

1 July

Fr JOHN WEISSKOPF

8 May 1848 – 1 July 1883

Born in Zingsheim, Germany, John Weisskopf died in Pandamatenga, on the Zimbabwe border with Botswana, 60 kms south of Victoria Falls. He was 35. Much of what we know of him was written by him in his letters. He describes Henri Depelchin's final address to the gathered six missionaries and four helpers who set out on the 1880 journey north from old Tati. Depelchin encouraged them to love one another as the only consolation they would have in the coming expedition. There were two wagons, each drawn by 16 oxen with some other oxen and goats as part of their company. He describes the journey in detail; the mimosa bushes, the dry land, empty river beds and the infrequent water holes. He tells us how the wagons were looted at one point and how a protruding tree root shook one wagon tumbling a helper, a Mr Walsh, out and how a wagon wheel ran over him. The accident delayed them for two weeks.

On arrival, he describes the life they led for three years' 'struggle for our existence'; the gardens they built, the relations with the traders and hunters, their - especially his - deteriorating health. After his death, Fr Bartholomew Kroot described his 'humility, simplicity, aversion to ostentation, his patience energy and wit. ... Together with Law, Terorde, de Wit and so many others who have left us, he is one of the glories of the Society of Jesus'.

On 30 April, 1989, the diocese erected a cross as a shrine to 'the first heralds of the gospel in Hwange'. The plaque contains Weisskopf's name and those of four others.

