

Reminiscences of 50 years ago by Arthur Marsh who is well known from the Cape to Cairo as the Port Elizabeth Sausage King. When Johannesburg was born I was a young man of twenty five and my brother Samuel who passed away about 4 years ago was then twenty three. We were not present at its birth but arrived there a few months later. It was then known as Ferreira's Camp there were a few buildings in progress at the time but it was simply a primitive Mining Camp dotted over with tents cattle and dual Huts and beichles of all descriptions in many instances I noticed that squares were built with very light pieces of luartewing and balies tacked around it as a means of shelter at the time we were both Married Man and both of us were Butchers by profession. Being young and energetic and having heard such glowing reports about these new gold fields we decided to try our luck and ales to go up by Donkey wagon why we selected this Mode of travelling I really do not know but one thing I do know is that we discussed and cursed the thing as good many times on our travels and came to conclusion that we were the biggest Donkeys of the lot as the method of travelling was altogether too slow and at times made us both very impatient. Before starting we made Commadagga our head quarters, w[h]ere we had a very nice cosy little wagon built with a tent the whole length of it and a flap at each end. This wagon was built by a very old friend of ours, the late Mr Cyrus Smith was the cart and wagon builder at Commadagga station. Whilst waiting for the wagon to be built I slipped off up to Mount Stewart to see the late Mr Cawood who used to keep an hotel there in the early days. I explained to him that I wanted sixteen good donkeys. So he recommended me to a farmer [by] the name of Rex who was living some distance from Mount Stewart. I accordingly hired a horse saddle and bridle from Mr Cawood and set off on my journey to Mr Rex. On arrival there I could only manage to pick out 10 suitable animals from his lot. But he informed me that I would be able to get the other six from his adjoining neighbour which I did. As I did not want to waste any time I got Mr Rex to kraal the donkey's for me and I slept at his place that night and started off at the day break the next morning to drive them to Mount Stewart. But what a day I had. The heat was terrific. The old horse was slow and had no paces. I had neither whip nor spurs. So [I] broke a branch from a tree to try and urge him on. As long as I could keep him on the trot it was alright but immediately he stopped the 10 donkeys would turn off on the one side of the road and the five on the other side and they would start running back again so that I had to continually keep rounding them up and getting them on the trot until I reached Mount Stewart about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Not having had anything to eat or drinks since leaving the farm at day break in the morning. Gentle headers some of you would be able to imagine my feelings and some of you would not but I can assure you that I offered up prayers from w[h]ere I was driving the donkeys from sight away to Johannesburg and back again. And oh how I prayed that dubs would only grow on their bushes so that I could just quench my thirst again I was in that sort of a mood that if I had only had a gun with me I would have shot the bally lot of them horse and all and would have walked back to Mount Stewart. To make matters worse on my arrival there I found that insult had been added to injury I had chafed so badly in the saddle that I found I had contracted Half Crowns on both of my sit downs which necessitated me using a cushion for about a week afterwards. I left the donkeys in care of Mr Cawood and the next day left by train for Port Elizabeth. I then sent my boy to Mount Stewart with instructions to take them on to Commadagga where in due course he arrived with them in good order. The harness we had made in Port Elizabeth by a Mr. Haught who has also passed over to the great majority. He used to have this Harness Marking establishment in Queen Street next to the Cale Cobb & Companys Stables in the early days. It took us altogether about two weeks getting everything ready, cutting swingle bass fitting the Harness and providing provisions. Our commissariat consisted of a Pig that

we killed and salted in. also a cook containing 12 nice young Cockerels, bag of meal, bag of salt, bag of potatoes, packet of sugar, packet of bush tea. Tin of ordinary tea, tin of coffee, , the usual condiment and 3000 Us weight of dried fish which we powered from Jefferies Bay this proved to be a good investment as I sold remarkably well on the road and helped to pay expenses. The eventful day arrived for starting we had a photograph taken of ourselves and the turn out. Wished our wives and friends good bye and off we started. Everything went along very nicely for about six miles then when going through a rugged sluit our disselboom broke. Fortunately we had 2 spare ones and plenty of tools. We outspanned and repaired the damage. By the time we finished it was getting dark so we decided not to go on until the next morning. We were up at day break and found that the donkeys had disappeared and we only found them at midday about 1 o'clock. And although these donkeys were together in a camp for about a week before we started whenever we outspanned the ten would go off in 1 direction and the six in another and for some time we were at a loss to know how to counteract the business. When suddenly a brain wave struck me and I said to my brother and our boy Bill that I thought it would be a good plan each time before outspanning just to throw a spoonful of salt into their mouths this had a desired effect and acted like magic as we always used to outspan close to a dam and after dosing them with the salt they would all come back again to get a drink. The old boy Bill was delighted and used to sit-down and laugh when he seen them coming back to drink. He said Boss that was a good plan, Bill will have no more troubles with de Buggers now. We outspanned at a farmers house close to Middleton Station but unfortunately I can't remember his name it was dark when we got there. We had supper with him that evening and breakfast next morning and he gave us some splendid advice. How to treat the Donkeys and how to drive them we had a camel whip and a sjambok which he said was no good to drive them with, as it was altogether too heavy. He cut the camel whip down and made two light whips out of it and put some voorslag on the end of them. Now he said you must not beat the Donkeys just clap your whip and talk to them. The sjambok he said you can leave that with me that will be alright for me to beat my boys with but not beat the Donkeys with. It was simply marvellous how they pulled and never once stuck on the road before reaching Cookhouse it came on to rain and owing to the Donkeys being badly chafed we were delayed there for three days. We mixed up some brandy and salt and bathed the affected parts which son healed up again we then got some sheepskin belts and lined the breast plates of the harness with it. So had no more trouble with them in that direction. Our most serious mishap occurred one Saturday night about nine o'clock going through the Jet River to get to Weinberg. My brother had gone earlier in the day to get post and it was arranged that he would come back and wait on the other side of the river until I arrived so as to let me know if it would be safe to come through. On my arrival he called out that everything was OK. So the old Boy Bill took the tow and I sat on the wagon shouting and clapping the whip. We just got into the middle of the river when the two front donkeys missed their footing and down they went. My brother and myself slipped off as quickly as we could and assisted the boy to get them up but they were half drowned before we could get them out and eventually we had to do away with them. On leaving Winburg from the other side we had to again cross the Vet River. The drift going out from that side was very steep when we arrived there, Six young farmers with 3 Wagon Loads of Wool were just taking up the Lass Load with two spans of oxen attached to the wagon and wanted to know if they required any assistance we thanked them and told them the donkeys would pull out alright. As soon as they got out, we started the donkeys they got about half way up the drift and then stood so we gave them a couple of minutes rest and started them again and they went out splendidly. The young chaps looked on in amazement and the one said to the others

My God but those chaps are well trained to drive Donkeys. On the road a transport driver overtook us. He had three wagons loaded with goods for the Gold fields. After the usual inquiries wanting to know who we were going to and we had loaded up and how many days we had been on the road after answering all his questions he told us that he was going to Joburg. But he said it is a long way from here so I will wish you good ye as I don't suppose we will see each other again as the donkeys do not travel as fast as oxen. So we wished him good bye and had forgotten all about him when to our surprise about two weeks later we came across him again. He was busy showing his oxen. He said that he had made a big mistake because they wanted the goods at a certain date in Joburg and he had driven his oxen a bit too fast to try and get there and the consequences was that the oxen had contracted sore feet and had fallen off in condition so that he now had to shoe thee probabilities are that he might have passed us in the night, whilst we were peacefully sleeping in our Cosy Little Wagon dreaming of Nuggets of Gold that we were going to pick up in in the streets of this newly found Eldorado. We used to do three hours travelling in the early morning and three in the evening so as to avoid working the donkeys in the heat of the da and each time we outspanned we gave them a ration of soaked mealies which kept them in splendid condition. I had a double barrel combination of guns with me and used to keep our carder well supplied with birds and hares and also a Buck as there was plenty of shooting to be had along the roads in those days we used to buy a nice fat lamb the pick of the farmers Kraal for 7/6. The boy cleaned the head, feet and tripe which made a lovely stew we had a grid iron and a three legged Pot and our Menu consisted mostly of Grills, Roast and stews. We always had a good supply of meat salt pork, lamb poultry bension birds hares and fish. Our great draw back on the road was fresh bread, but our Boy Bill was a champion at making what they call askoek which consisted of a mixture of unsifted meal, water, salt and baking powder well needed together and allowed to rise and well baked under good cow dung fire not in a pot. Bill could always tell if it was sufficiently baked by removing the dung on the top of it and tapping it with his knife. It had to have a certain ring, he would then call out askoek is alright now boss. If any of my readers are contemplating going on an extended picnic tour then I would advise them just to buy this askoek, as I can recommend it from experience as one of the World's finest Howell regulators that it is possible to get which is owing to leaving the bran in the meal. It took us just nine week to do the trip as we travelled very slowly and did not travel when it rained. On our arrival there we found everything was very expensive. Mealies and sausage was an exorbitant price and as it would not have paid us to feed the Donkeys we arranged with a farmer living some distance from the camp to grange them until we required them at 1/6 each per month. We then began to look round to see what could be done, we came across a couple of Lean to Shanties rigged up as Butcher shops, but neither of them required any assistants in fact on of them offered to sell out to us as he had made up his mind to go to Rhodesia. But unfortunately we could not entertain the idea as we had spent the most of our money on our trip out going up there. We were offered several jobs but the remuneration was so small that we did not consider them. We were lucky in selling our wagon to a syndicate going to Rhodesia for the sum of £97.10 the Harness we sold to another party for £7.10 Sales were held daily in Marshall Square so we decided to get the donkeys back and sell them but the highest bid we could get for them was 7/6 each which we declined with thanks. We then got a pass from the Landrost for the Boy and the Donkeys and the Boy took them to my Brother in law in Kimberly w[h]ere they realised 3 of each. I met a Mr Doubell up there whose brother I knew well in Port Elizabeth. He had a large plan with plots of ground marked out for sale ranging from £25 and upwards. Every time I met him he urged me to go in for a couple of plots but somehow or another I could not see further than my nose

and so remained adamant. What a fool I was that I did not take his advice and put the money that I got for the Wagon, Donkeys and Harness into a couple of plots as I would have more than recovered my losses. Anyhow you cannot put old heads on young shoulders and as the old saying goes what [h]as got to be will be and what [h]as not got to be will not be. Neither of us ever regretted the venture it was the experience of a lifetime we both enjoyed the trip. We both had good health and we both put on a little over 50lbs weight each by the time we arrived back in Port Elizabeth we remained at the Ferreira's camp for a little over two months and as nothing turned to suite us we said goodbye to a few friends that we had met there and then booked our seats by Made Wagon to Kimberley w[h]ere we remained for a week and then returned to Port Elizabeth.