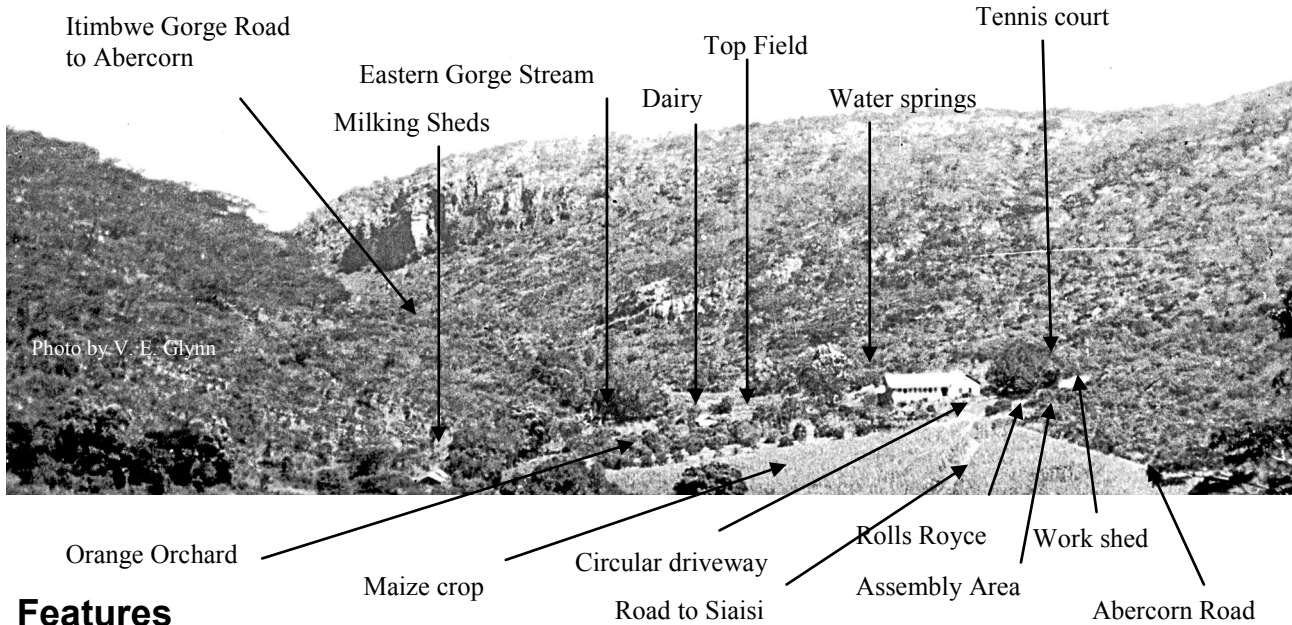


Itimbwe Ranch
mid1949 - mid1951
Part 4
The Farm
Features, Activities, Folks, Felons and Flaws



Features

In the photograph Itimbwe Gorge lies on the left of the picture running roughly North to South with the Ranch house at the southern end. Native worker huts are shown on the left with their gardens in front of them. A zig zag road nearby disappears behind the trees joined the Siaisi road. The corrugated iron roof visible above it belonged to the milking shed. Behind that, the larger trees trace the path of a watercourse around the base of the hill leading from the Gorge. The orange orchard is in the centre of the photo with the maize field in front of it and another smaller field visible behind. This field was bordered by the main watercourse and (on the right of the photo) by the Gorge road and another smaller stream. The road from Abercorn runs through the Gorge, past the house and orchard to join another road to Siaisi and a second route to Abercorn.

The **milking shed** was located a good 80 metres or so away from the dairy but close to the Eastern side Gorge stream for water access.

The **top field** had access to both the Eastern side Gorge stream and another stemming from the smaller springs on the Western side of the gorge.

The **orange orchard** was home to a large fenced chicken enclosure with a substantial brick coop with a metal roof.

The larger of the **two maize cropping areas** was divided by the road running to Siaisi.

The **dairy** shown here half way between the milking sheds and the house.

The little **water spring** that supplied the house was about 40m from the Gorge road.

A disused **tennis court**

The **assembly Area** was a cleared space on the edge of the roundabout in front of the work shed.

The **Rolls Royce** was parked in the grass beside the Assembly area guarding the ploughing and tilling equipment stored between it and the Siaisi road.

Activities

The Itimbwe homestead and its immediate surrounds were the nerve centre of the Ranch. The Farm, as we called it, was essential to the business as a whole. The Siais operation only concerned the cattle herd, so it supplied the milkers. It had its own workforce though these men and sometimes women were also employed on the farm for cropping activities. Their homes and gardens were beside the river at Siais where they were able to supplement their diet by fishing. But the business of the Ranch was food production, both for sale and for home consumption so all of the activities listed here contributed in some way.

Gardening: The farm garden began accidentally it was supposed to be a garden for the family. My mother had always had a garden and this was supposed to produce just enough for us all. However when she saw or how much land she had she began to have other ideas. In the first place she realized that the people working for her would not have time to plant their own gardens. And for many times in the year this also applied to the village women. Thirdly she realised that by employing the ladies from our workforce to take care of the garden she could be confident that there would be no stealing of the produce. Little did she know how successful the garden was going to be. There was certainly enough food produced for us to sell some and share the rest with the workers.

Cropping: Initially this involved grazing off the weed growth using the Siais herd for a few days. Then the oxen were used to plough and then rake the fields. It seemed that the oxen belonged to a union of sorts because at midday they stopped work and lay down. Their drivers on the other hand were keen to complete the work so that they could have their lunches. A standoff usually ensued. The favoured method of persuasion was for a driver to bite the tail of the lead ox. This worked—the animal would rise and being yoked to its partner the other had also to rise—unfortunately in the time this took the lead ox forgot the tail pain and lay down again. The planting and weeding of the crop was done by the women. After the harvest the maize cobs and sunflowers were dried in the sun before being taken to the barn where the women would de-husk the cobs and de-seeded the sunflowers before it was bagged. The women sang as they worked taking turns to lead with the others following in harmony. My mother said it sounded especially good in the barn.

Stock: The cattle were usually kept in the vicinity of the river where the best grazing was. This was also where most of the native workers lived. The herd was diminutive by Australian standards, only 25 to 30 animals, excluding the five or so milkers that were kept at Itimbwe. In addition there was a small herd of about 15 goats.

Also kept with the cattle, when they were not working, were six oxen. In addition to ploughing the fields they dragged this heavy cart (right) and various loads—including people—back and forth between the two parts of the ranch almost every day. These poor creatures certainly earned their keep.

Neil and I treated the ox cart as a hop-on-hop-off bus. Though in our case it was more of a hop-on-leap-off bus. The oxen knew where the scheduled stops were. Unscheduled stops took time to negotiate, first with the driver then with the beasts. More time than small boys ever have to spare. But at the pace the cart moved an exit was undignified but fairly safe.



Photo by V E Glynn

There were three small grey female donkeys. They had a very easy life indeed. Nothing at all was required of them. The larger white male we called Jacky. Only Jacky was capable of being ridden but seldom was. The native herders all loved Jacky because he seemed to know when it was time to move on to fresher pasture or even when to head for home. No one had to call him—though maybe they did—but when he moved off the cattle followed. He was a kind of silent Pied Piper for them. It was a very mysterious thing to see.

Dairy: The farm dairy when usually a high of activity from very early in the morning until about ten o'clock. The cows were milked at daybreak and the milk carried a to it to be separated. Some of the cream was so then spun them until it formed butter. Three products within dispatched to the kitchen area; milk, cream and butter. They would then be loaded on to the waiting bicycles to be transported to town along with eggs and vegetables.

Meals: The kitchen and pantries were the engine room of the farm. My mother seemed to spend most of her day cooking and baking bread.. The pantries were stocked with enough food to last for at least two weeks. This included tinned meat, fish, as well as bags of oats and a flour and of course tea and bags of maize meal for the workers.

Even the animals were keenly aware of my mother's importance to the provision of food. Once we watched an incredible procession. My mother was taking a tray of food over to the work shed. She was followed first by a calf that she was hand rearing, then the dog, Jansen, then the cat, Tom, who was followed by two small black kittens. They all walked in single file in order of their height and separated by similar ranked distances. My mother was completely unaware of what was happening. Jacky wasn't the only Pied Piper on the Ranch.

Hunting: This became an important source of fresh meat at Itimbwe, the bushland was an extension of the Ranch's food resources. On hunt days a party men would assemble in the morning near the work shed and be driven out to a designated area. They often returned empty handed or with an animal carcass to be butchered in the assembly area. Sometimes the butchering was done at the kill site when more than one and antelope had been shot.

Food Distribution: This was done at the Assembly area, a place without markings about half way between the Work Shed and the wreck of an old car referred to as the Rolls Royce. It was where the men were paid and where work was allocated. More importantly it was where food rations and meat from a successful antelope kill was were distributed. I have called it the Assembly area but in fact it had no name we knew of.

Rolls-Royce?



Five features to look for if the reader is in search of the truth. A rolls or a ring-in?

1. Flat roof to cabin
2. Side ventilation panel
3. Fog lights
4. Shape of the mudguard/running board
5. Bonnet mascot

The vehicle seen here (left) may or may not have started life as a Rolls Royce.

A search of the internet looking at what we can see of the front indicates five features that are similar to some early RR models but I haven't been convinced either way yet.

We were told it was and accepted that it was. My father regarded it as a pile of junk because it was no longer serviceable.

Like a decommissioned lighthouse. it became a kind of landmark just the same.



Photo by J.B. McGee

Pre Christmas 1950 share-out

Game Meat Distribution

The leaves in the foreground of the photograph cover parcels of a butchered Sable antelope. The dark object above them is the skin holding the edible entrails of the animal. Beside that are farm grown cabbages. Piles of oranges of differing numbers decorate the grass in front of the paraffin cans mid picture. These hold home made beer—chibuku— recently retrieved from the work shed grease pit where they had been stored to prevent pre-festivities random sampling.

Folks

Worth noting in the photo are some of the small community group dynamics.

The lady seated in front near the bicycle is wearing a hat and fur coat or stole. She appears to have admonished the young woman on her left and received some criticism herself from the girl with her baby on the far right.

The younger women seem to be clustered closer to that side than where madam fur coat is. Near her though stands her husband (most likely) in hat and coat and some older looking women. He is probably the farm foreman.

The man holding the antelope head—far right—could be the man who shot the animal. He has status as do the other men wearing hats. The girl child behind him has none yet. She has probably come to help carry things.

The two ladies with chibuku cans on their heads clearly have priorities when it comes to having a party. They hold hands to maintain balance! Not necessarily a good idea!

The bicycle parked oddly in the way is a status symbol too. Everyone there will know who owns it.

Felons

Animal Thieves

Growing a food crop like maize presented many problems. There were no fences. Every stage of the endeavour seemed to have a niche predator: seeds, seedlings and especially the maturing plants. These were most at risk from two very cunning and determined raiders; baboons and the wild pigs—warthogs.

Two observation towers had been constructed in previous years to try to safeguard the crops. They were mobile and could be placed at either end of maize field or other appropriate position. Two very good native marksmen were employed to watch over the crop for long hours every day the crop was ripening.

This photograph of Terry with our best shooter. On this day he killed three baboons in a single raid by a troop lasting just two or three minutes.



Baboons, when given the chance could wreck havoc in the maize rows. A story was told in those days that their method of raiding involved each adult doing the following:

The first cob to be pulled from the plant would be placed under an arm while going for another.

The second cob would also be placed under the arm so that the monkey could get to the next.

And so it went until the animal came to the end of the row and escaped into the bush... With just two cobs.

Every deposit of a new cob had released the previous one.

A tall tale perhaps but the trail of destruction left by a baboon troop in a maize field must have made it sound true.

Observation Tower



Photo by J. B. McGee

I regret that I have long since forgotten the names of all but one or two people from those days.

The dark shirted man in these two photographs is likely the marksman who killed the antelope in the Christmas Share Out picture.

The male baboons have fearsome canine teeth and the natives were justifiably afraid of them. However it was the warthog that could be the most aggressive and thus dangerous.

This one was killed in the native workers gardens



Photo by J. B. McGee

Cattle Predators

Cattle were also at risk from predators. In daylight hours when the herds were supervised by humans there was less of a threat but it did happen occasionally. The herders had very little to fight a determined attack by wild dogs, leopards, or even lions off with. Normally however the predators had some fear of humans and left them alone. At night, on the other hand, when the stock were in the kraals and the humans in their huts and the lions were hungry the temptation was often too much for them and they gave in to it. This is what happened here (Photo right) with fatal consequences for Leo as can be seen.

The story here was that three nights previously at Siais, our friend above and some of his pride got into a Kraal and killed two female donkeys. A kraal is an enclosure made of cut thorn bushes. They ate part of the carcasses but left when they saw the men arriving with flaming sticks and barking dogs. My father was sent for at daylight. He held an 'indaba' (conference) with the headman and elders when he arrived.

Dad was all for tracking down and killing the lions but for the advice of Kangangari.



Photo by V. E. Glynn

Picture: Terry and Neil Glynn with deceased.

Kangangari was a very old man by African standards of the time. He was tall, very thin, with a withered left arm and bloodshot, rummy eyes who wore nothing but a length of cloth and always carried a long stick but his knowledge and experience were legendary. He pointed out that the lions had tasted their kill and now had the scent of donkey so knew where to find more. He was sure the pride would be back and suggested they build a trap. He described how it could be done and sold my father on the plan immediately. It was similar to the rabbit traps he and his cousin set in Ireland when he was a boy on holiday with his mother's family farm.

They built a lean-to tent of thorn bush on the kraal wall with a short lead-in tunnel big and long enough to accommodate a large lion. The donkey remains were placed in the tent 'room' opposite but away from the tunnel entrance. A loop of thin wire was placed on a stick support circling the entrance to the room. The end of this was connected to the trigger of a gun mounted on poles so that the muzzle pointed downward to the middle of the entrance. The lion pushing through the last bit of the tunnel would put his or her head into the noose and by moving forward tighten the string on the trigger, shooting itself in the back of the neck. That is exactly what happened.

Flaws

There were deep flaws in the idyllic picture painted in the mind's eye of what it was like to live in the bush in the middle of Africa over sixty years ago. I'm sure there are even now problems that test the endurance of humans. Things that must be managed by the individual on a daily basis for the sake of themselves and their families. As children we were mercifully unaware of the work put into making our lives as pleasant and carefree as it was. Here are just some of the problems my parents faced.

Mosquitoes

Malaria, a disease caused by the bite of a female mosquito, was well known when living in the rural areas; and indeed some of the urban areas as well. Mosquitoes breed in the wetter part of year but my family arrived on the ranch in the dry season in the cold months of 1949. The temperature rose from July to the heat of October. Everyone welcomed the cooling showers of November without recognizing the threat that the rain also brought.

Some time in early December my mother came down with a very serious strain of malaria and had to be taken to hospital in Abercorn. Mosquito nets had been ordered from the store in town but they had not arrived before the mosquitoes did. In the distress caused by my mother's illness nothing was done to protect my brother and I. Soon after Mum recovered we became sick almost simultaneously just before Christmas 1949. There was no Santa that year.

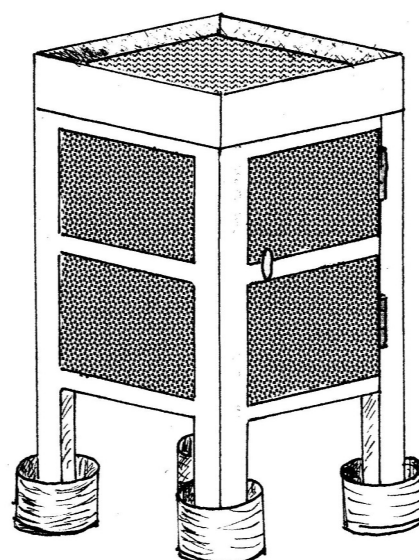
The weapon used against mosquitoes fleas, ticks, cockroaches, flies, wasps and any other six legged foe known to man in those times was DDT which was sold as a powder. Mixed with water it could be sprayed with a barrel hand pump spray. This insecticide is still used in many countries of the world today as an anti malarial measure. However it creates environmental problems which has led to the development of alternatives and the banning of the product in some countries.

DDT was sprayed on all the internal walls of the house. However the windows of Itimbwe had no fly screens attached so at night the use of mosquito nets above the beds was the only real protection against the insects. On the hot humid nights sleeping under a net is a trial.

Ants

Ants were another creature capable of making life very difficult. Swarms of little red ants just four or 5 mm long could appear from nowhere very quickly around the carcass or blood or meat on the ground. They were ferocious and inflicted painful bites. Red ants rarely came into the house, perhaps because of the DDT, but the feet of the meatsafe were placed in cans of oil to deter them just the same.

A meatsafe was a special cupboard designed to both keep food cool and stored safely away from hungry animals and insects. The sides of the cupboard were covered with steel mesh so that air could flow through it. The mesh was often covered by canvas or a second layer of mesh with the cavity between packed with charcoal. The canvas or charcoal was kept moist to encourage evaporation by a slow leaking water tray on top of the cupboard.



The humble Meatsafe

Food storage without refrigeration or access to ice presented a larger problem for my mother than she had anticipated. In Luanshya there were few refrigerators so soon after World War II but there had been a daily delivery of ice. She was pleasantly surprised by the efficiency of the Ranch meat safe with its charcoal filled walls .

Bats

Bats were a problem for my mother at Itimbwe. It was something she learned to live with though. At certain times of the year large numbers of small bats took up residence in the ceilings of the veranda. They streamed out of one or two gaps between the roof and wall of the veranda at a regular time in the early evening every day for about three weeks. Then as suddenly and silently as they had come they left. We never discovered if they were fruit or insect eaters. During the day we saw nothing of the creatures, not even when they returned from their nocturnal foraging, so apart from the odour close to their migration time they were something we learned to live with. Blocking the holes was on dad's 'to do' list of course.

Mum's aversion to the little bats was due to a firm belief that bats couldn't resist getting tangled in a woman's hair. Apparently this was a well-known fact. A woman's hair is a bat magnet!

Mice

Mice were another problem largely in the mind for Mum too. Tom, the cat, saw to it that no mouse survived a visit to the house as a whole, the kitchen, pantries or courtyard areas in particular.

Neil and I caught a little field mouse however one day in the barn. The little mite was no bigger than a twenty cent coin and so perfect in every exquisite detail that we couldn't wait to show it to our mother. Imagine her surprise when we rushed into the kitchen bursting to get her attention. Both of us, hands behind our backs, begged her to guess what we had or who had it. She was wary because we had caught her before with a giant dung beetle and a locust. When she had run out of guesses and given up Neil produced our prize, the diminutive grey field mouse. Now imagine our surprise at the transformation in our mother. This we had never seen before. Her laughing face became one of absolute horror.

She pointed at the door and yelled "Get that thing out of my kitchen ... now!"

Needless to say Tom was given the run of the barn that afternoon and any other time he was seen loitering outside the barn door in the future. Cats are more than pets on a farm.

Swallows

Swallows were another unlikely source of some worry for my mother. They came with the onset of the rains and fed on the 'flying ants' (termites). We all enjoyed watching their aerial acrobatics from the veranda in the evenings as they swooped and soared above us catching their meals on the wing.

In 1949 mum allowed the birds to build their nests high up on the veranda ceiling/dining room wall joins. We watched daily as the little dabs of clay the swallows brought grew into igloo shaped mud brick houses. The downside of this process was the mess that had to be constantly cleaned from the floor and walls. This increased when the eggs hatched and the mother swallows took to dumping the nest poo out their igloos. More and more time had to be given to the house servants to clean the veranda. The last straw for mum came when a hatchling fell out of the nest and was scooped up by Tom and taken away to be consoled.

There were no swallows allowed to nest in the ranch house in 1950.

Misadventure

Accidents and worse happen everywhere but on a farm where resources to deal with them the sense of inadequacy is keenly felt. There were three deaths on Itimbwe during our tenure.

The first was a young woman from the Lake who contracted an unknown disease and died at Siaisi. My parents had to supervise her burial and the burning of her hut and mpsha' (belongings). The second was our house servant. A young man my mother was convinced had been poisoned for favouring his wife's relatives in the 'butter milk' distribution. The third was near the end of our period at Itimbwe.

A little boy about my age was sleeping in a hut at Siaisi when it was hit by lightning. The child was very badly burned. The father and grandfather and a few other men wrapped him in a blanket and took it in turns to cycle with him on the crossbar to the Ranch House. The others running ahead with torches. I remember the boy's face in the lamplight when they arrived. His eyes were staring as though he was trying to understand what he was seeing but his teeth were chattering. Dad got him to town but he died long before he could get any medical help.