

The Leisurely Way – to London

by Dave Newnham
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An H.P.42 and A.W.15 of Imperial Airways at Kisumu, Kenya, c.1936,
with a DH.84 Dragon of Wilson Airways in front,

In days gone by, flying around the world was a more comfortable and leisurely way to travel, yet it was still the quickest means of getting from point A to point B. Initially, in the golden age of aviation it was the means of travel for the rich. After WWII and with the availability of large passenger aircraft it became available as carriage for the people, and later still (with the demise of the passenger liners), a cheap means of travel. But with the blossoming of flying as a popular means of travel, the “Sardine Can” age heralded the cramped and uncomfortable experience that it is today.

During the Rhodesian years and after, I did a fair amount of flying between London and Rhodesia, all of it in sardine cans operated by various airlines. Incredibly, I found the most comfortable of these to be the Air Zimbabwe Boeing B.767 service, probably because they were invariably only about half full and one therefore had room to spread out and get comfy. In the following paragraphs I have attempted to give the reader an idea of the distinction of air travel prior to it becoming the abode of the “Everyman”.

Due to the vast amount of data, I have had to restrict the detail I present and thus have only included the pre-war land plane and flying boat services, the immediate post-war flying boat and later the “coach class” cheap flights from Central Africa to Europe.

By the mid 1950s the Sardine Can era had begun with the airlines packing passengers into large aircraft, providing them with little space and treating them merely as a number on a seating plan. The days of caring for your customers (passengers) and giving them a relaxed and friendly trip were no more.

I have presented a route plan for each of the trips mentioned. I have laid out these route plans in a similar manner so that the reader can compare them. Not all the sources that I have, give all-encompassing detail, so I have left blanks where I do not have data. For example; where not specifically mentioned, it would seem logical that each stop was a refuelling stop.

During the life of each service there were often multiple weekly flights and frequency of flights per week grew as the popularity of the service increased. I have thus shown the days as “Day1”, etc and displayed a single flight. There were on occasion, minor variations to timings and occasionally route, dependent upon the day of the week that the flight was scheduled.

Imperial Airways (1932 – 1937)

The first airline to provide a London to Salisbury service was Imperial Airways, starting in 1932. This was a one-class (First) service and due to the slowness and short range of contemporary aircraft took 8 days from London to Salisbury. In those days that was fast since the alternative was a three/four week steamship trip via the Atlantic to the Cape or via the Red Sea and Indian Ocean to Beira.

I have only shown the African portion of the route. The primary reason for the introduction of the route was the movement of the Empire Air Mail with passenger travel assuming greater importance as time went on. Passengers flew in Handley Page HP.42 aircraft from London to Kisumu, Kenya and there changed to Armstrong Whitworth AW.15 Atlanta aircraft for the remainder of the trip.

Imperial Airways flight by HP.42.

	Arrive	Loc		Depart	
Day1/2		London to Cairo			
Day3		Cairo		0730	
	0930	Asyut		0945	
	1155	Aswan	Lunch	1435	
	1615	Wadi Halfa			Night Stop
Day4		Wadi Halfa		0800	
	1100	Atbara	Lunch	1400	
	1545	Khartoum			Night Stop
Day5		Khartoum		0500	
	0745	Kosti (Renk)		0805	Fuel stop
	0950	Malakal	Lunch	1220	
	1530	Juba			Night Stop
Day6		Juba		0600	
	0915	Entebbe		1115	
	1245	Kisumu	Lunch. - Change to AW.15 Aircraft.		

Imperial Airways flight by AW.15.

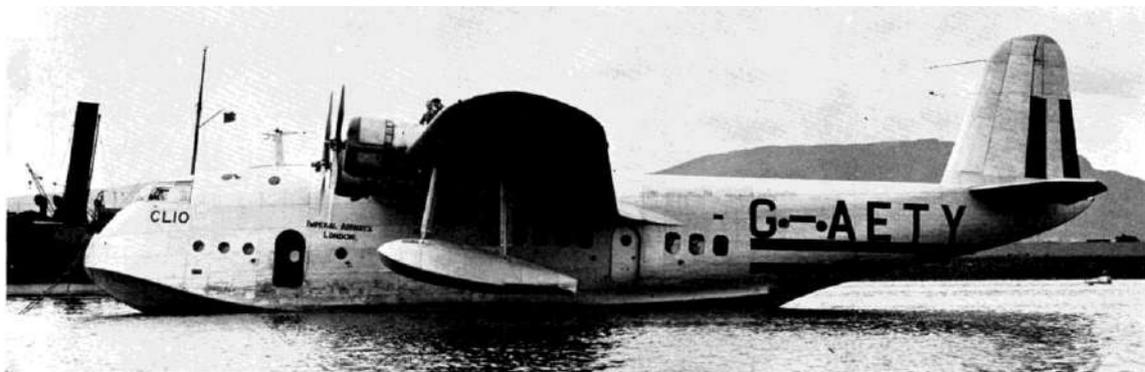
		Kisumu		1415	
	1600	Nairobi			Night Stop
Day7		Nairobi		0630	
	0810	Moshi		0950	
	1150	Dodoma	Lunch	1335	
	1615	Mbeya			Night stop
Day8		Mbeya		0700	

0925	Mpika		0955	Refuel stop
1225	Broken Hill	Lunch	1400	
1645	Salisbury			

Imperial Airways (1937 – 1939)

By 1937, the aircraft in use were becoming too small for the traffic and Imperial Airways switched to using Short S.23 Empire flying boats. At that time Flying Boats were thought to be the future of long-distance air travel and could lift far heavier loads than contemporary land planes. This was a one-class (First) service and the journey took 7 days from London to Salisbury.

They left from Southampton so passengers had to travel by train to Southampton and spend the night there before boarding. Passengers for Salisbury, alighted at Beira in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) and transferred to a Rhodesian And Nyasaland Airways DH.89 Dragon Rapide for the trip to Salisbury. (RANA had the contract for the mail and passenger connecting flights.)



An Imperial Airways "C" Class Empire Flying Boat

Imperial Airways flight by Short S.23 Empire Flying Boat.

Day 1	London (Waterloo)	Southampton
Day 2	Southampton	Rome
Day 3	Rome	Alexandria
Day 4	Alexandria	Cairo
	Cairo	Luxor
	Luxor	Wadi Halfa
	Wadi Halfa	Khartoum (night stop)
Day 5	Khartoum	Malakal
	Malakal	Juba
	Juba	Port Bell (Bus to Kampala for night stop)
Day 6	Port Bell	Kisumu
	Kisumu	Mombassa
	Mombassa	Dar-es-Salaam
	Dar-es-Salaam	Lindi
	Lindi	Mosambique (night stop)
Day 7	Mosambique	Beira (optional refuelling)

RANA flight by DH.89 Dragon Rapide to Salisbury

British Overseas Airways Corporation (1948 – 1950)

World War Two changed the world forever. Vast technical development took place. Resulting in larger, faster aircraft able to carry greater loads; and long concrete runways became a feature almost everywhere in the world. BOAC initially reinstated their flying boat service to Africa although using Short S.45 Solents (a development of the WW2 Sunderland maritime patrol aircraft). This

was still a one-class (First) service that left from Southampton, and took 4 days from London to Salisbury.

However, the world wanted fast, cheap travel and these anachronisms from the age of elegance and costly travel were soon to be replaced. However, while they flew they were a reminder of what had been! Salisbury passengers alighted at Victoria Falls where they connected (a 7 mile coach trip to Livingstone airfield) to the Central African Airways Viking to Salisbury.



A B.O.A.C. S.45 Short Solent on the Zambesi at Victoria Falls

BOAC flight by Short S.45 Solent Flying Boat.

	Arrive	Loc	Depart
Day1		London Terminal	0700
		Train to Southampton	
		Marseilles	
		Augusta (Sicily) (6.5 flying hrs)	Night Stop
Day2		Augusta	
		Cairo	Lunch
		Khartoum	Night Stop
Day3		Khartoum	
		Port Bell (Lake Victoria)	Night Stop
Day4		Port Bell	
		Victoria Falls	

CAA flight by Vickers Viking to Salisbury

On the 7-Nov-50 the age of elegance and leisure died; when the last BOAC S.45 Solent flying boat passed through Victoria Falls on its way to Johannesburg. Henceforth, we would all fly in “Sardine Cans”!

This was the end of flying boats as passenger transports and from now on the airlines would use

large multi-engined aircraft. Initially world war two bomber and transport conversions and later aircraft specifically designed to carry large numbers of passengers. This also started the era of the “direct” flights to central Africa. The stops were at major cities along the route and initially served as refuelling points as well as collection and destinations for passengers. As the technical capability of aircraft grew, these stops gradually dwindled in number until the dawn of the, truly, direct flight.

The “Main Line” Services

Many airlines flew African schedules using a multitude of aircraft and it would be true to say that most of the worlds scheduled carriers and many charter airlines have operated the UK to Salisbury route at some point. Below are just a few of the services that have been offered, which will give the reader a flavour of the progress in the field.

After the demise of the “Boats” in 1950, BOAC at first flew the Douglas DC-4M, Argonaut on the route to “Salisbury”, landing, however, at Livingstone. A noisy (4 Rolls-Royce Merlins) 26/30 hour trip with a number of refuelling stops. Passengers for Salisbury still had to take the CAA Viking from Livingstone to Salisbury.

In 1952, BOAC introduced the de Havilland Comet service to Johannesburg via Livingstone. The first all-jet service with only 3 stops before “Salisbury” (Livingstone) but passengers for Salisbury still had to take the CAA Viking from Livingstone to Salisbury.

From 1956, when the new, Salisbury International Airport opened, BOAC at first flew the Douglas DC-4M, Argonaut on the route to Salisbury (to replace their Comet service). A 26/30 hour trip, with only 3 stops and landing at Salisbury.



The Vickers VC10. This is British United Airways flying into Lusaka in Northern Rhodesia.

Then came the age of the type designed airliners. The first of which was BOAC’s “Whispering Giant”, the Bristol Britannia. Although a vast improvement on the wartime conversions and powered by propellor-turbines. And thus much smoother and faster; it was still a 13 hour trip to Salisbury. In the due course of time, BOAC introduced the Vickers VC10 on the route. A trip of seven and a half hours in comparatively luxurious seating, it was probably the “peak” of flying the

route.

One should not forget the SAA Boeing 707 west coast flights via Isle de Sol and Frankfurt, in 13.5 hours. There have been many others during and since but space precludes detailing them all.

The “Safari Flights”

We turn now to the smaller airlines and charter operators who took advantage of the popularity of the Salisbury to London route to offer alternative means of travel. Although unable to compete with the major airlines in terms of trip times. They made a virtue out of necessity; offering, several-day multi-stop flights at low prices.

The CAA Zambesi service

In 1953 Central African Airways, instituted a low fare alternative to the regular airlines flights, the “Zambesi” service. This service took four days (with night-stops) instead of the 30 hours of the BOAC/SAA flights.



A C.A.A. Viking at Salisbury (Belevdere) airport.

CAA flight by Vickers Viking

	Arrive	Loc	Depart
Day1		London Victoria terminal	0645
		London Airport	0815
		Malta	Night Stop

Day2		Wadi Haifa	Night Stop
Day3		Entebbe or Nairobi	Night Stop
Day4	1230	Ndola	
	1450	Lusaka	
	1635	Salisbury	

After the introduction of the Vickers Viscount by CAA the airline continued with its “Zambesi” service to London as an alternative to the major airlines. Again it could not compete on time of flight but did offer a 10% reduction of costs. However, it was a leisure journey no longer, being a 30 hour trip with refuelling stops.

CAA flight by Vickers Viscount

	Arrive	Loc	Depart
Day1		London Victoria terminal	1330
		London Airport	1500
	1840	Rome	1940
	2350	Benghazi	0035
Day2	0425	Wadi Haifa	0520
	0715	Khartoum	0800
	1310	Entebbe	1355
	1635	Ndola	1730
	1905	Salisbury	

The Colonial Coach service

Competition for CAA came from Hunting-Clan/Airwork who, in the mid 1950s, instituted a “Colonial Coach” Vickers Viking service to central Africa. These two companies came to a code-sharing agreement whereby they alternated in running the weekly service. Just like CAA this service also took 4 days with night-stops.



Hunting-Clan Viscount “Colonial Coach” at Ndola.

Hunting-Clan/Airwork flight by Vickers Viking

	Arrive	Loc	Depart
Day1		London Victoria Terminal	0645
		Bovingdon or Blackbushe	0900
	1230	Nice	
	1705	Malta	Night Stop
Day2		El Adem	(+ 4 hours)
		Wadi Haifa	
		Khartoum	Night Stop

Day3	Juba		(fuel stop if required)
	Entebbe	lunch	1510
	Nairobi		1700 Night Stop
Day4	Salisbury		

in 1960, both of these companies merged into British United Airways. BUA continued to operate the Colonial Coach service and it upgraded its equipment to the Vickers Viscount. Just like CAA, it was a direct, approximately 30 hour journey with refuelling stops.

Many other charter companies have operated flights to central Africa, too many to name!

Conversion

In due course, and as the African Nations became independent, Many companies that had been running “Colonial Coach services” converted their operation to scheduled airline flights. As a scheduled flight they had to provide a realistic service and converted to modern advanced aircraft such as the DC-6. These flights became direct flights with refuelng stops.

And Now?

In more recent times, as passengers, we have been packed (the term “Sardine Can” is appropriate), into aeroplanes, given movies to watch on a 4” x 2” screen, that you wouldn’t pay to watch in a cinema. Fed plastic meals on plastic trays and been ignored, if at all possible, by cabin attendants (There are no longer any Air Hostess’s around to look after us). And - you can’t see anything of the countryside from 35,000 feet.

We have been flown in Boeing 707s and Boeing 747s (where one spends eight hours listening to the wind whistling down the outside of the fuselage) and spent much of the flight trying to decipher the noises that come over the speaker system and the accents of these same cabin attendants!

Well, yes; flying today is about as cheap a way to travel as you can get and granted I’m an anachronism. BUT; I am afraid that the days of interesting, comfortable flying and the romance of long-distance travel are gone forever. I for one, regret the change!