

# African Journal

September 6, 1974 Seattle, WA ("Happy Birthday" to me!)

"Let the Journey Begin" I woke up this morning finally feeling like I was going on a long awaited trip – not just any ordinary trip mind you. This was a trip conceived some several months earlier as part of a grand daydream with my friend John. He talked of traveling around the world, starting in Africa. Here I was facing a trip of some undetermined length and not even a bag was packed for my departure today. With a few deliberate motions I rounded up some of the most obvious items of clothing I would need for the Sahara Desert and the tropical rainforests I was about to see in the next few months. As the clothes were stuffed into the huge forest green rucksack I had purchased the week



Stamps in my  
passport for Africa

I would be somewhere between Morocco and Nigeria! But had I thought of everything? And what if I hadn't, how would anyone get in touch with me? Suddenly all of the anxiety of the past three months rushed through my body and I quivered for a moment. My eyes darted to the clock on my desk and the realization that my plane would be departing in less than three hours jolted me back to reality. There was a bag to pack, arrangements to be confirmed, and a final farewell to a few friends.

As the last few precious essentials were stuffed into my bulging green rucksack, a knock on my door startled me. Upon opening the door I found the bright and beautiful face of my friend Marta who had graciously volunteered to take me to the airport. It was a delight to see her and to know someone was going to send me off on my journey to the Dark Continent. We loaded my bag into Marta's Volkswagen and headed for the freeway. The long ride to the airport was broken by the excited questions Marta asked of my plans for the upcoming months in Africa. I did my very best to answer them as specifically as possible, but I had no better realization of what was in store for me than she. I left Seattle aboard an Eastern Airlines flight bound for Chicago where I would pick up a flight to Europe on Icelandic Airlines, the least expensive ticket that was available. Since I had an overnight stay in Chicago

## **October 8 – 10, 1974 (somewhere between Tamanrasset and In-Guezzem)**

*"The Big Breakdown"* We started off from Amsel early in the morning and had a pretty good day having done about 100 miles on rough roads with only one minor mechanical problem. The next day we drove 60 miles and found one of the vehicles had broken a front spring. It took us 3 hours to change the spring assembly. Then we drove on another 10 miles before the old British Army bus suddenly came to a grinding halt, the engine sputtered for a minute and then died. Upon investigating we found that one of the exhaust valves had dropped through the top of the piston, so we had no choice but to tear down the engine and seal off the bad cylinder. But after running a few miles with our makeshift repair it was clear that the old bus would not pull the load over the rough road and soft sand. So we had to pull over and transfer as many people and gear as possible to the other British Army truck in order for them to go ahead to the next town for water. The rest of us prepared to camp for the night with only a limited amount of water left. It was really a feeling of being stranded in the middle of the Sahara and we had no idea of what might happen if the other truck were to break down as well. It could have been a potentially dangerous situation as there was virtually no traffic on the road now. But it turned out to be a beautiful night for camping beneath the stars among some weird rock formations. Everyone became a bit closer because of the experience. The desert has been a tremendous learning experience, both physically and mentally. This breakdown was not only a mechanical one but also a personal one for many people in the group. It was very near a climax point of frustration for some, especially after all of the other mechanical breakdowns, illness and heat stress we have experienced along the way. I feel the stress of the desert to a great degree as well as everyone else I'm sure.

## **October 11 – 12, 1974 In-Guezzem, Algeria**

Once the other truck had returned the next day and was able to tow the old bus to the small village of In-Guezzem, we found the rest of our group had set up a camp on the edge of the village near a well. The small village was 200 miles from nowhere and except for one well there was no food or drink of any kind available. In-Guezzem was basically a refugee center set up for the local Toureg people during the recent drought. To make matters worse, there was virtually no shade, a lot of dust, and a tremendous number of flies. It looked to be a most miserable and wretched place to be I'm sure. Tomorrow four of us are to take off in the truck heading for a town in Niger called Arlit, some 220 miles away where we can send a telex to London for spare parts to repair the engine in the old bus. We'll probably be gone for over a week before we can get the whole group back on the road again. It's going to be a very long time for the people stuck in In-Guezzem I'm afraid.

## **October 14, 1974 Arlit, Niger**

Our small team of 4 people arrived in Arlit after a day of rough driving through roadless desert following the tracks of a 100 truck UN convoy that was hauling grain to remote villages. The town surprised us with its size and to some degree its sophistication. The town has cold beer, gin and tonic, a bank, swimming pool and a small French community where there's even a down to earth "supermarket" for the French ex-patriots living here. Arlit is the center of French uranium mining in Africa so their influence here is unmistakable. The local people in town are very friendly and outgoing. One man has even invited us into his home to use the shower, toilet, and refrigerator which are most



Todra Gorge in eastern Morocco



Children in Figuig, Morocco



Street life in Figuig



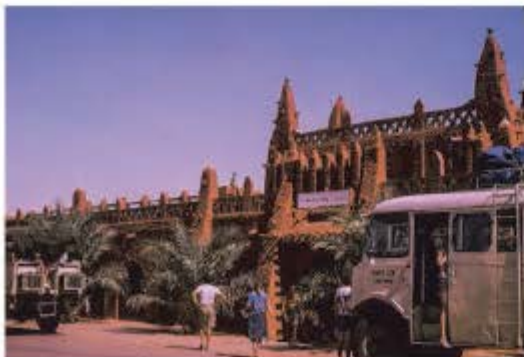
Setting up camp in western Algeria



Remains of old French Army post near Bechar, Algeria



On the road to Ain-Salah, Algeria



Desert resort in Ain-Salah



Arriving at a desert oasis in southern Algeria

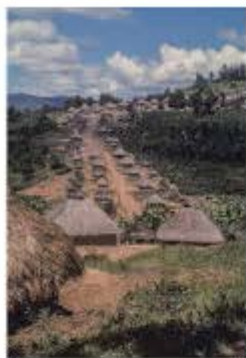
## **December 17 – 20, 1974 Kishumburi, Zaire**

*"The Most Pleasant Breakdown"* Higher and higher we went into the Ruwenzori Mountains, passing beautiful vistas of hazy hills and valleys, winding in and out of grassy fields and tall forests. An incredible variety of scenery awaits us around every curve in the road as we head further south in the bottom half of the world. The Ruwenzori keeps growing upon my memory as a beautiful, peaceful, tranquil world of its own, a veritable kingdom hidden from the rest of Africa and the rest of the world. Our time here seems to pass so pleasantly and at such a quiet pace that when the front wheel falls off the old bus we just take it in the calmness of the moment that has been instilled in us so subtly by the landscape around us. There's very little agitation or anger at our incredibly bad luck, nor confusion about what might happen. We take it all in calmly and begin to set up camp in a field beside the road, literally next to the crippled body of our old bus. As we look around we see a huge field of lush deep green grass, like a plush carpet overlooking a series of hills and a small village. To the west there's a group of old yellow brick buildings on top of a high grassy knoll, with all of the appearances of being an old English farm. It is a most beautiful setting with cows grazing in the pastures below and more hills beyond. A painting of it would have carried the title "A Pastoral Scene" because it was so quiet and peaceful, as well as being in perfect harmony with the surrounding landscape. Throughout the coming few days the light of the sun painted many colors on the farm and its fields, more than any artist could have attempted to do without fear of being repetitious. Nights were the only rivals of the beauty of the days, when the stars were spread from hill to hill across the full length of the black night sky. It was also a time when a cold chill crept upon the land to lay in rest until the next morning when the sun rose to chase it away. There were the inevitable mountain showers which announced the approach of evening with a soft pattering of rain drops on our tent roof. The combination of the chilly night air and the wet land around us combined to give us the impression we were anywhere but just south of the equator. It was a most refreshing feeling of invigoration, like the rush from stepping into an icy mountain stream. The clouds over the mountains were always distinctive, ever changing, and added a great deal to the serenity of the landscape. In all aspects one would have to say this was the "most pleasant breakdown"!

## **December 19, 1974 Nyiragongo Volcano, Zaire**

*"The Long Hard Climb"* Although we were sad to leave our beautiful hillside camp in the heart of the Ruwenzori Mountains, we were fortunate to find a Belgian mechanic who was able to weld our stub axle together and get us back on the road again. A highlight of our short stay by the roadside was the opportunity to buy fresh milk and butter from the Belgian dairy farmer whose beautiful yellow brick farm on the hill overlooked our camp. It was so delicious and incredibly refreshing in these surroundings and seemed so natural, as if it was part of the whole scene.

Gradually we left the high mountains and came upon a geological phenomenon known as the "Kibasha Escarpment" that divides the Ruwenzori from the lake region to the south, which we were now entering. As we dropped over the rim we could survey a magnificent vista of Lake Edward and the Kivu Valley, with Virunga National Park just below us. Slowly we made our way down the narrow, winding dirt road some 4000 feet to the valley floor. Traveling through the park we chanced to see herds of antelope, giraffe, elephant, water buffalo, and a large group of hippos. That night we camped on the short grass plain beside a river and in view of the volcanoes of the Kivu region to the south. I managed to take a dip in the river amid several palm trees and flowering bushes just before dusk. It



A village in the Ruwenzori Mountains



Leaving the Ruwenzori Mountains behind



Belgian dairy farm in the Ruwenzori Mountains



Into the plains of East Africa



King Kong suffers a broken front axle



Entering Serengeti National Park - Tanzania



Camped beside the road in the Ruwenzori Mountains



Sunrise at Ngorongoro Crater - Tanzania

## January 15 – February 4, 1975 Lamu Island, Kenya

*"A Day on Lamu"* A day on Lamu is like a day in a time machine set for the 18<sup>th</sup> century and locked on that era. The town of Lamu is old and weathered in many sections as it stretches out along the sea wall and the main waterfront. Classic old buildings in the Arabic and Indian style give the town a distinctive tropical setting and quaint atmosphere without being false or pretentious. There are very few signs of tourist facilities because most people are residents. The waterfront is a buzz of activity and is comprised of a sea wall, several docks, and a front street of sand where the only traffic is on foot or hoof. (There are no cars on the island) The majority of the activity along the waterfront each day takes place as boats are constantly coming and going, as well as those anchored nearby. Just up the hill from the waterfront is the second main street of Lamu town, a very narrow, cobblestone passageway separating the front doors of the adjacent buildings. As a "street" by most definitions it hardly qualifies, but then there are no motorized vehicles on the island so it only has to serve foot traffic, which it does with a great deal of lively atmosphere. The street is lined with an endless number of small shops, all selling everything from soup to nuts. There are also several small restaurants along the way serving local food and juices, together with small stands and vendors serving specialty foods. It continues to amaze me how all of these little shops manage to stay in business since they all sell the same items at the same prices. But somehow they all do, because one can tell by looking at them that they've been here a long time. The streets of Lamu town are sometimes nothing more than a narrow space between two buildings, just wide enough for two people to pass and often with an open drain along one side. At night it can get quite dark and a bit eerie, I must say. In the center of the town is a small square with a large tree growing in the middle. On one side of the square is a massive stone structure with a tower on each corner and a long flight of steps leading to a huge wooden door. Intricately carved wooden doors are a special attraction of Lamu and they abound throughout the town. But this particular building which is so imposing overlooking the square is home to the local prison. On a daily basis the prisoners are marched out of the building to do manual labor around the town and then back to their cells. It would appear that this daily routine might be planned to impress everyone with the consequences of crime. Every day the streets of Lamu town are bustling with people all engaged in the daily business of buying and selling, which is also a kind of social activity. Groups of men often sit outside small restaurants drinking tea, coffee or juice discussing issues of importance to someone, though I'm never sure who that someone is.

Each day one of our group was likely to come into Lamu town to buy some staples like butter, bread, jam, or tea and we quickly gained a local shopper's knowledge of which shops had the best foods at the cheapest prices. After some time we became familiar faces at some of these shops and began receiving special attention, which also cut down on the amount of time devoted to shopping trips. Soon we discovered a routine for the optimum shopping trip – be at the fish market before 11:00am, shops close at 1:00pm, fresh bread available after 2:00pm, and the New Star Restaurant for the cheapest lunch. I preferred to spend most of my time at our little house or on the beach rather than going into town. Luckily John and Ginny enjoyed the shopping trips so there was not much of a problem in obtaining our food supplies every day. A few days after we arrived some local fishermen stopped by to sell us fresh fish, crab and lobster they had caught that same day. Buying our seafood this way was very inexpensive to say the least. Large crabs cost us about 3 schillings each, lobster for 11 schillings a kilo, and large 20 pounds rock cod or sea bass for 20 – 25 schillings. We ate nothing but seafood the entire time we were in the house. There was everything from crab and lobster omelets



Young Masai boy in Tanzania



Mt Kilimanjaro - Amboseli National Park, Kenya



Ngorongoro Crater National Park - Tanzania



The waterfront - Lamu Island, Kenya



Flamingoes - Ngorongoro Crater National Park



Arab dhows in the harbor on Lamu Island



Sleepy lions - Ngorongoro Crater National Park



Marion with morning tea at our house on Lamu Island