Travel Down the Wally Byam Highway

Around the World Caravan Background Notes

by Dale Schwamborn #00002

Wally Byam had ongoing financial difficulties in keeping the doors open at Airstream. Three times he came back from his factory being padlocked by the government. Wally had that unique quality to face adversity, conquer it and move on.

In 1951, the status of Airstream was precarious. With encouragement from Airstream owners and his association with Trail-R-News (a trailer oriented magazine) and with the Los Angeles Times, he planned to form an all-comers trailer (open to all trailer brands) caravan to Mexico and Central America.

Wally also saw opportunity for publicity for his venture. No one had ever done this El Paso, Texas to Managua, Nicaragua with a caravan made up of travel enthusiasts. Airstream Wally Byam Caravan's became an advertising asset for the company. This picture shows Wally Byam with Major Millender, Advance Man, going over details about the Caravan.



For an inaugural caravan, it was as rough as you wanted. In a letter Wally wrote home from Guatemala City, "I have learned on this trip that difference between men is a matter of guts." "I hate to go further." "I hate to go back over these roads." "I guess it is the same stubborn stick-to-itiveness that drove my forbearers west."

My firsthand experience on the caravan rates the Guatemalan roads as bad as any of you will have ever traveled. The washboard, ruts, dust and general disrepair on the roads were horrific.



Mexican Bridge 1951 Wally Byam Caravan Mexico and Central America

Let's go back to the financial status of Airstream. Wally received a letter from his office manager, Mildred, in Guatemala City. She told Wally you will be pleased to know we made the last payment to the government.

Airstream now moves forward!

Wally Byam stood by his Airstream. If your automobile could make over any road condition, then you can take your Airstream with you. Of course, this relates to earlier days before four wheel drive, and heavy duty utility vehicles.

In planning his 1st Caravan in 1951 to Mexico and Central America, Wally knew the roads were going to be rough, but passable. He knew that the Pan American Highway had not been completed and in Southern Mexico, the Caravan had to travel by rail on flat cars to the Guatemalan border. Wally also knew that Managua, Nicaragua was trails end. The Pan American Highway is non-existent into Panama.

When least expected, the Caravan crossed primitive and localized bridges where villagers built their bridges using practical applied engineering. The above picture demonstrates a plank bridge in Mexico.

Eight years later on the 1959 Airstream Wally Byam African Caravan, they experienced similar bridges. Enjoying déjà vu moments from the 1st Caravan to Mexico and Central America.

Airstream's pedigree includes road testing on the six continents including North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia. Someday Antarctica may be included.

The miles accumulated by Airstream Caravans and individual owners traveling our world confirms what Wally Byam bequeathed us in *"The Wally Byam Creed."*

Wally said, "To place the great wide world at your doorstep for you who yearn to travel with all the comforts of home."

Enjoy!



African Bridge 1959 Airstream Wally Byam African Caravan