

In the first 5 months of 2001 Frontline Fellowship sent out 5 teams to Sudan, 3 of these drove overland. For an insight into what's involved in these overland missions, Rev Bill Bathman (who is celebrating 50 years in missions this year) wrote this report:

In the last three months I've travelled, preached and witnessed for Christ through 7 countries, crossed the equator 6 times, saw all of Africa's Big 5 animals (Elephant, Lion, Buffalo, Rhino and Leopard), visited Kenya 4 times, used 3 means of transportation (vehicle, boat and aircraft), made 2 mission trips to Sudan and all in the service of the One who said: "Go." He sent, so we went.

To drive the over 7000km to Sudan we had a 4 wheel drive vehicle especially equipped with heavy duty suspension, twin fuel tanks, and a winch and snorkel for fording rivers. The vehicle and trailer was packed with essential supplies for the Frontline mission base and school.

We needed to repair a malfunctioning diff-lock en route and before crossing the border into Zimbabwe we topped up our fuel tanks. We had heard that diesel and petrol were hard to find in Zimbabwe. We were soon to find out just *"how hard."*

This was my second visit to Zimbabwe since it became a communist country. Twenty years have left the country in a desperate state. On my first visit here in 1977, I paid \$1.60 for one Rhodesian dollar. Today, the rate is 100 Zimbabwe dollars for \$1. There are shortages of everything. Diesel fuel and petrol can only be found in larger towns and there are long queues of cars waiting to get to the pump. Many stations in the capital, Harare, had a sign out front, "**No fuel**".

It reminded me of Romania during the Cold War.



"The African Queen III." What should have been a 3 hour ferry ride for Robert and David turned into 12

At the fifth station we tried in Harare we finally found diesel, but they would only sell us 20 litres!

In the days before 'liberation', Rhodesia exported 73% of her agricultural products. It was the breadbasket

We drove down roads such as Samora Machel Avenue (the streets in Harare are named after communis

The Kariba dam is a gigantic engineering project, built by the Rhodesians, to harness the tremendous en

Night driving in Third-world African countries is not recommended for health or longevity. The roads are full of pedestrians, cattle, pot holes and parked or broken-down vehicles with no lights or warning signs. The lights of oncoming cars are seldom properly adjusted and easily blind you. It's almost impossible to over drive your own headlight, but to do so would court disaster. In one section of Lusaka the electricity was out.

After camping outside of Lusaka, I awakened at sunrise to the beautiful sound of birds singing cheerfully in the mahogany trees. In the fresh, early morning air, it was a perfect time to read the Word. I looked up from the Psalms and saw two zebra, grazing casually not fifty feet away. They had not seen me and seemed to share the same peace I was experiencing in the stillness of that silent moment.

This was quite a contrast to our experiences in the city where we were surrounded by swarms of street vendors and beggars pressing in on us from every side.

We then visited a Christian school Frontline Fellowship and ITMI helped establish. I was most impressed with the school campus. They had clearly done an enormous amount of work repairing the buildings and painting the classrooms. Each is named for one of the fruit of the Spirit; "*Love,*" "*Joy,*" "*Peace,*" etc. The Christian Academy had grown to 150 students in just 4 years. I left with the impression that the teachers were dedicated to training a generation of Joshuas.

After our refreshing visit to the school, the going was slow as the road was in a terrible condition with many pot holes. Later we were delighted to turn onto a brand new tar road which had apparently been built by the Canadians. We had the perfectly beautiful road almost to ourselves the whole day, passing no vehicles going north and only a handful coming south. The high price of diesel (\$4.15 a gallon) may have been a contributing factor to the lack of traffic. We also noticed that there were no filling stations along the way. We became concerned when our main tank was empty and we switched to reserve. For over 450km (281 miles) we saw very few signs of life and nothing remotely resembling civilisation.

In the end we needed to leave the road to search for fuel in a nearby village. A passer-by gave us horror stories of how people were cheated by price gouging, and how short the supply of diesel was and how certain unscrupulous characters mixed kerosene with diesel, etc. After long negotiations, an entourage of people appeared bearing a variety of containers which they assured us were full of diesel. As "the searching eye of heaven" disappeared below the horizon we began to prepare for a long, dark and uncertain night driving in the bush.

About that time we reached a tiny village and I saw a man carrying a Bible. We stopped and I asked him if he knew the Lord Jesus. He smiled broadly and said, "*Yes, I am a born again Christian.*" His name was Emmanuel. I asked him where we might find some fuel. He offered to take us to a petrol station

several kilometers off the beaten path.

We pulled into the station only to be told, *"We have no more diesel. This afternoon I put the last 20 litres in a jerry-can and sold it to a man hoping to get a ride south."*

We then walked to the man's house and found the man was willing to sell us the last 20 litres of fuel in the village.

By now it was pitch dark. I started the engine, switched on the lights and almost immediately they went out. Within two minutes my Mag light suddenly quit, giving a whole new reality to the phrase *"darkest Africa."* I pulled out my spare bulb and replaced the burned-out one.

Back to fuse hunting. Hansie swapped several fuses from accessories we could do without, but none of them worked. The problem was more serious than a simple fuse. Emmanuel considered our plight and said, *"Come stay with me tonight."*

We left at 05:25. When Hansie and I went outside we discovered to our delight that Emmanuel had washed our vehicle, including the trailer! What a dear brother! The Lord is so good to provide his angels along the way to smooth our journey.

We reached the Tanzanian border and filled our fuel tanks at the nearest border town. Diesel was much cheaper in Tanzania (\$2.62 a GLN).

Then we spotted a garage! They diagnosed the problem immediately and replaced a circuit breaker and bulb for one of our spotlights. We pressed on, greatly relieved to have lights again.

The road was badly pot holed. Driving was slow and tedious. In the villages there were serious speed bumps that could wipe out the entire suspension system if you hit them at 45 to 50 m.p.h.. Indeed, we saw several cars and trucks along the roadside that had suffered such a fate. You could see the damage done and there was no possibility to repair them, so they were simply abandoned. It would not be long before they were stripped of all usable parts, picked to pieces by vehicular vultures in search of spares.

Our drive north and east took us over a high mountain pass, then down into a vast, rich green valley. We passed through innumerable villages with small adobe huts and tukels with thatched roofs built on both sides of the road.

In the distance, off to the south, we could see the impressive Kipengere Range and the high waterfall near Chimala. Mt. Kirengapanye (7,264 ft.) dominated the serrated profile.

We overnighted at a game reserve. Waking up to the gentle cooing of birds, surrounded by an infinite variety of exotic animals, is a great way to appreciate God's extravagant originality.

As we drove on, we saw baboons, monkeys, wild boar, a hippo and all kinds of exotic birds. Later we connected with a hard surface road that had apparently only had minimal maintenance since colonial days.

Dark gray clouds began to fill the sky warning that a tropical storm was building up ahead of us. There were brief periods of brilliant sunshine but for the most part, low clouds hid a view we had hoped to see - the perpetually snow covered summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro. Reaching over 19,000ft. it is Africa's highest peak.

Skirting Mt. Meru (14,800ft.) we headed north on a road that climbs gradually for 110 km. The Tanzanian-Kenyan border was the shortest crossing of our trip. We were only at the frontier for 55 minutes. While there I conversed with a group of young people driving from Johannesburg to Nairobi. *"How long have you been underway,"* I asked. *"Oh we've made really good time,"* they responded.

"We left Jo-burg 30 days ago."

Imagine the look they gave me when I told them we left Cape Town ten days ago. Not too bad for an old guy with half a heart and a semi-colon.

In Nairobi we were caught in a rainstorm. After more vehicle repairs and practical arrangements we were off. The roads were really rough. Only a few tar strips and lots of pot holes in between.

We crossed the Nile at Owen Falls Dam . The dam confines Lake Victoria, the largest lake in Africa and

We left the tar road (such as it was) at Nakasongola and came straight into the center of the road fully

Incredibly, we had to stop and pay a toll for this road (!) When we reached the Nile ferry crossing point w



Rev. Bill Bathman expounding the Word of God at a Sunday Morning Service in the Fraser Cathedral in

The Nile is probably half a mile wide at this point and flows from east to west. It took us 20+ minutes to cross. There was a lot of deep mud to negotiate on the north side.

From where we stayed that night, the view was spectacular. A gentle evening breeze kept the mosquitoes at bay. By now the splendour of an African night was almost overwhelming. The sky was brilliant with stars like diamonds on a velvet carpet. There was just a sliver of moon hanging precariously on the southern horizon, but just enough to help us discern the Nile winding peacefully through the valley below.

Along the way the next day we saw a herd of elephants, lots of baboons and monkeys and a wide variety of buck ranging from the tiny dik dik to an impala.

The road deteriorated measurably as we went on. Progress was slow. As we cleared Uganda and entered Sudan, a sign on the Sudan side read, *"Drive right."* We laughed. All of East Africa drives on the left and we get to Sudan, where there are virtually no roads, and we're told *"drive right."*

A

"road"

in Sudan is simply two ruts of varying depths, cut through the bush, jungle or veld. If you meet an oncoming vehicle (an unlikely occasion) you must both crawl to the right out of your respective rut and pass, with the oncoming vehicle to your left.

We overtook twice in the next 440km. Once to pass a northbound vehicle that was broken down (not unusual) and in the middle of the ruts. This took some careful 4WD negotiations into and out of a ditch.

We proceeded into the advancing darkness. In the distance we could see leaden skies with pencil flashes of lightning. A storm was approaching. It was, after all, rainy season. Soon it was pouring with rain and the *"road"* was a virtual skating rink.

By the time we drove into the Frontline Fellowship mission base long after midnight we had covered over 7800km (almost 5000 miles) across 7 countries in 15 days.

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you." □ Isaiah 43:2

Rev. Bill Bathman

Related Resources:-

[3 Films on Sudan on 1 DVD](#)
[Faith Under Fire in Sudan](#) □