

CARDIFF TOUR OF SOUTH AFRICA

A large crowd saw us depart by coach from the Cardiff Club at 9 o'clock on the morning of the 3rd May, 1967, and after lunching at the Bacon Arms, Newbury, we boarded our plane - a Boeing 707 - at Heath Row Airport and left promptly at 5.15 p.m. in rather cold wintry conditions. I should mention that our Teddy Bear Mascot, nick-named SIONI, dressed in the Club Colours, was already becoming the most popular member of the party. As the plane with its engines screaming surged forward for the "take off", the boys started to clap their hands and chant the Beatles number "This could be the last time.."etc. They did this every time we took off and every time we landed they burst into applause, which definitely relieved any tension there may have been among the passengers.

We climbed six miles over the Atlantic and headed South. Five hours later we nosed down through the tropical night to land on the tiny Portuguese Island of Sal for re-fuelling. Three-quarters of an hour later after some refreshments, we took off again on one of the longest single stage flights in the world, from Sal to Johannesburg. This hop was the toughest part of the journey. Dr. Naysmith's sleeping pills were a help to some, but for others the night was exhausting. It did not help either when we flew over Windhoek at 33,000 ft. at 6.30 in the morning and knew that we would have to spend the rest of the day getting back there. We liked it even less when we learned later that Boeing 707's land at Windhoek twice a week. We flew a thousand miles on to Johannesburg and landed at 8.15 in the morning.

We had a very good reception here and it was observed that each member of the party had made every effort to look spick and span - white shirts, Club tie, blazer and grey flannels being the order of dress. We went into the Airport Lounge where we were met by Dr. Danie Craven and members of the South African Rugby Board. There we met our liaison officer, Mr. Frohnmann, a former Springbok forward from Port Elizabeth, who became known to everyone as "Fronny." We also met our internal travel supervisor, Mr. "Stoney" Steenkampf, a representative from the S.A. Railways.

After a few speeches, we boarded a Viscount and started the long trail back to Windhoek, via Bloemfontein and Kimberley. It was not until we left Kimberley that we began to realize just how vast and barren so much of Africa is. We flew over the famous diamond hole a few seconds after take-off, the largest man-made hole in the world, from which 23 tons of diamonds have been dug, and headed for the Kalahari Desert. The landscape below consisted of unending parallel lines of red sand dunes, dotted with sparse scrub and we wondered how stock fatterd when the vegetation was so sparse - but apparently it does. Every now and then we saw a vast white circle of dried salt, known as a pan, where the seasonal waters of a lake had been evaporated by the sun.

We arrived at Windhoek in the heat of the afternoon and were greeted by the local representatives of the South West Africa Rugby Union. During our stay here, we were invited by the Administrator and his Wife, Mr. & Mrs. du Plessis, to take morning tea with them in their beautiful home and gardens. They were charming hosts and we sang a few songs to them on request. We had the usual receptions by the Mayor and were introduced to many officials and personalities in the area.

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Training was arranged and at the first training session which lasted approx. 2 hrs., the Coach, Roy Bish, put the playing strength through a very exacting programme in intense heat and at a high altitude, which quite understandably affected our players and had a big effect on the way they approached the game against South West Africa.

May is the dry season in S.W. Africa. It had rained only once in that month in the last 30 years but in answer to our prayers it poured for two hours before the match. We drew 11 all and all were a little disappointed. The local pack was big and strong, but we should have won fairly easily, missing two wonderful chances of 'killing them off' when we were leading 11-3. Phil. Morgan dropped a goal, Maurice Richards scored a try and Ray Cheney besides kicking the ball vast distances, kicked a penalty goal and a conversion.

Early Sunday morning, 7th May, we left for Upington by Charter plane. The aircraft this time was a Dakota and in view of the weight aboard all were very relieved when we eventually took to the air successfully. Upington is a small but very wealthy farming community on the high sloping banks of the great Orange River and as soon as we arrived on another blazing hot morning we were met by Mr. Jack Horn, President of the North West Cape Union, a bank manager by profession, who was also the Mayor and by such unforgettable characters as Doc. Visser and George Young.

After settling down and having lunch some of us were whisked away to the Augrabies Falls, 85 miles away, whilst the players who were being rested from the next match were taken by private aircraft up country into the Kalahari Games Reserve on a hunting trip. It was not my good fortune to go with them but from what they told me, they will remember that experience long after everything else has faded. They landed on a dirt road, three hundred miles from anywhere, camped out over-night and enjoyed barbecue steaks, etc. At the crack of dawn, they were off armed with rifles and both Billy Hullin and Rees Stephens shot a buck.

After training the next morning, the rest of the party moved off by bus to join the hunting expedition in the Games Reserve. We arrived there late afternoon after travelling approximately 230 miles along a desert road and a dried up bed of a river. Before night fall, we went into the Reserve to see some Bushmen, who were in their traditional dress or undress to greet us. We bought souvenirs, bows and lethal looking arrows which these people use for hunting and then in the desert dusk we watched these little people do their tribal dances. We spent the rest of the evening around a huge fire enjoying a barbecue which they call a braiface. The food was delicious and G. Edwards managed to eat 12 steaks.

We rose before dawn the next day and drove into the Games Reserve. We followed the dried up bed of a river and saw many of the wild animals like springbok, gemsbok, wildebeest, hyenas, etc. and to our immense delight a pride of lions which had just partaken of one of the animals they had just killed.

We returned after lunch and after travelling approximately 5-6 hours, we arrived back in Upington a little tired but, nevertheless, very impressed by our visit. A couple of the more fortunate members were flown back by the Doc, an amazing character who flies himself on trips of 200-300 miles, landing on the road or the veldt to see his patients, as casually as you or I would walk up to the "Royal." He arranged for some of us to play golf with him and if you have had no experience of golf in the desert, then I can assure you that it bears no resemblance to the game you know. There's no grass anywhere, you tee off on a black of concrete with a strip of sand in the middle and you hit the ball on to an area of scrub covered gravel. If your caddies have good eyesight, you eventually arrive on a green - or more correctly, a black circle consisting of fine sand mixed with oil. Before putting, the natives roll out a smooth strip between your ball and the hole with a smoothing iron and then you proceed to putt: 9 holes of this was enough.

We played everyone against North West Cape who had not already had a game. The ground was hard and the weather hot and although we won 23 pts.-12 pts., only in the last ten minutes did we really get on top, thanks largely to Ray Cheney who contributed 14 pts., tries being scored by Keri Jones and Gareth Edwards with Gary Samuel dropping a goal.

I think the friends we met in Upington were the firmest we made anywhere in South Africa and the hospitality unbelievably generous. A few of them, including Wilhelm Barnard, a former Springbok who toured this country, flew to Pretoria to see our last match.

We left Upington by Dakota again to fly 300 miles to Kimberley to meet the Boeing going down to Port Elizabeth arriving mid-day. We were received by the usual Reception Committee and then the Assistant Manager, Capt. and Vice-Capt, Mr. H. Johnson and myself were taken straight away to a Rotary Luncheon and after the usual type of lunch, had the misfortune to listen to a Col. of the Police talking on the "Growth of the Police Force." We were entertained to a reception at the City Hall that evening, but otherwise enjoyed more freedom than we had had up to date.

From the Press, it had appeared that we had now played the two easiest games in South Africa and that from now on we could expect much stiffer opposition and that we had little chance against Eastern Province who had beaten the British Lions on many occasions. Training was emphasized and temperance observed by all selected players. Beside the normal training, the boys enjoyed exercises on the beach followed by a swim. This helped them to relax a little. It was good to be back at sea level and in more familiar surroundings and one could sense an air of quiet confidence. The boys were in good spirits and there was a sense of unity on the short coach trip to the Ground which produced the best singing of the Tour.

The players did not bother to watch the earlier matches which are a part of every afternoon's football in South Africa. We had chosen our strongest available team and they went straight into the dressing room to concentrate on the job in hand. Then they came out and destroyed Eastern Province. It was magnificent football, particularly in the first half when we scored 29 points - the like of which I have never seen. Not a pass went astray as we confused the defence with rapid switches of direction. This was a team win, but all credit is due to Maurice Richards

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for his part in this win of 34 pts.-9, who personally scored 19 pts. made up of 3 tries and 5 conversions. The local people were full of praise for our performance, because we had played the most appealing Rugby and this was the type of game they wanted to see in South Africa.

The following morning, Sunday, 14th May, we left for Cape Town and apart from the usual reception, we were also greeted by a contingent of Welsh exiles, one of the women dressed in the Welsh National Costume. The next day we had a training session on the soft grass at Newlands and then went on for lunch at the Rhodes Fruit Farm just outside Cape Town, where we were entertained by the Managing Director, Mr. Manning and his charming Wife. We were all tremendously impressed with this beautiful home, situated in a spot where the high peaks of mountains tower behind you and in front stretch some wonderful orchards for miles and miles, whilst in the distance beyond stood the Table Mountain. The weather was perfect and here again we enjoyed the usual barbecue before going on to Stellenbosch University where a demonstration had been arranged for us by Dr. Danie Craven and his students. We were impressed by the amount of training which was taking place where the fields stretched for miles in a most beautiful setting. The training was hard and reminded some of us of the battle course or Commando type of training during our War service.

We had tea with the University Officials and then went on for a sing-song with the students before returning to our Hotel for Dinner.

The next day we had lunch with the Prime Minister, Mr. John Voster, at Parliament House. The South African Parliament is a faithful replica of the British way of governing and their house is very similar to the House of Commons. Mr. Voster came out to be photographed with us on the steps outside the building and then entertained us to lunch. He was quite charming, an easy conversationalist and a former Rugby player himself.

Whilst at Cape Town, Mr. H. Johnson had permission from the South African Rugby Board and relatives of the late Col. Frank Mellish to place a wreath of flowers on the chair he formerly occupied at the Newlands Ground and also to spread some of his ashes in a corner of the pitch which, from thereon, would be called "Frank's Corner." I had the pleasure to assist him in this small ceremony. That evening we were entertained by the S.A. Board where I had the privilege of presenting to them, through D. Craven, a Plaque of this Club.

The game the next afternoon was a great disappointment to us all, because it was one we should never have lost. Some blatant infringements in the front of the line-out by the University went un-noticed by the Referee and this added to the deterioration of the game in the first 20 minutes. We were 11 pts. down before we regained our balance and only sheer bad luck and some faulty handling at the final moment prevented us scoring and winning the game. We lost 14 pts-11 pts., the match finishing 3 minutes early. M. Richards and W. Hullin scored our tries, Gareth Edwards kicked a penalty and Maurice converted one try. D. Craven described the last 20 minutes of the game as the best Rugby he had ever seen in his life!

We left Cape Town on Thursday, 18th May, at the unearthly hour of 6 o'clock in the morning - it was hardly worth going to bed!

All this travelling and early departures had some bearing on our disappointing display against Northern Transvaal. We arrived at Johannesburg to be greeted by the usual officials and taken to Union Hotel, Pretoria, after having a look at the famous Ellis Park. We lunched with the Mayor at a beautiful Country Club just outside the City and were presented with mementoes of our visit by his charming Wife.

In the match against N. Transvaal we scored a very good try by M. Richards early on - - he had a most impressive tour - - Ray Cheney converted and our tails were up. Then for some unaccountable reason we started making mistakes. Instead of touching the ball down in goal, we opened up, failed to find touch and on two occasions, this led to a drop goal and a try against us. The Referee made some decisions which baffled our team and I think this frustration at the end of an exhausting tour explained our eventual collapse.

We left Pretoria at 8.30 Sunday morning in order to see some Bantu tribal dances just outside Johannesburg which, however, were a little disappointing. The open-air Theatre in which they do their dancing is like a small bull ring and I suggest the best act of the morning was John O'Shea and Billy Thomas doing a bull-fighting act.

We lunched at the famous and fabulous Wanderers Club where some speeches were made as usual. We were all impressed by Mr. Charles Fortune, the S. African Radio Commentator, who emphasized the fact that we had done a wonderful job in South Africa, but the most emotional moment was when Billy Thomas, in a very moving speech, spoke so highly of the Cardiff Club and how much it had meant to him and how much it should mean to everyone who wore its famous colours.

We left the Wanderers Club and journeyed to Jan Smuts Airport where we were joined by the Scottish Borderers Team on completion of their tour. After farewell speeches from Managers and Captains of both sides and from D. Craven we left reluctantly but, nevertheless, pleased because we were going home at 6.45 p.m. Sunday, 21st May. We touched down at Nairobi and Frankfurt before arriving in London 8.30 a.m. on Monday, 22nd May.

We caught the 11 a.m. Pull/^{man}train from Paddington and arrived in Cardiff 1.20 p.m. after lunch on the train and were soon enjoying a pint of old "H.B."

I would like to thank again all the people who helped to make this tour so enjoyable:

- 1) Tom Holley for doing a wonderful job in looking after our kit and baggage.
- 2) Roy Bish who had kept the boys hard at it and ensuring their fitness on the field.
- 3) Dr. Naysmith for carrying out his daily rounds.
- 4) Hubert Johnson for his help and advice.

It was a great pleasure to have with us a grand bunch of supporters and I would like to thank them for their generosity to our players.

Finally, on behalf of Haydn and myself, may I say again to the players how extremely grateful we were for your excellent behaviour, presentation and conduct throughout the tour. This Club of ours is very proud of you.