

**Itimbwe Ranch
Zambia
mid 1949 - mid 1951
Scrapbook**

**Terence J. Glynn
2015**

Itimbwe Ranch

mid1949 - mid1951

Foreword

When a parent dies, a book in the library of life closes; forever. All the questions you never knew you needed to ask you never will.

This 'scrapbook' is designed to explore some of the questions I never asked and speculates upon what I might have discovered had I done so. The photographs here have helped me to refresh many old memories. I see in them now threads in the fabric of so many lives that my age then hid from me.

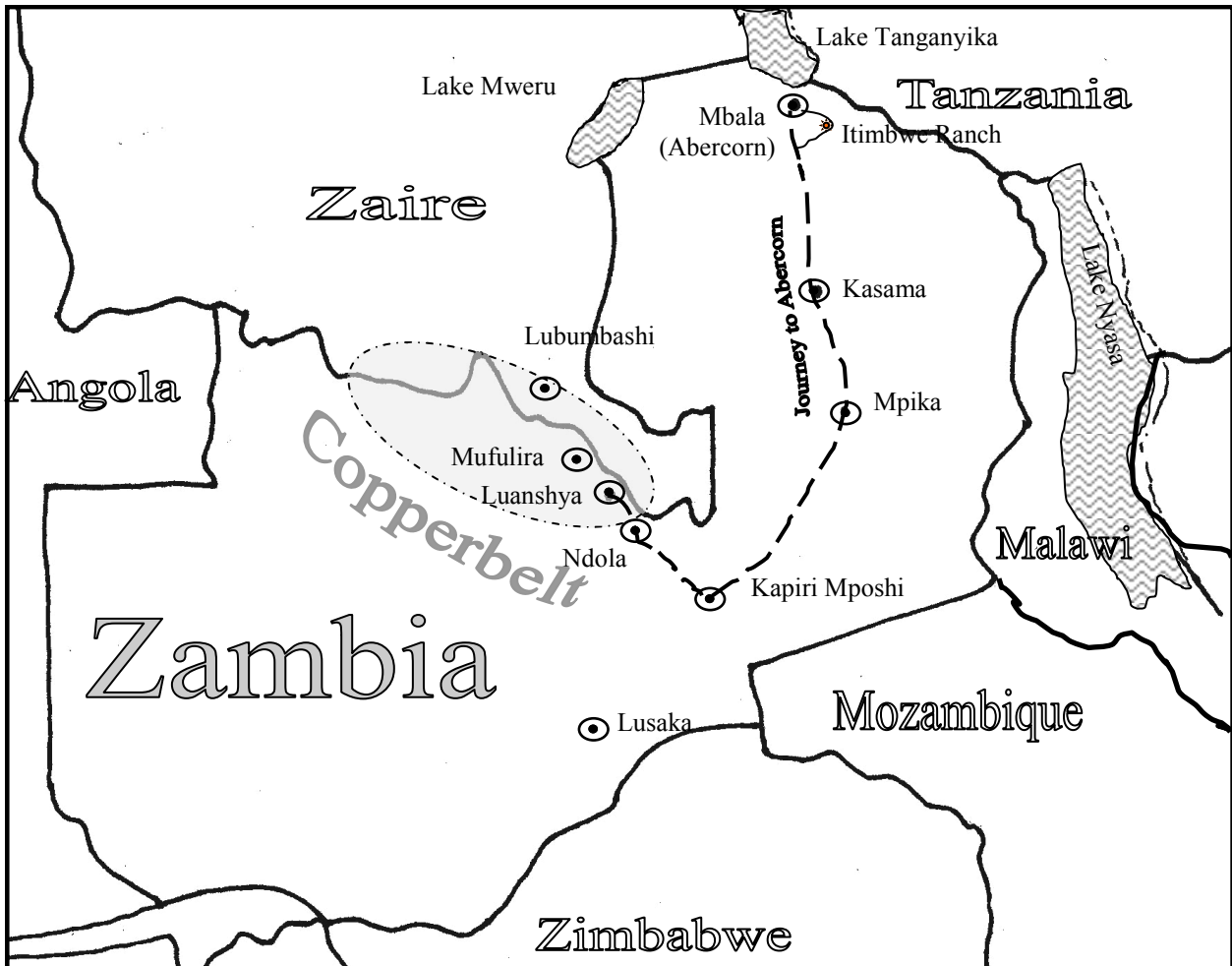
This work is a bare bones outline of the period from mid 1949 to mid 1951 at a cattle ranch in the north of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). I have by-passed the bulk of the treasure chest of stories from the period in favour of a more general presentation of their setting.

There are five parts in the presentation. The first—the Introduction—describes the decision my parents made to begin a new venture. Then the three day journey to Abercorn to a place we loved from the start. The second describes the house we were to live in at Itimbwe. The third could be omitted by anyone not interested in how the house was created and why the position was so critical to its success. Part four provides a glimpse of what life was like at the ranch in what I call the African Outback. The last part is devoted to some footnotes and follow-ups to the earlier pages and skims the last few months of our Itimbwe experience.

Thanks in the preparation of the text is due to my brother Neil and sister-in-law Joanne. The trip they made to Mbala in 2004 supplied not only confirmation of the demise of Itimbwe Ranch but photographs of what the area looked like at the beginning of the 21st Century. I am also grateful for the work of my proof reader Lorraine Neil and to Colin Carlin for posting this piece on the Abercornucopia website.

Terence J Glynn
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Itimbwe Ranch mid1949 - mid1951 Part 1



By Terence J. Glynn
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Introduction

In the north of what was once Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, close to the southern end of Lake Tanganyika and tucked away in the hilly area that marks the junction of the eastern and western arms of the African Rift valley lies a little town, once called Abercorn, now Mbala. And nearby was once Itimbwe Ranch, a cattle property of some 10,000 acres, situated about 37 kilometres from the town. Part of it was on river flats beside the Siais River. The other was on the fringe of the hills overlooking the river valley at the foot of a narrow gorge, which gave its name to the property, Itimbwe Gorge.

The house and the enterprise that were Itimbwe Ranch in 1950 no longer exist. This is account of a small part of its history. It covers roughly the two years from mid 1949 to 1951 when my family lived there. When my brother and his wife visited the place in 2004 they found only ruins where the house had been, grass and bushland had reclaimed the rest.

This Account

My project to record the time my family and the McGees spent on Itimbwe was obviously written many decades after the event. It has been put together over a period of years and put aside often when life got in the way. I no longer have any excuses or time left not to complete the work. I have used my own memories and some subsequent life experiences to patch this account together but in addition made use of input from my parents, some personal building experience, photographs from the period and those more recent of my brother and sister - in - law Joanne Glynn.

The most reliable information came from my parents. They came, in 1978, to retire in the town where I live and so were able to flesh out and add to many of the stories I had tucked away from the Itimbwe days.

When I built an investment building here in Port Macquarie (Australia) in 1980 I became very interested in the complexity of the project. I marvelled at how much more difficult the task a large building in the bush in Northern Rhodesia must have been just ten or so years after WW1.

The best resource we have covering our time on Itimbwe Ranch is of course the shared photographs of the two families. I am especially grateful my mother kept the negatives of many of the ones she took. These lasted well in the subsequent years my parents lived in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) but have not fared so in the more humid conditions here. A project to rescue them had to be abandoned some years ago so some are not useable now but I enough remain for this task.

The Deal

In January 1949, my father grandfather Matthew Glynn passed away in Glasgow. Perhaps as a reaction to that event, Joseph (Joe) and mother Veronica (Ron) Glynn, responded to an advertisement in a newspaper and subsequently signed a 10 year lease to run Itimbwe Ranch. Dad was an electrician and at that time was earning good money working night shift underground at Luanshya mine on the Copper Belt of Northern Rhodesia. It was hot dangerous work and the lure of exchanging it for daylight and the open air seemed too good to pass up.

In early May my mother also lost her father. Mum was a full time mother to my brother and me but was a trained nursing sister and midwife. She too was also ready for a change of scene and a new challenge.

Neither of them had any experience of farming or living in the 'bush' for that matter. They were both 33 in that year. I was six years old and my brother Neil, just five.

Jimmy and Mary McGee, Mum's sister, were at that stage winding up their affairs in Ireland in preparation for a move back to Africa. They accepted an invitation to come up to Itimbwe when they did with the view to a partnership in the ranch.



Photo : Luanshya
Terry and Neil posing in
new clothes with less-
than-toothy grins

Their daughters, Patricia, was six and Roisin, was four.

Departure

Preparations began immediately for our journey. My parents considered themselves fortunate in having two of the wardrobe travel trunks and assorted suitcases available from our recent six month overseas trip. Some new clothes were bought especially for my brother and I. Note the pith helmets, new canvas shoes, socks, khaki shirts and shorts (with pockets!) and best of all new elastic belts with 'snake and hook' buckles in the photograph.

Other preparations made seem now a bit bizarre. For example both of us had all our teeth removed.

The journey from Luanshya to Abercorn took three days. On the first day we went from Luanshya to Ndola by private car and from there to Mpika by Thatcher and Hobson bus. We spent the night at the Mkushi River Rest house.

The next day was a long one. We continued along the great north road to Kasama. There was no bridge over the Chambisi River at that stage so the bus, our belongings and passengers were all eventually ferried across on a pontoon powered by a team of chanting men.

That night we were accommodated in the Thatcher and Hobson guesthouse at Kasama.

The final day brought us into Abercorn and a home for the next week or



Photo by VE Glynn

Photo: Terry and Neil having lunch while waiting to board the ferry at Chambisi River. Porter in the background carrying load to the ferry.



Photo by JP Glynn

Photo: (above) Last day of the journey, (L to R) Neil, Ron and Terry Glynn at Abercorn.

so at the Abercorn Arms hotel. It seemed that all was not ready yet for our move into Itimbwe ranch house. We used the time to enjoy a holiday in the little town.

Lake Chila at Abercorn was a wonderful place for us to swim and for my parents a great distraction from the turmoil they anticipated up ahead.



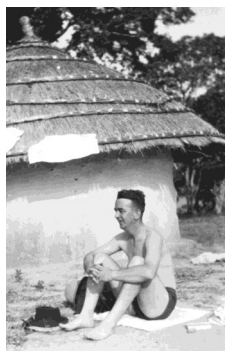
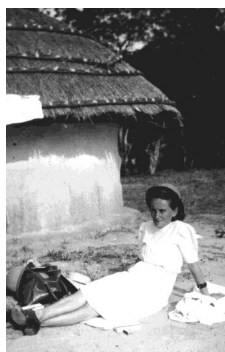
Photo: Lake Chila Abercorn

Ron, Neil and Terry with Scotty dogs, the little girl from the Hotel and a lady guest also at the hotel with us. Picture by the husband of lady in right of picture— name unknown using my mother's camera.

An excursion was also organized for us to visit Mpulungu on lake Tanganyika just a short drive from Abercorn. So two exciting days were spent there.

Nevertheless my mother never stopped thinking about where we were destined to go to and opened an account for us with the town store. She also checked out the medical, educational and church facilities in Abercorn.

Dad left us for a few days to return to Kasama. He managed to buy a second hand Chevrolet vanette—vintage unknown—with a custom made a canvas cover for the back tray. In addition he was able to engage a young African driver, Benjamin, who had been in service with the army in Burma in and after world war two. He spoke some English and knew the local Bemba dialect. The man was prepared to move to Itimbwe with his young family.



The Glynn family moved on to Itimbwe Ranch in June of 1949. Jimmy and Mary McGee joined us in July 1950 with their two daughters Patricia and Roisin.



Photograph by V. E. Glynn

This is a photograph of Itimbwe Ranch taken in 1950 from the hillside opposite the homestead.



Photograph by J. B. McGee

Joe Glynn in front of the Ranch House.

Photo: The Chevrolet Vanette with (L to R) Roisin McGee, Ron, Neil, Terry and Joe Glynn taken about July 1950



Picture Above:
The Glynn's welcoming their first guest to Itimbwe in the prized vanette. Roisin McGee was called Aunt Roisin by the children. She was the sister of Jimmy McGee and a huge favourite of all of us.



Photograph: Glynn and McGee families on the steps of the house

Back (behind the pillar):
Roisin and Mary McGee
Standing (assisted):
Jansen

Seated top:
Joe Glynn and unknown person (vet?)

Seated middle:
Jimmy McGee

Seated front:
Patricia McGee, Ron Glynn, Terry Glynn, Neil Glynn



Intrepid Explorers

Neil and Terry in khaki uniform reporting for duty in our new home.

This picture was taken by Mum on one of our exploration walks with her in the first week or two of our arrival at Itimbwe.

The canvas shoes (we called 'tackies') lasted longer than one might imagine largely because we preferred going barefooted.

Economics of the Ranch

From an economic point of view the value of the cattle as income was nonexistent. The herd was not large enough to sacrifice any animals to send to market; even if that were possible. The nearest market of any size was the Copperbelt with its string of mining towns and that was far away. Live transport was expensive and given the poor roads not really an option. Refrigeration was not yet available in 1949.

Within a few months it was apparent to my parents that the Itimbwe Gorge area of the ranch was the only potential source of revenue and so it was. Unfortunately it was also clear that it would, at best, only ever be marginal. Again it was all about availability of markets. We came to call this part of the property "The Farm" and by the end of 1950 it was producing milk, cream and butter as well as eggs and vegetables and selling well into Abercorn.

Unfortunately the 'credit' system of payment customary in that part of the world at the time gave the buyer 30 days to pay. The workers were also paid monthly. Late payments from customers meant my parents were constantly using their own capital to pay the men. Sadly the town market was never large enough to generate enough cash to solve that problem.

The maize and sunflower crops were good in 1950 but not great. Adding to the disappointment in the case of the maize was the fact that my father had to give most of it away to the nearby native village. The people there had been persuaded to eat all their livestock and food because the end of the world had been prophesied six weeks earlier and had, for some mysterious reason, failed to eventuate.

Jimmy McGee was a businessman by profession although he was an enormously skilled handyman, very good with machines and woodwork especially. He was able to do a number of things Dad just simply had not had the time or skill to do. It was Jimmy that got the town trade into a systematic 'order and delivery' business as well as build reliable bicycle carriers that balanced the loads for the men doing deliveries. With his help by September 1950 my parents were able to analyse the financial prospects of the Ranch.

The 'stock take' confirmed what was expected. It was clear that there was no prospect of supporting one family let alone two on Itimbwe for the foreseeable future. They were both beginning to realise my brother and I needed education facilities that Abercorn was unlikely to provide and boarding school fees for us could never be paid for out of the revenues generated by Itimbwe.

Mary was due to give birth in November so it was decided that the McGees should move into Abercorn. This they did and converted the old decommissioned European hospital into a weekday boarding house for the out-of-town schoolchildren



Photograph by J. B. McGee

Picture : Weekday Boarding House 1950 The former Abercorn European Hospital converted to provide weekday accommodation for the out-of-town school children. Run by Mary and Jimmy McGee for the last few months of the year.

Ron Glynn spent the Christmas period of 1949 in the corner room (behind first tree from the left) with bad case of malaria. So she might have been one of the last patients in the old hospital.

Leaving Itimbwe

Our tenure on the Itimbwe lease came to an unexpected but welcome premature end.

Much to the relief of my parents Mr Gliemann informed them in writing some time in the last months of the year (1950) that he wished to terminate the agreement by midyear 1951. My parents and the McGees had already decided that staying put was not an option. The reality was that Itimbwe would probably never be a viable economic proposition without a great many changes to the Ranch, the district and the country as a whole. All of which required capital and time. With young families they could not afford to gamble away their remaining resources or wait for what might never come.

Jimmy McGee left Abercorn alone in January 1951 to look for work on the Copperbelt. He found a good job on the mine at Mufulira with a mid year start. He, Mary, the girls and baby Bernard left Abercorn in April. We left soon after them. Dad found a Government job in Lusaka and also took a share in a brick making factory with an old friend. Eventually, for much the same reasons for leaving Itimbwe, he too went to Mufulira. There the two families were re-united and my sister Geraldine was born on the 18th of March 1952.