

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

ECONOMIC AWAKENING IN THE COLONY OF NORTHERN RHODESIA

A journey into the Luangwa Valley in the first decades of the 20th century meant an arduous and often adventurous affair: Steep marches on foot on the Escarpment, plagues of tsetse flies, dangerous encounters with lions, loneliness and lack of water. At times access to the valley was even officially barred, so that sleeping sickness and nagana disease, carried by the tsetse flies, could not get out of the valley and into the uplands. Consequently the Luangwa valley remained for decades spared from European influences, untouched and authentic.

While at the Luangwa, as ever, time seemed to stand still, around it a modern colony rapidly developed. Everywhere stocks of wild animals diminished, and people were forcing their way into hitherto unsettled rural regions. Construction of roads propelled under high pressure to shorten the long transport routes and make travelling more convenient. In the first years of colonisation European women would travel exclusively in the machila, a hammock on one or two wooden poles, carefully transported by African bearers. Behind these machila-bearers the native porters would walk, balancing the Europeans' worldly goods on their heads. In the hierarchy these were lower than the machila-bearers. European men by contrast travelled by bicycle, accompanied by a 'bicycle boy', whose job it was to carry the bicycle over bad sections of the route or through marshes. A stretch of more than 50 km could be covered by such a baggage team in a



Young dancers, 1931, Schomburgk's Expedition (SLUB Dresden, page 234)

day. A new innovation was the so-called bush-cart or garetta, preferred by the ladies for riding out to High Tea. It consisted of a wooden seat with a sunshade and curtains, on top of a bicycle wheel, and was pushed and pulled along by two bearers. Donkey carts and rickshaws were also tried out. In Fort Jimmy (an abbreviation for Fort Jameson, today Chipata) an attempt was made to tame four zebras, in order to yoke them to an ox-cart, but the animals remained unpredictably snappy; nor were they able to be ridden because their backbones are too soft for such loads.

At this time the North Charterland Exploration Company (NCEC) built up a successful transport business. It took hundreds of bearers under contract and organised the exchange of goods between the young colony and the motherland. From Chinde in the Zambezi Delta on the Indian Ocean a steamer transported the required import goods such as fabrics and household articles to the transshipment point at Tete. From there treks with 200 to 300 bearers started, each of whom hauling a load of approximately 20 kg. To reach Fort Jameson they would be underway for up to ten weeks. On the return journey, after a long palaver, they would carry the colonists' export goods to Tete: cotton, beeswax, tobacco, red chillies and ivory. Nobody wanted to carry chillies, because they would pulverise on the way, covering the bearer and his belongings with dust. There was as certain

romantic idealism surrounding the weeks-long treks, and it is said that they were often conducted in cheerful mood. Around 1918 however this form of transport came to an end when rapid economic development made the



Dr. Livingstone being carried in a hammock-like machila

orders from Northern Rhodesia more and more complex. Billiard tables, pianos and agricultural motors could no longer be divided into portable 20-kg loads, and so the NCEC was forced to replace the bearers with ox-carts.

Admittedly these posed new concerns: vehicles needed better and wider paths than columns of bearers; they also had to be provided with numerous depots along the way, supplying replacement animals and wagon parts. The oxen were susceptible to disease and quickly became foot-sore, therefore they were fitted with horseshoes. At times lions attacked the rear wagons of the cavalcades which could be several kilometres long.

All of these difficulties encouraged the colonial administration eventually to expedite the building of railways. By 1924 even the oxen treks were obsolete and transport times were shortened to one week.

Until the railway in Nyasaland heralded the start of a new, industrial age, the 500 km long link between Fort Jameson and Broken Hill (today Kabwe) was kept alive by the dutiful mail runners. It took three weeks for the mail runners in their red uniforms to run between the two administrative centres. In the Luangwa Valley they wore heavy overcoats in addition, which were supposed to keep the searing heat from their bodies.

REST STATION 'THE GOOD HUNTER'

Somewhere in the middle of the stretch between Lusaka and Chipata lies the small modest village of Kacholola. Its name goes back to Sydney Spencer Broomfield, who offered newly opened Government Rest House Bungalows for Travellers here in 1951. His nickname Kacholola means 'good hunter'.

Broomfield could look back on a colourful life as a doctor, pearl fisher, ivory hunter and farmer before settling down here. His bungalow complex remained open until the early 21st century, albeit its offer became ever poorer, finally not even including electricity for cool drinks. At last the tradition-rich 'Kacholola Rest House' completely closed its doors. A few years ago however the renovated complex reopened once again.



Adventurous makeshift bridge, 1931, Schomburgk's Expedition (SLUB Dresden, see p. 234)

HANS SCHOMBURGK'S PIONEER JOURNEY 1931/1932

FIRST MOTORISED CROSSING OF THE LUANGWA VALLEY

Hans Schomburgk's African expeditionary journey of 1931/1932 with its first motorised crossing of the Luangwa Valley is just as fascinating a story. Schomburgk was at that point in time already over fifty years of age and an experienced connoisseur of the African wilderness; he had also walked through the Luangwa Valley from west to east in 1907 as a young big-game hunter.

Born in 1880 in middle-class Hamburg, he was drawn to South Africa at the tender age of 17, where he worked on a farm and took part in the Boer War as a dispatch rider for the British Natal Police. His thirst for adventure led him into the police service in Northern Rhodesia, where he quickly became enthusiastic about the wilderness at the British outpost, traversing the vast country as a big-game hunter. He thereby discovered unknown bodies of water in Southern Angola and identified the link between tsetse flies and sleeping sickness. He successfully captured some rare wild animals and shipped them to Europe (among others the first

pygmy hippopotamus, hitherto deemed extinct). Then a process of maturing began and Schomburgk recognised how dramatic the changes were for the people of Africa and how much of a threat unbridled hunting was to the animal world. In 1912 he finally exchanged the firearm for the film camera. The wild adventurer became a thoughtful explorer, researcher of Africa and just as quickly a pioneer in German wildlife film-making. In the following decades he undertook numerous journeys through Africa, making documentaries and feature films and writing travelogues and non-fiction books; he compiled a comprehensive ethnographic African collection, was soon accounted THE German expert on Africa and was meanwhile even nominated as the military attaché to the Liberian Embassy in London. He was a jack of all trades and remained thirsty for knowledge throughout his life. Yet because of his half-Jewish origins, despite his fame, the Nazi regime imposed a gagging order on him in 1940. While his works later became widespread and popular in the GDR (East Germany), in West Germany Schomburgk fell almost into oblivion after the war. However his texts show a deep respect for all life in Africa and a philosophical wisdom that was still rare among travellers to Africa in his time. What particularly interests us at this point, out of all his African travels, is that motorised crossing of the Luangwa Valley, which all of his local contemporaries had declared, shaking their heads, to be impossible:

Schomburgk and his seven European companions—including his wife, a photographer, scientists and technicians—as well as numerous helpers from Zululand led an unusual baggage train: two open-top vehicles and two light trucks with the trademark 'Opel-Blitz', which had been specially refitted for use under challenging conditions. Herein were stowed the expensive film cameras, recording equipment and still-cameras, tripods, binoculars, spare parts, tools and gifts for exchange, as well as four bicycles for particularly difficult road conditions. The Schomburgks had even brought their small dog, Putty.

'CIRCUS' WAS WHAT SCHOMBURGK DUBBED THE COLOURFUL BAGGAGE TRAIN, BECAUSE EVERYWHERE PEOPLE FLOCKED TO SEE IT WHEREVER IT TURNED UP

Against the advice of the British administration the 'Circus' set its wheels rolling from Lundazi in the direction of the Luangwa Valley. The valley, for its part, had been kept under wraps as a barred area for a long time because of the widespread tsetse flies, so that animal epidemics and sleeping sickness would

not spread into the upland regions. Only gradually did the colonial administration take the first steps in surveying the valley, in order to build roads in the future. From both sides at that time only dirt tracks and paths led down to the Luangwa. No one had ever managed—nor had it probably even occurred to them—to cross the valley in a motor vehicle. But Schomburgk did not allow himself to be deterred, putting his faith in his expeditionary equipment, experience and technical skill.

Very soon after Lundazi the road deteriorated, and the 'Circus' followed, at snail's pace, a swathe from an old road project, once cut through the Miombo forest but never further developed. Schomburgk described how the indigenous people feared this forest because it attracted lightning. Even for his fellow European travellers the dry forest was disconcerting. Many a time the engineer would inspect the vehicles because he could identify the peculiar loud cracking noises of seed capsules springing up only as mechanical faults and would not believe Schomburgk's botanical explanation. And the cicadas buzzed loudly in a way that made the engineer seriously fear leaky valves.

Difficult journey through the Luangwa Valley, 1931, Schomburgk's Expedition (SLUB Dresden, p. 234)



THEN BEGAN THE DESCENT INTO THE VALLEY, THE VEHICLES ALMOST TIPPING OVER ON THE SLOPES

Then began the descent into the valley. Branches and mattocks were now in constant use for getting over the many small tributaries. On the slopes the vehicles almost tipped over. Often they could move forward only a centimetre at a time using the pulley. All of this in the utmost October heat and under tiresome tsetse fly attacks. Even then the 'road conditions' were not the biggest problem. Cool water had to be constantly supplied for the two vehicles, which threatened to overheat, and since the Luangwa tributaries dry up in October as a rule, topping up with cool water was the greatest worry and logistical challenge. Washing and taking showers had to be suspended. After days of exertion the expedition reached the village of Chama. Here the people created quite a commotion because they had never seen a car before. Schomburgk was thrilled to find, among the Senga in Chama, original African traditions and hospitality still in existence. He managed to engage additional bearers and helpers here, because meanwhile he was concerned about the morale in the group. The difficult battle for every kilometre was straining

everyone's nerves, and with thirty men from the village he hoped to progress more quickly.

So the 'Circus' battled on with difficulty through the virgin wilderness. At every sandy river bed there were hours of waiting before a boardwalk could be laid down, across which the vehicles could be pulled. Between the river beds, in the dense forest, toppled trees or rocks had to be cleared out of the way. There was plenty of food, because the area was very rich in game. But everywhere there was a lack of water. When the expedition camped one day on a hill, they discovered a fresh water spring in an enclosed basin on 'Kapanta Mpasi'. For the rest of that day the exhausted group luxuriated in the small bathing pool.

Finally they reached the Luwumbu River, one of the largest tributaries of the Luangwa - one that flowed all year round - and the border of the district between Lundazi and Isoka. There was even a new bridge. Schomburgk had engaged the thirty Senga from Chama to come only up to this point, where their settlement area also ended, because he expected to find better travelling conditions for their onward journey in the direction of Isoka.

In this however he was mistaken. Two American land surveyors, whom he met at the

Opel vehicle of Schomburgk's Expedition, 1931 (SLUB Dresden, see p. 234)



Traditional dancer, 1931, Schomburgk's Expedition (SLUB Dresden, see p. 234)

bridge and who almost took him for a Fata Morgana (mirage), confirmed his worries: it was true that there were a few paths in the stony hill country beyond Luwumbu, but before a navigable road could be built, the two cartographers must first complete their work. And while up to now there had only been rather flat and sandy territory to overcome, the expedition would now have to navigate mountainous stretches full of boulders and rocks. Now Schomburgk could not yet manage without those thirty helpers from Chama. But the men went on strike. There began a long palaver, at the end of which the Senga declared themselves prepared to march on as far as the next village. Eight of the Senga deserted on the way, but the others kept their word. At the village of Mpeta Schomburgk hoped to meet the two land surveyors again, but they meanwhile, after waiting in vain, had set off on an elephant hunt.

The adventurers had still not reached the Luangwa. The difficult, deep-sand river-beds now lay behind them, and the administration in Isoka had had temporary bridges constructed

across numerous deep valley cuts in the mountain country lying before them. But all of these were much too light for the two-ton trucks in Schomburgk's wagon-train.

THEREFORE IT REMAINED A BATTLE FOR EACH KILOMETRE. BRIDGES HAD TO BE UNDERPINNED AND REINFORCED, STEEP SLOPES BEHIND EACH LOWLAND STREAM HAD TO BE OVERCOME

In villages they passed through now lived members of the proud Bemba kingdom. Schomburgk was anxious meanwhile whether or not he would be in time to leave the valley before the start of the rainy season.

Then suddenly they were standing in front of the bridge over the Luangwa. After all the bridge collapses of the past weeks, with their breaking wooden slats, Schomburgk now no longer had the nerve to watch how his vehicles would make it across the Luangwa bridge, which at this time was four metres above the surface of the water. However all went well and the bridge held. On the same day his dog Putty went missing, but the cavalcade made an immediate about-turn and found the runaway again.

The expedition spent their last evening in the Luangwa Valley at the village of Chinyasi, lying beneath a notorious pass called the 'Jordan pass', which marks the watershed between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. This opening in the Muchinga Escarpment had hitherto been deemed impassable for lorries, but Schomburgk's team had already overcome worse things when they stood before the pass the next day. They scaled the slope without great difficulty and continued directly on to Isoka.

The incumbent representative of British colonial administration could hardly believe his eyes when the exhausted troop appeared before him and immediately issued the expedition with a certificate for their incredible feat of crossing the intrinsically impassable Luangwa Valley by motor vehicles.

THE ADVENTURES OF PAUL GRAETZ

WITH THE BOAT 'SAROTTI' ON A CROSSING THROUGH AFRICA

Only at its border did one extraordinary expedition brush the Luangwa Valley, yet it deserves a mention: The German Paul Graetz had accomplished a much-admired journey by car through Africa from Dar es Salaam to Swakopmund between 1907 and 1909. Two years later the irrepressible adventurer embarked on a second, even more exotic crossing. This time he hoped to cover the distance from the mouth of the Zambezi to the mouth of the Congo, on the Atlantic, in an 8.20 metre long motorboat.

He travelled the Zambezi and Lake Nyasa in the company of a French film photographer and then had the boat 'Sarotti' tugged, dragged and pushed 240 km along the Stevenson Road over the mountains in the area of the Luangwa's source. This rough-going lasted five weeks; then the expedition foundered, because a tragic hunting accident with a wounded buffalo cost the Frenchman his life and gave Graetz life-threatening injuries as well.

Paul Graetz survived, but only with a lot of luck and under dramatic circumstances, which however did not stop him from resuming the failed journey the following year. This time he navigated the Congo in the opposite direction with a new boat, because the Sarotti had meanwhile fallen over the Mumbatuta Falls into the Luapula and sunk. With the 'Hygiama' he reached the Luapula in December 1912 and had thereby now successfully traversed the continent in a motorboat.

Some villages still look like in the days of Paul Graetz



Tsetse fly control post along Great East Road

GREAT EAST ROAD AND LUANGWA BRIDGE

From April 1924 Sir Herbert Stanley had held the office of first Governor of Northern Rhodesia and he considered it unacceptable to have to travel through the three colonies of Southern Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa and Nyasaland in order to get from Broken Hill to Fort Jameson, both within Northern Rhodesia. Therefore he commissioned the province administrator, E. H. Lane-Poole in Petauke, to draft a possible route for a road through the impassable territory. The latter thereupon navigated the Luangwa in a dugout canoe and identified a potential crossing. In 1926 a government agent relocated the route a little further south, nearer to the Portuguese East Africa border; then the construction work began. After three years the 300 soldiers involved had constructed a dusty, two-lane track, which, although it snaked around every large tree or termite hill and had to be blocked off in every rainy season, otherwise drastically reduced the travelling time. On average a journey from Broken Hill or Lusaka to Fort Jameson now took two weeks, and it was approached like an expedition. For you could hardly count on help in the event of accidents or vehicular breakdown; instead travellers had to be able to help themselves frequently, when wooden bridges on the way collapsed or burned, or if fallen trees were blocking the road. In the darkness lions would prowl around their makeshift overnight camp. In these first years, crossing the Luangwa at



Colonial road map, 1948

the level of Simambo proved to be particularly adventurous, because in the absence of a pontoon, several dugout canoes would be tied together and wooden planks laid across them, on which the fully unloaded vehicle would then be transported. Only in 1933, was the first 275 metre long Luangwa Bridge completed, a good 20 km south of the ferry. The building material was acquired with the financial backing of the wealthy Beit Trust from England, founded by the BSAC Director Alfred Beit, who died in 1906. At the same time the stretch of road was straightened, and more than twenty new bridges now spanned smaller streams. In 1934 the Great East Road was officially opened. Until the 1960s the particularly curvy and steep section on either side of the Luangwa remained confined to fixed times for heavy vehicles: every day from 2 a.m. to 2 p.m. for vehicles from east to west and from 2 p.m. to 2 a.m. for all vehicles travelling east. The Great East Road was not tarred until after the independence of Zambia.