belgian Congo would be much worse.

To be continued next month.