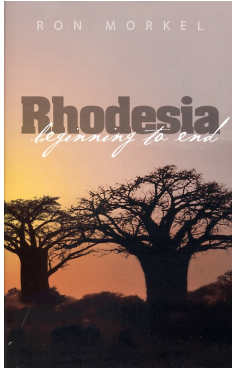


Rhodesia. Beginning to End

Ron Morkel



Ron Morkel, who now lives in North Carolina USA, has documented the history of three generations of his family in Rhodesia. His grandfather, Arthur Loreht Rubidge Morkel, arrived at Fort Salisbury in 1891 when Cecil John Rhodes was establishing the Colony. Ron fought Mugabe's terrorists until it was time to leave in 1978. His book (1), published in 2010, is basically about the family, but it is also the story of Rhodesia, from beginning to end. I have condensed and extracted the stories of this branch of the Morkel family from his book. It can be obtained from amazon.com, bookdepository.com and other online booksellers.

André T. Morkel. April 2014.

Part 1.

Arthur Loreht (2) Rubidge Morkel

1871 - 1937. (1, p27 – 103)

Ron Morkel could draw on Arthur's extensive memoirs of his remarkable life.

Childhood

Arthur was born in Graaff Reinet on May 14, 1871 to Peter Morkel and Sarah Rubidge. Sarah was the granddaughter of Commander Robert Rubidge, an officer in the British Royal Navy during the Napoleonic wars whom Britain awarded land in the colonies for his valiant service. He came out to Albany district near Graaff Reinet with the 1820 British settlers.



Arthur Morkel (1, p25)

At the time of the Great Trek, Peter Morkel's family moved from the Cape to the Eastern Cape. Peter was by all accounts an enterprising man who followed impulsive 'get rich' ideas that never seemed to work out. Peter and Sarah eventually had seven children, two of whom died in infancy.

Peter took his family all over the country from one failed venture to the other. In some he did succeed to make money, only to lose on the next. He tried diamond mining in Kimberley and cotton farming in Grahamstown. He finally landed a paying job as *Landdrost* (magistrate) in the Zoutpansberg in the north of the Transvaal Republic.

His wife and children suffered in the process of frequent moves, lack of money and had to put up with Peter's ill temper and constant drinking. By now Sarah had had enough and left Zoutpansberg with her children on the long journey back to the Cape. They travelled by

mule wagon back to Pretoria and with other wagons further south. Their money ran out and Arthur, then twelve years old, got a job packing tobacco to help out. They eventually reached Colesberg where Sarah stayed with family while Arthur took the train to Graaff Reinet where he stayed with an uncle, Walter Murray. Sarah's extended family of Rubidges, Southneys and Murrays repeatedly provided refuge on their farms for her and the children.

While remaining loyal to his father, Arthur remembered his relatives from his mother's side with fondness and deep appreciation. His cousin Graham Southey, a few years older than Arthur, became a friend for life and related his experiences at St Andrew's College in Grahamstown. It became a tradition within Arthur's family to send their sons to St Andrews. Graham also took Arthur hunting for small game and introduced him to guns and coping in the bush. Uncle Walter Murray had wonderful stories of hunting in the hinterland and initiated Arthur into bush craft, such as reading the spoors of lion and other animals. Above all, these relatives provided not only shelter but warmth and love. Arthur naturally came to identify much more with his mother's side of the family and the British in South Africa than with the Morkels and the Afrikaners and Boers.

Arthur was sent to the Southey family in Ceres in the Western Cape. He went by mule wagon from the farm of George Southey to Nelspoort and then by train to the closest siding to Ceres, about ten miles away through the mountains. From there he walked to Ceres and was warmly greeted by his grandmother. All his life he fondly remembered his time at Ceres and the beautiful setting in a valley in the mountains. While he did not complete his elementary school examination at fourteen, he became a keen reader. His mother and siblings eventually joined him in Ceres.

Arthur had dreams of trekking into Africa's darkest interior, but as a first step accepted a job as apprentice farmer with Charles Southey in the Middelburg district where he cared for ostriches. His uncle was known for his laziness and love of brandy and Arthur returned to Ceres and his education. He continued to dream of adventuring north and spent his spare time reading about traveling to the interior of Africa.

Going North

When he was sixteen, an elderly woman in Ceres gave him enough money to travel to Johannesburg, where, because of gold mining, he hoped good jobs would be available. The train went as far as Kimberley, where he signed up with a transport rider carrying heavy mining machinery to Klerksdorp. Heavy rains made the roads a quagmire and Arthur worked tirelessly with the transport rider to drive the oxen through the mud. He walked from Klerksdorp to Johannesburg and found a glut of workers competing for few jobs. He was keen to work and he was employed by a sympathetic businessman as driver of the family's horse carriages. He took on extra work where he could and eventually landed a better paying job as storekeeper, compound manager and office clerk on the *Jompers* Mine. Once a week he had to accompany the mine captain down the mine to record measurements of shafts, wings, drives, rises and stopes. This experience would prove invaluable in later years when he pegged his own gold mines in Rhodesia.

Arthur was eighteen years old when Cecil John Rhodes received the charter from Queen Victoria to explore and colonize the land beyond the Limpopo River. Rhodes was recruiting men for his pioneers and Arthur applied. He was disappointed when turned down as too young and it steeled his determination to do it on his own, if he must. With money they had saved, Arthur and his relative Gilmour Southey convinced a Mr. Hubert Davies to complete the financing of a wagon that would take them to the lands to the north.

He writes in his memoirs:

Our outfit consisted of eight donkeys, harness and wagon (a four wheeler, usually known as a 'horse wagon' and the sort which Boer families rode in when attending their Nachtmal celebration). For provisions we had boermeal, rice, tea and coffee, sugar, tinned meats, a bag of salt, a large lump of lead and other odds and ends. This was not a great assortment but enough for two of us to last a year. We packed most of these under the seats of our wagon and had our beds made up on top of the lot. We were very comfortable.

The modern road from Johannesburg to Salisbury is about 600 miles (ca 1,000km) long. In those days it was much longer, because they had to go via Bechuanaland and had to skirt Lobengula's domain. The journey was harrowing and took six months. There were copious rains which provided water and fodder for the donkeys, but they had to wait weeks for swollen rivers to subside. The mud made it heavy going for the donkeys, and they were overtaken by ox wagons. It was wild country with dangerous animals and hostile black tribes, but the worst of all were the hordes of mosquitos. Both Arthur and Gilmour contracted malaria and at one stage they feared for Arthur's life. Weeks went by recuperating from the fever. At one river crossing the wagon got stuck in the sand. Gilmour was weak with fever and Arthur carried him across to a shady spot under a tree. He then unloaded the wagon so that it could be pulled across the river. Arthur carried a heavy 200lb (ca 100kg) bag of boer meal and stumbled. He was exhausted and the weight of the bag thrust his face into the sand. With almost superhuman effort he managed to work his way out but he nearly suffocated.

On July 29, 1891 the bedraggled pair arrived at Fort Salisbury (Harare) in Mashonaland. Their seven tired donkeys slowly pulled the wagon, which was worse for wear. Their boots were worn through and their clothes tattered and torn. Medicines had run out and supplies were low. They were dirty, unshaven, tired, weak with fever and a pitiful sight. However, they had made it and in Arthur's memoirs there is never a hint of complaint. They were true pioneers in Rhodesia.

Arthur writes;

Salisbury in those days was mostly a collection of badly built huts. The population was as rough as you could find in any outlying post of civilization. The only women in the town were 'The Countess' and Mrs Johan Colenbrander.

They were fond of their donkeys but they needed money for medicines, hospital expenses and food. They parted with the animals two at a time. Arthur was suffering badly from malaria and spent time in the primitive hospital. Just before he left, Mother Patrick and her nurses arrived and overnight the atmosphere in the so-called hospital improved dramatically. The place was now clean, they had better food and the care was a great improvement.

He had been in hospital for a couple of weeks and ready to go prospecting for gold. He could draw on his experience in the Johannesburg gold mine. Legends going back to biblical times abounded of fabulous mines in the lands of Ophir and Monomotapa, producing gold that was transported by Arab traders. Arthur spent weeks in the bush contending with tsetse flies by day and mosquitoes by night but, apart from traces, did not discover any promising gold finds.

There was an acute shortage of food in Salisbury since almost no-one was growing and producing crops. It was transported by wagon from Transvaal. Arthur and Gilmour approached Leander Starr Jameson, Cecil Rhodes' Administrator of Mashonaland and Frederick Courteney Selous, commander of the BSA Company troops, and obtained permission to peg a small farm on the east side of Fort

Salisbury. Gilmour pegged the farm *Gletwyn* named after the family farm near Grahamstown. Arthur pegged the adjacent land and called it *Glenlorne*. They received a span of untrained oxen, six months of provisions and a plough from Mr Selous and Dr Jamieson. They made yokes out of local woods and *rieme* out of the game they shot. The vegetable garden was a great success and they kept the mess and canteen supplied as well as hawking the surplus on the streets of Salisbury. The crops were disappointing because it was easier to plow the *msasa* sandveld than stump the huge trees in the rich fertile soils.

Salisbury to Johannesburg - Back and Forth

Arthur had recurring bouts of malaria and Dr Jamieson suggested - really a command- that he return to Johannesburg. Arthur did not have the strength to walk the distance and together with a friend Jack Wightman, tried to sell his two remaining donkeys. They were unsuccessful but that evening Jack played Billiards at the new hotel on Pioneer street and won £15, which he gave Arthur for his journey. Arthur could only give him the donkeys and much thanks for being a good friend.

Arthur signed on with a transport rider named Terblanche and reached Pretoria 48 days later. He walked the 36 miles to Johannesburg and stayed with friends. He obtained a job at an Electric Light Works but it was too strenuous. He then took an office job, first with a gold mining company and then with Mr. L.E.B. Homan, a well-known sportsman and speculator. He was Homan's private secretary in charge of correspondence and record keeping.

There was resentment and tension between Boer and Brit in the Transvaal. The Boers had trekked to the interior to get away from the British and now found that they (English and other Europeans) came in their thousands to the goldfields of Johannesburg. They were the *Uitlanders* (lit. outlanders or foreigners). The *Uitlanders* had no rights under President Paul Kruger and they formed a 'Reform Committee' to campaign for recognition and representation.

Arthur joined the Reform Committee and with his horse and bicycle trained as a scout for the *Uitlanders*. At this time, in 1895 Arthur married Alice Southey, sister of Gilmour Southey who was his partner in their first venture to Mashonaland. While Arthur trained with the Reform committee, Alice stayed with her family who were also living in Johannesburg.



One of Arthur's later oxen spans (1, p65)

News came that Dr. Jamieson, with a band of five hundred troops had come down from Mashonaland to help the *Uitlanders* take over Transvaal from the Boers. They had reached Mafeking and were marching towards Johannesburg. On his scouting trip Arthur came across a party of Boers who told him that Dr. Jamieson and his troops had surrendered and was being escorted to Johannesburg. He mounted his bicycle back to Johannesburg and reported the news to Captain Gilfillan and Colonel Rhodes (Cecil's brother). The intended insurgency was over.

The Boers treated the humiliated *Uitlanders*, including Arthur, as second-class citizens. Arthur saw an opportunity to be a transport rider trekking food to Rhodes' troops in Matabeleland. He approached his boss, Mr. Homan, who agreed to finance his trip. The year was 1896, at the height of the Matabele and Shona rebellions. Arthur got ten wagons, a hundred horses, a hundred and forty pack mules, all loaded with boermeal, bully beef and other supplies, set off for Bulawayo. It was a very successful and profitable expedition. When they arrived at Fort Tuli a large contingent of soldiers, the 7th Hussars, bought all their supplies and even some of their horses, paying good prices. On his way back he heard that his wife Alice was ill. He delegated bringing the remaining wagons back and hurriedly walked to Johannesburg, covering more than 100 miles in three days. He saw his wife recovered before venturing out again.

Based on the success of the first trip, Mr. Homan financed another one, on even a larger scale. They bought thirty wagons, 280 mules, 160 donkeys and some spans of oxen. They had a contract to deliver 1000 bags of mealies and other supplies to Rhodesia's troops in Bulawayo. Arthur bought a bicycle so he could ride back and forth to keep in touch with this huge convoy. A devastating outbreak of rinderpest, a tick-borne disease, decimated cattle herds throughout Matabeleland and all his oxen died. He was saved by having donkeys and mules to continue. At Bulawayo he was able to sell his supplies at very good prices. Arthur was weak and ill and was in the Bulawayo hospital for weeks. He placed the return journey in the hands of others who had accompanied him. He was keen to return to report back to Mr. Homan. The railway line by now had reached Mochudi and as soon as he could, Arthur took the Zeederberg coach from Bulawayo to the railhead.



Alice Morkel

Arthur Morkel

(1, p100)

Arthur writes about his journey.

I got back to my home in the Rand in November 1896. I had experienced the awful coach journey from Bulawayo to Mochudi where the rails from the south had reached. The coach proprietor, Mr. Doel Zeederberg (3), did all he could to make things comfortable, but unfed mules, tired drivers and leaders, wretched provisions, traveling night and day, cooped up in a coach full of passengers of various states of cleanliness, manners and habits, all conduced to one of the worst journeys I had ever undertaken and after six days and nights of this torment it was a great relief to board what would today be considered a most uncomfortable railway carriage.

Arthur then rode the 200 miles by bicycle from Mafeking to Johannesburg to rejoin his family, to recuperate and to regain his strength. Soon he felt better and he became restless again.

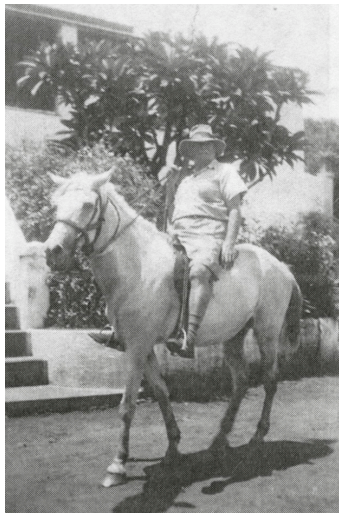
Opportunities for mining and farming in Mashonaland beckoned and he could sense that a second war, between the Boers and the British was inevitable.

In April 1897, Arthur and Alice set out from Johannesburg for Mashonaland with all their possessions. (*The Boer War broke out two years later, laying much of Transvaal to waste*). Alice's brother Gilmour, now married, came in a second wagon and they were joined by Alice's younger brother Jack, and Mr. Claude Southey. He bought two wagons, 36 mules, three horses, 30 bicycles and spare parts, thirty bags of flour and other provisions. In a little four wheeled horse cart Arthur and Alice set out on a 'most enjoyable journey with good weather and no human illnesses'. However, a serious outbreak of horse sickness killed the horses and 2 of the 36 mules. They had to leave one of the wagons behind at Enkeldoorn. Arthur later went back to collect the wagon and their belongings. Mr. Homan's influence secured a job for Arthur working a farm for Mr. Grey.

Mining and farming in Mashonaland

Although Arthur's passion was agriculture, he realized that life would be a struggle if they had to rely on farming alone. They eked out a living on a farm they called Avondale close to Salisbury - it became a suburb of the city in later years. Arthur started exploring for, and mining gold and combined it with farming for the remainder of his life.

He returned to Johannesburg to organise financing and formed a syndicate to explore for and acquire gold mining prospects. His first mine, Wiltshire, was unsuccessful in spite of his efforts and they had to abandon the venture. He then acquired the Joker mine which was rich with gold and provided income for most of his life as well as funding for farming. His memoirs tell of the hard work it was and how he transported heavy bags of ore and later bags of gold hanging from the handlebars of his bicycle, or from the saddle of his faithful, but skittish horse Tommy. Weighed down with his heavy cargo he had precarious crossings of flooded rivers and came close to losing the gold and even his life on more than one occasion. Later he was able to afford trucks and cars to make the journeys.

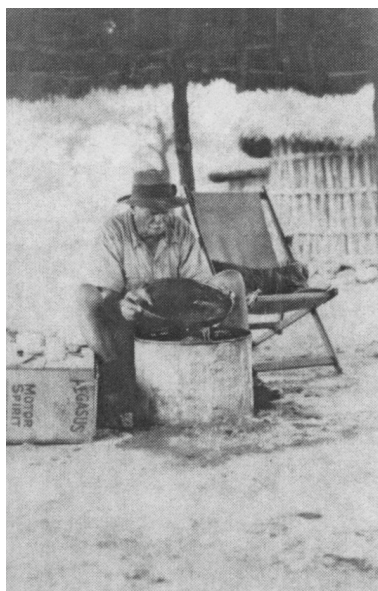


Arthur on Tommy (1, p78)

He petitioned Rhodes to make more land available for agriculture, which eventually happened. He acquired prime land near present day Shamva and named his farm *Ceres* after the goddess of the harvest and his fond memories of the town of his youth. Money from the Joker mine made it possible to develop the property into a magnificent farm over the years. For irrigation he dammed the Umvinzi river. With a workforce using pick and shovel he constructed a ten mile long canal with a half a mile long tunnel through a ridge to deliver copious water to the most fertile soils on the property. Arthur's experience and knowledge of mining was vital to the project which took years to build. But when completed, it yielded ten cubic feet of water per second water for irrigation. He continued to improve the irrigation system all his life. Arthur and later his sons and descendants cultivated cotton, maize, soybeans, tobacco winter wheat and other crops and also a large vegetable garden for the African townships around Salisbury. Eventually the farm also supported cattle, and other livestock as well as a crocodile farm and a game ranch.

Arthur continued to prospect for gold and found a good deposit along the Mazoe river close to the border of Mocambique. He established the Fungwe mine and operated it for many years.

Arthur and Alice had six children, Rhoda, Reginald, Vincent, Cecil and Clifford and Ernest who died tragically of a gunshot. Rhoda married Charles Campbell Morgan. Reginald took over the day to day farming at Ceres and eventually inherited the farm. Vincent joined the civil service and became District Commissioner. Cecil farmed Bamboo Creek, adjoining Ceres. Clifford managed the Fungwe mine for some years and eventually acquired a pastoral property, Mazuri Ranch near Que Que, as told below. Their sons all attended St Andrew's College in Grahamstown.



Arthur assessing gold potential at the Fungwe Mine (1, p77)

Arthur was a leader in the community. He was active in the politics of farming and became chairperson of the Shamva Farmer's Association, the Grain Marketing Board, the National Farmer's Association, the Agricultural Union and other boards. His farm provided employment for generations of Shona and Nyasa with housing, schooling and a medical clinic. At their comfortable and well appointed home with swimming pool and tennis court, Arthur and Alice were central to their large extended family and friends. At their home they hosted Cecil John Rhodes and the fabled big game hunter Selous on their visits. Arthur hunted all over Southern Africa and the Mazoe Valley, mostly around his mines. It was always for food, as he was not a trophy hunter. He only shot elephant when nuisance animals were marauding in the natives' crops or posing danger to the local people.

On September 14, 1931, Alice passed away. Arthur chose a peaceful place within walking distance of the homestead for her final resting place. It became the Morkel family cemetery. Life was never the same after the passing of Alice, but he kept active in his mining and farming ventures until the day he died in July 1937, when his family buried him alongside his beloved Alice.

The eldest son Reg became the patriarch, owner and custodian of the family estate. For a time brother Cecil worked the section of Ceres Farm known as Bamboo Creek. Reg and his wife Doodie had three sons, John, Rex and David who all farmed Ceres and Bamboo Creek and with hard work and financial resources, added to the farms. When Reg died, his son Rex took up the baton as Ceres Farm patriarch. Rex and his wife Trish had four children, Alan, Diana, Brian and Keith who continued to work the farm.

Notes and Sources

1. Ron Morkel 2010. Rhodesia. Beginning to End. ISBN 145378943X. www.amazon.com, www.bookdepository.com. Our story is extracted from this book.
2. Ron Morkel spells Arthur's middle name Loreht, which is also how it is on his gravestone. Arthur's grandfather was Pieter Loreth Morkel and it comes from the maiden name of an ancestor, Hester Loret, daughter of a French Huguenot.
3. The Zeederberg Coaches were well-known in Southern Africa at the time. Mr. Zeederberg himself seems to have been in charge of Arthur's journey. The Zeederberg and Morkel families were connected with 4th generation Willem Morkel (1803 - 1876) of Morgenster married to Isabella Zeederberg (1809 - 1886).

(Continued in Parts 2 and 3. The Family Genealogy is at the end of Part 3)