



An amazing Boran Story: **FROM KENYA TO AUSTRALIA**

 Geof & Celia Burnett-Smith

Geof and Celia Burnett-Smith were both born in Africa - Geof in Malawi and Celia in Kenya. Their families moved to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the 1950s and 1960s respectively.

At that time, prior to the beleaguering effects of the ensuing political upheavals in numerous African countries, Rhodesia twinkled like a diamond studded crown with an ideal climate, largely fertile soil and countryside of great beauty and appeal.

Crops and animals thrived and people were attracted from all corners of the globe to settle in this idyllic little paradise. With them, many brought an abundance of wealth and knowledge and started building what they expected would become their new homes for generations ahead.

Sadly, as history dictated, this was not to be. Farmers, in particular, left in droves due to hostilities and land-grabs from the then Zimbabwean government. These activities left numerous hard won initiatives hanging - particularly those in the agricultural sector as their land was earmarked for resettlement.

In 1980 the Burnett-Smiths visited family members in Australia and in 1985 finally emigrated to settle in Adelaide, South Australia, with their 4 school age children, tragically forsaking their livelihood on a family farm in one of the prime farming regions in Zimbabwe - then known as Umvukwes - now named Mvurwi.

In 1980, Geof had been surprised at how Australia was largely populated with either indigenous animals (kangaroos etc) or European breeds of commercial animals.

The notion of moving more suited genetics of goats, cattle and sheep from Africa to Australia, became a tantalising vision - 'though one hardly likely to be within our reach.

However, with Australia living up to its reputation as 'the land of opportunity', the Burnett-Smiths found themselves, signing an agreement in 1988 with two prominent businessmen in Adelaide. Funding was established through a quasi government body and we were on our way to living our dream.

Our intentions were solid and our motivation and incentives limitless. We dedicated our life to our first importation of Angora and Boer goats which entailed a 5.5 year quarantine period to ensure freedom from the dreaded scrapie/mad cow/JC diseases. This was successfully completed in 1995 when the goats were released into regional Australia, where they have enhanced the feral goat herds in the harsh outback regions.

..... in the meantime, along came the cattle....

Tuli and Mashona (Bovine) Embryos from Zimbabwe :

Boran (Bovine) Embryos from Kenya

In a virtually impossible move, through our contacts in Africa, we were able to source embryos directly from Soysambu - the great Delamere Estate in Nakuru, in the Rift Valley, Kenya.

These being the very genuine and authentic **Kenyan Boran**, we were enormously privileged to have access to these famous genetics. Our thanks goes to everyone involved who assisted in paving our path towards this bounty of bovine genetics. You know who you are and please take a bow. Your involvement was greatly appreciated.

The Process

Funding and management plans in place, the same team who had collected our goat embryos Premier Genetics, NZ - with additional personnel, headed to Kenya to perform our virtually impossible task of collecting embryos from the Kenyan Boran.

Previous to their departure, Geof and Celia had visited Kenya to finalise the arrangement with Lord Delamere himself. They met his management team and viewed the animals which were offered as donors for the programme.

Given the standing of the Boran within the herdsman's circles, Geof was required to personally discuss the matter of what management the animals would receive in Australia with the Masai herdsman and chieftains who lived in a village based on Soysambu Estate. Africa operates very much on different rules and hierarchy systems, which was familiar for us, having been born in Africa.

Once we had advised of the procedures of embryo collection, one chieftain asked if he could submit his wife for the same process!

There were numerous questions from the tribesmen about the management of the animals in Australia and discussions for their welfare and uses.

The Masai Boran tribesmen have a distinct spiritual bond with the Boran, believing their own souls are linked to the breed. For this reason, they never consume the flesh of the Boran and will only drink their milk and blood. When blood is extracted through the jugular, the wound is healed with a mixture of dung from the same animals.

Such are the African beliefs. Their generosity in sharing their sacred breed with us, for the good of the Australian cattle industry, is beyond measure.

Little did we know it, these negotiations, however hard we had considered them to be at the time, were soon outweighed by subsequent events.

The embryo collection itself went smoothly and efficiently as we knew it would with our excellent technical team, Premier Genetics, so our aspirations for 500 Kenyan Boran embryos became a reality.

There were difficulties of course, all aligned with the 'African factor'. Elephants damaged the quarantine fencing which had to be constantly repaired and the buck/deer had to be closely managed to prevent them from entering the quarantine area during the allotted period.

It was required for us to pay an AQIS (so named at that time) vet to oversee the operation, overall procedures and health of the animals. It was also necessary to take blood tests at certain times, both pre and post collection. All blood samples were sent to the Pirbright Laboratories in UK for analysis.

Having managed the previous difficulties, one by one, we then ran into an unforeseen problem never encountered previously, from the Pirbright results. Our donor animals had an FMD (foot and mouth disease) titre reading which did not comply with the protocol.

The enormity of this was chilling as it meant that the embryos could not be cleared for export to Australia! However, it was soon established that the management team at Soysambu had inadvertently inoculated the donor animals with their 6 monthly vaccine against FMD which resulted in the high titre readings. Although this was fully confirmed and the animals definitely did not have FMD (as agreed by all experts at the time), there still remained the problem with the non-compliance to the protocol..

With much ensuing discussion 'back home, in Australia', involving to-ing and fro-ing back and forth with AQIS, we contracted an independent, expert consultant to review whatever options we might have to bring the embryos into line with the compliance.

The Selected Option

The flush washings (debris/broken embryos and liquid from the embryo flush) had been frozen and retained for future testing if required. In this case, this proved

to be invaluable and thus, in accordance with Dr Parsonson's recommendation, the material was sent to an overseas, high-security laboratory on Plum Island, off Long Island, USA.

All results thankfully and clearly resulted in being negative to FMD.

Much relieved, we followed the rest of the recommendations which meant sending some carefully selected and tested, recipient cattle to Australia's Cocos Island, by air from Western Australia. Following further tests and requirements, a sample of the Boran embryos were implanted into the recipients which were then cleared and released for transportation to Terraweena, South Australia, where they were born and started life as Australian citizens.

In summary, this enormous task and the exorbitant expenses took their toll on the partnership which dissolved shortly thereafter.

In essence, the result was that there remained some invaluable Boran calves and embryos, from Kenya, for the use of forward thinking Australian cattle breeders. Being traditional by nature, the uptake has been a long time in the making and the embryos were finally sold to Troy Gayler who is implanting them and receiving favourable results of pregnancies per embryos implanted.

We wish Troy the greatest good fortune in his endeavours and will do all we can to back him up through the early years of Kenyan Boran calves on Australian soil.

It has been a very long and arduous road, but we are delighted to see the calves now being born and soon to be used for their true purpose.

We trust and hope it will be acknowledged that our purpose was to fulfill our obligations, rather than grow wealthy in the doing. We can safely put our hands on our hearts in the knowledge that, that is what we have done.



