

Travels with King Kong: Overland across Africa

James Henderson

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Like a travel blog, but written back in the 1970s, James Henderson's *Travels with King Kong: Overland across Africa* evokes a simpler time in a simpler place. From the depths of poverty and the discomfort of heat, flies, and dysentery to the glories of a sunset seen from the top of Mount Kilimanjaro and nights spent under vast star-filled skies, Henderson's journey not only marked him forever but also led him to the woman who would be his wife.

Henderson's descriptions of little-known parts of Africa bring to life the warmth, curiosity, pride, and endurance of the African people he met along the way, from the drivers and bush mechanics who somehow managed to keep "King Kong," their lumbering, smoke-spewing, decrepit British Army bus, moving, to the guides, families, and friends of all nationalities who brought comfort and color to the journey. Africa is a land of extremes, and the travelers encounter landscapes that range from desert to lush jungle to mountains. Extreme also are the differences in how they are received by the locals: many are warmly accepting and others merely curious, but a few, still harboring resentment over their experience of colonialism, threaten with rocks and knives.

Henderson details his travels without skimping on the discomforts, and the joys, he and the other travelers endured. Searing heat, thirst, the lack of sanitary facilities, and the dangers posed by unsafe vehicles transiting unpaved and often muddy roads all play against the pleasures of swimming naked in the sea, sailing with native fishermen, and lounging on a sun-bathed island. His chronicle is generally well written, though there are occasional errors in grammar and word usage. The cover art, a map marking Henderson's route across Africa, is not only attractive but also helpful in visually tracing the journey. The back cover matter, which is minimal, could be improved by adding more details as to the content of the book, as well as a brief bio and photo of the author. The visual element could be given more attention throughout the book; rather than the occasional page of small photographs, larger photos placed in appropriate locations throughout the text would not only highlight the places, people, and events being described, but would also enhance readability by helping to break up the text, which currently is presented on wide pages with no relief for the eyes.

Seattle native James Henderson has traveled to more than one hundred countries. He holds a PhD in satellite image analysis and has worked for the US Fish and Wildlife Service and for the world's leading computer mapping software company. Now semiretired, he continues to enjoy his passion for travel and photography.

KRISTINE MORRIS (June 4, 2015)

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