

Africa - and BUST..!

By ALLAN TOWNSING
as told to POST staff writer
VAUGHAN MAWBEY

★ IF A girl travels unaccompanied across the primitive backlands of Africa, local men will often consider her "fair game" for their satisfaction. That fact has given me a few anxious moments as I have led adventure expeditions across the Dark Continent.

Like the time I had 18 young men and women aboard, and we were crossing the border of Algeria into a neighboring State.

Out there, in the middle of the Sahara Desert, the immigration officer was the only authority for hundreds of miles — virtually a king in his domain.

★ DRIVEN by Australian Allan Townsing, a safari truck is ferried across a river in Tanzania.

ship of the Professional Divers' Association of Australia, and without that he could not work as a diver.

Rather than do the whole course again he took whatever jobs he could find from truck driving and painting and decorating to running his own business.

That shared the fate of many small businesses during the recent economic slump and he is working now as a delivery van operator.

Months after he left the UK he found he had won a university scholarship. By then it was too late to accept, and his one regret is that youthful impatience cost him the chance to graduate as a marine scientist.

His interest in sharks began when at the age of nine, he spent the first of several holidays at Lands End, England, and watched the Atlantic mako being fished commercially.

He spends up to four hours a night on study and research and many weekends on underwater observation and gathering specimens.

He conducted a nine-month research program on crinoids (feather starfish) for the Marine Aquarium Research Institute of Australia and has had recognition and assistance from the CSIRO and leading U.S. marine scientist Prof. Perry W. Gilbert. Prof. Gilbert is professor of neurobiology and behavior at Cornell University and director of Mote Marine Laboratory.

Mote has made Jim an active

member of its research panel and the International Oceanographic Foundation in the U.S. has elected him a fellow for "contributions to the advancement and extension of knowledge and discovery in oceanography and the marine sciences."

For a year he has been preparing a textbook on sharks.

At the request of Mote and the Smithsonian Institute in the U.S. Jim also is collecting information for the international shark attack file and has started on an international index of sharks so they can be readily identified anywhere in the world.

Jim has a small, poorly-equipped laboratory in a spare bedroom, a third share in an expensive microscope and a similar share in a boat he uses for collecting specimens.

He has three small tanks for keeping the specimens which he studies and returns to the places where he found them.

Jenni willingly shares their duplex with moray eels, stingrays and scorpion fish.

She even has a fish tank in her kitchen and once moved her hand just in time to escape an eel's vicious cusps (teeth) when it sprang out of the water at feeding time.

As the first step towards making his hobby his career Jim needs money to build shark-size holding tanks and equip a laboratory.

To achieve this, he is prepared to take a 50-50 gamble on his life.



★ For last the two-and-a-half years, Allan Townsing, 27, has been driving the adventure trail in Africa and South America. This former bank-clerk now works as a driver-leader on safari-type expeditions organised by a London-based company, Encounter Overland. The firm uses four-wheel drive trucks to ferry parties of adventurous men and girls across Africa, Asia and South America. Allan is back in Australia to organise a film-making expedition down the jungle rivers of South America. Here, Allan recalls some of his experiences on the longest and roughest of the overland routes — the 20,000 km safari to Johannesburg!

★ ABOVE: On the track, passengers must pull their weight when it's time for chores. And, if bogged in the Sahara Desert, they have to P-U-S-H!

★ BELOW: On a remote plain in the Sudan, deep in Africa's interior, these overland adventurers attracted the attention of curious local natives.

This official pounced on a minor change which had been made on the passport of an attractive German girl, and refused to allow her to travel on.

He ordered me and the rest of the group to drive on, while the girl stayed back, alone, for "investigation." Not knowing what would become of her, we couldn't accept this, and so spent the rest of the day "camped" around the door of his office, keeping an eye on the girl.

Luckily, by day's end, the official had realised that the girl was not going to be left by herself, and so agreed to let us take her.

At another of the desert border posts, we knew it was no use arriving in the morning, because the guards would always refuse to clear us till we had stayed overnight — simply so that the girls would be available for a party.

Of course the soldiers were lonely, and would want the girls to go off with them. I would have to speak up on their behalf — despite the big, ugly guns they carried.

But, as you soon learn in the out-back of Africa, diplomacy and tact are essentials of survival.

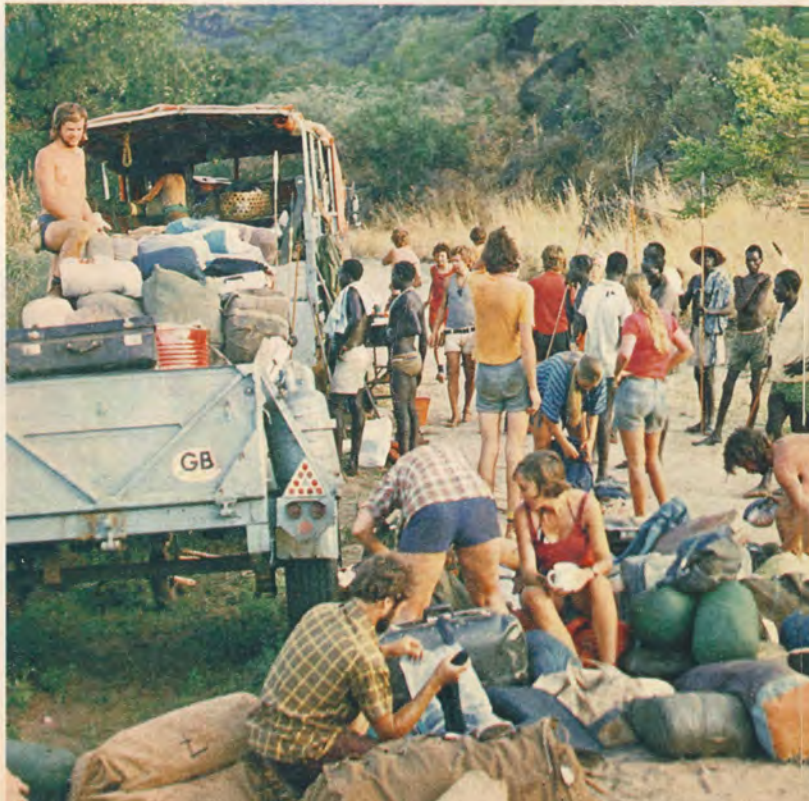
For 18 months I drove on what some people have described as "the longest regular bus run in the world" — 22,500 km (14,000 miles) overland from London to South Africa.

But we don't use buses — they'd never make it. Instead we travel in sturdy, four-wheel-drive army trucks, over routes which include 10,000 km of barely-maintained track.

The company which organises the journeys, Encounter Overland, of London, describes and plans each journey as an "expedition," and that's not being melodramatic.

Each overland journey — London to Johannesburg, or the

continued overleaf



'I'LL FACE KILLER SHARK!'

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aggressive tiger sharks, up to 16 ft. long, while diving around the Great Barrier Reef.

He would be prepared to feed one of these or an oceanic white tip shark which lives in deep water beyond the continental shelf, and which he considers as dangerous as the great white.

He says his stunt would have no resemblance to previous offers by resubmers to fight a great white shark in a controlled environment, using explosive spearheads.

"I want to feed, not kill, the shark and I won't use one numbed by captivity," he said.

"I have worked out my technique which would include using fresh, not chemical, food and a gadget which would give me a good grip on it."

That is all he is prepared to say about his method at present.

In the past year Jim has handled 6 ft. whaler sharks on the Barrier Reef.

His last contact with a great white was near Devil's Island, off Coogee Beach, Sydney.

"I did not see her approach but felt a bump in my ribs and turned to see about 9 ft. of great white above me," he said. "I gave her an elbow jolt in the snout which hurt me but not her."

"However, it did the trick and she turned and swam away slowly."

"If she had been hungry she would have killed me."



★ THESE scars were inflicted by a white pointer off SA. Jim will risk similar attack.

"Even the slight bump left me with two cracked ribs."

"It is possible the shark I attempted to feed may go for me instead of the food but I think I can make the bait tempting enough to keep him interested in that alone."

"The biggest problem I could face in an uncontrolled environment is the arrival of more sharks and the development of a feeding frenzy."

Jim represented England as a schoolboy swimmer and at 15 was chosen by the Royal Navy for a divers' training course including underwater demolition and sabotage.

In 1961, aged 17 and sick of the UK climate, he migrated to Australia.

He found his English training did not qualify him for member-



★ THIS young man, on one of Allan's overland expeditions, met pygmy villagers in the Central African Empire.

★ LEFT: Luckily, Allan is a handy bush mechanic. He's had a few knotty problems on safari.

nine-to-five marriage, and exposed hidden cracks in the relationship.

One man — outwardly even-tempered — even came to blows with his wife, and had to be pulled off by other passengers.

"Fresh" meat from village markets is usually fly-blown and smelly, so we generally find it safer to buy

live goats and slaughter them by the roadside.

Because of this, we had a run-in with another Sahara Desert official — this time the police sergeant in the Niger outpost of Agadez.

In this mud brick village you're in the middle of the sun-scorched territory of the Taureg desert nomads.

There, the 20th century is something that whizzes by on the wheels of passing strangers, and, in the main street, camels are more common than cars. But, no sooner had we arrived, than the



sergeant "booked" me — for making a "U" turn.

Then three of our party bought a goat from a local man, who butchered it for them on the spot. Up panted the sergeant, arrested my three men, and clapped them in jail, charged with slaughtering an animal without written permission of the Health Department.

It did no good to argue that the only Health Department office within 1000 km had been closed four months ago. The only way to get my people released was to shell out for bail.

In local currency, the bail was

8000 CFA's (\$40); the sergeant confiscated our goat, which had cost \$20, and my U-turn fine of the morning had been 4000 CFA's (\$20). They don't issue receipts out there and — as the next day was the Muslim festival of Ramadan — I suspected I was buying someone a generous supply of party drinks.

But if you don't pay, you stay in the cells till the circuit judge arrives for trial — and that could be a three-month wait.

When you're out on your own, on the road to Johannesburg, there's another thing you learn quickly — the fine art of compromise.

Africa — and BUST . . ! continued

return from South Africa to London — takes four months through rain forest and desert, flies, mosquitoes, and plagues of dysentery.

You won't find a garage on every street corner, so for large parts of the journey travellers must be completely self-sufficient.

Each truck and its accompanying trailer carry plenty of spare parts, and preserved food.

Travellers who join these expeditions have to be — or should be — more than mere passengers, a different breed from the usual run of pampered world tourists.

We camp out most nights, and everyone takes turns at the chores. Each member is expected to pull his — or her — weight, cooking, washing up, digging rubbish pits, standing guard, interpreting, or running the "bar" which we set up in a tent.

Probably the most arduous job is that of mechanic's offside. Because in the Sahara and Central Africa the driver and a helper must spend up to two hours a day on repairs and protective maintenance of the vehicle.

Almost inevitably there is some part that needs to be repaired or replaced from the spares kit. Once, in the Cameroons, the crown wheel of the back differential broke up, and we had to drive 600 km on the front diff.

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before we could get parts air-freighted from London.

When the wheels bog, members help to dig and push the truck out. When we venture over sandy or swampy track, teams of two have the exhausting task of running forward with "sand mats" which are laid in front of the wheels as a kind of "instant road."

If we come to a broken or washed out bridge, there's the shared task of felling a tree across the creek and flattening the top as a makeshift crossing.

Of course, when 18 strangers, from half a dozen nationalities, are thrown together 24 hours of the day for four months, the big question is how they will react to one another. It really makes little sense to try to keep up a barrier of reserve, because by journey's end other passengers will know just about everything there is to know about you.

Some couples who have met on the expedition trail have later walked down the aisle to make it a permanent match. In fact, I'm friendly with one such couple in London.

But for some married couples, the safari trail has led straight to the divorce court. Life on the track, where there are no showers to wash off the dust, and nowhere to go for a night out, has produced strains which are not present in a

This drug can banish stage-fright...

★ DOCTORS have discovered that a drug used to treat blood pressure will also cure ... stage fright.

MEDICAL REPORT
from Shirley Gott
in London

The drug, Oxprenolol, was tested by a team led by Dr Ian James, at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, London.

Dr James said: "It is one of a group known as beta blockers, and has been widely used for about 10 years to treat high blood pressure and angina.

"Doctors noticed that patients became much calmer on these drugs.

"We wondered if they might help professional musicians, actors, sportsmen — and others whose livelihood can be threatened by stage fright.

"Centre court nerves at Wimbledon is a classic example of this problem. Until now, sedative drugs, tranquilisers and alcohol have been used to counteract stage fright.

"But often they lead to further deterioration in performance because they cause drowsiness and impair concentration.

"The beauty of Oxprenolol is it makes the patient calmer, not sleepy or middle-headed. It is also non-addictive."

To test the drug thoroughly, Dr James's team hired the Wigmore Hall for two recitals by 24 young musicians chosen from leading London music colleges.

"Making a debut at Wigmore Hall," he said, "is widely regarded as a testing experience.

"But, as well as an audience of music lovers, we invited two top professors from the London College of Music to judge each musician's performance, plus Press and TV.

"An hour and a half before the first recital, some were given Ox-

prenolol and some got dummy tablets.

"For the second recital, those who had swallowed dummy tablets the first time were given the drug, and vice versa.

"When we studied the judges' marks, we found those on the dummy tablets whose first performance had been ruined by nerves improved dramatically on Oxprenolol at the second."

Dr James, who plays the viola with the Cambridge Symphony Orchestra, said: "I do not advocate any frivolous use of the drug. Any performer or sportsman who wants to try it must see his own doctor first."



★ AUSTRALIA's new opening batsman Rick Darling is a chronic sufferer from pre-match nerves — but this didn't stop him hitting up half centuries in both innings of his maiden test against the Indians this summer.