

THROUGH PORTUGUESE WEST AFRICA¹

IN the course of the last three years I have made several expeditions into Portuguese West Africa; to the Guinea Islands, as well as to the mainland colony of Angola. I will endeavour with the help of a good series of slides to give you a fair impression of what is going on there and what there is to be seen.

As some of you know, I am a collector of natural history objects and go about with a butterfly-net and a cyanide-bottle; but at the same time, one of the very necessary attributes of a collector is to be observant, so, in the course of my wanderings in remote parts, I often run across information that proves useful to those interested in trade and commerce who have not the opportunity to travel that I have. I hope, in this case, that all of you will find something of interest in what I have to say.

I took a ship from Lisbon which put in at all the Portuguese ports on the West Coast: Portuguese Guinea; the islands of Principe and São Thomé; Cabinda and the ports of Angola; and, finally, I landed at Lobito Bay. From there I went up the Benguella railway to the borders of the Belgian Congo and thence by car, to the Cape-Congo railway, afterwards passing through Rhodesia and out to Beira on the East Coast. The time I took between Lobito on the west and Beira on the east probably constitutes a record, though a modest one, for crossing the continent, as I accomplished the journey in under twelve days, a distance of 3,025 miles. I say a modest record, for it is a fact that anyone who has a mind to, can make this journey to-day in less time than I did. This will show you what giant strides the railways have made in this part of the world.

To begin with the Guinea Islands, I shall not be far wrong in saying that they are some of the most beautiful in the world. Looking at the island of Principe as you come to it from the sea, it presents a most astonishing outline. Like the others, it is of volcanic formation, though, of course, the volcanoes

¹ This paper was read at a Meeting of the African Society held at the Royal Society of Arts on 11th February 1929. For report of the Meeting see p. 291.



THE MOUTH OF THE PARROT RIVER, ISLAND OF PRINCEPE

[To face page 224.]



AT THE FISH MARKET ON THE ISLAND OF SÃO THOMÉ. OCTOPODA FOR SALE

[To face page 225.]

are no longer active, and one sees there gigantic masses of lava tumbled and thrown about in all directions by some previous eruption of great magnitude. My wife and I spent many months on these islands collecting insects. We had a camp up in the mountains and made some very rare captures. Nobody had been there collecting for many years, so we had the field entirely to ourselves, and were in consequence very lucky in the number of specimens unknown to science that we took. Nature on these islands seems to have set out to see how extravagant she could be in creating both slender peaks and huge dome-like mountain masses that are really remarkable.

Some years ago Príncipe harboured many tsetse flies, but the Portuguese took the scourge in hand and have cleared them out by various means. One very drastic method was the slaying of all the dogs and other domesticated animals on the island. Another was getting the occupants of the prisons to go through the bush and along the rivers with a sticky substance smeared on their clothes which attracted the flies and caught them in that way. Eventually after three or four years of intensive labour they got rid of the tsetse fly.

I used to go round the island by canoe when I was collecting. The vegetation, as you may see by these pictures, is very dense and forms the chief difficulty to those wishing to climb the peaks. I spent one or two nights on the top of the central peak (3,300 feet), where I had a camp and from thence I used to take photographs in the early morning, some of the results quite surpassing my expectations in the quality of their beauty. One looks down from the central peak to the sea, thousands of feet below, and as the island is, of course, quite small, it is possible to view it, when the clouds pass away, in its complete outline with one *coup d'œil*, so to speak. Príncipe is about seventeen miles long and fourteen broad—just a collection of peaks, and from one it is possible to see all the others, half a dozen or so sticking up like mushrooms above the clouds. So you can realise from this that it is a wonderful country for the mountaineer.

From Príncipe I will now take you to São Thomé, the next island. Here you have the blue sea beating against the black lava of a palm-fringed coast, forming the most marvellous

pictures. The soil is very fertile and great quantities of cocoa are exported from this island as well as from Principe, with copra and other tropical produce in addition. Looking up the steep ravines that intersect the central massif of the island, it will be seen that cocoa is planted up the mountain-sides, even on the very steepest slopes, but the ground even here is very fertile and gives good crops. The volcanoes, long since dead of course, are now covered with tropical forests, and the flowers one encounters there are rare and beautiful. One can look right down into some of the craters, some of which are filled with water, forming small lakes which are surrounded by tree ferns; however, the water is usually covered with bright green water-weeds.

The central peak of São Thomé rears its head 6,000 feet above the level of the sea, and there again I camped right on the edge of a great precipice where I collected various specimens of flowers and insects. While making the climb one passes through forests of cinchona trees which were apparently sown there many years ago. I think the plant was brought over from Brazil, and the whole peak is now a mass of these trees. Along the road, as I went up, natives were collecting the bark and bringing it down to be dried and packed for export.

As one might expect, in the surrounding seas great quantities of fish are caught by the natives, and fishing is a prominent pastime of these people. All kinds of very wonderful fish are brought into the market every morning, including shark, sword-fish, sting-ray, etc., and turtles of the hawksbill variety that produce the shell of commerce. Some of the methods which the natives have of catching fish are most interesting. Some use a cast net, a small-mesh round net, weighted at the ends. It is thrown in a very expert manner; the man holds a string in his hand which is attached to the centre of the net, and as it is thrown he gives this a jerk and it bells out, falling flat on the ocean bed, thus catching the fish by their gills. That is one of their methods. During the night they also go out in canoes with flares: the fish jump up to the light and are caught in that way. There are many other different methods that are well worth a closer study than I was able to give them. Close by on the mainland, the natives manufacture beautiful light-weight canoes. Looking at these

craft and their neat make, one realises what a very straight eye the native must have to turn out canoes like these out of mere logs of soft wood. They are so light in weight that a young boy can lift one up and carry it with ease. They have also the great advantage of being easily propelled.

I will just mention the coffee and cocoa industry. The trees bear large crops, and on one occasion I counted as many as a hundred and fifty pods on one cocoa tree. The islanders pick the coffee and cocoa and run it down in Decauville trucks to the central plantation factory to be dried, hulled and shelled as the case may be.

Some of the big estates employ as many as six or seven hundred natives, and I found that the men were very well treated. They had mostly come from the mainland. Of course there are the natives who live on the island, but the labour is mostly imported. The Portuguese owners have built some remarkable hospitals and huts for these natives, some of the best housing conditions that I have ever seen. One sometimes hears that these men are kept at the factories and cannot return to their own country, but this is only partly true. They have their wives and children with them, and it struck me that they were being very well looked after and fed and certainly not overworked. When they return to their homes on the mainland, as far as I could see, they went back better and stronger men than when they came. Of course the labour question in Portuguese West Africa is a very old one—four hundred years old—and a labour policy is very difficult to change once it has been started. The labour conditions in Portuguese West Africa, however, are not quite so bad as they have been made out.

The plantation manager's house is usually built in the old Portuguese style with a courtyard and gate leading into it. The original planters on São Thomé were the old monarchists, and one finds these men of the old aristocracy most hospitable and most likeable. They were very kind to me and did everything that was possible to make my wife and myself comfortable. Many of them still stick to their old national dress and riding equipment. They breed a very fine type of horse—half-Arabs, many of them—and they are great horsemen.

Right up in the mountains there are a considerable amount

of cattle, and some very fine studs of horses are to be seen. The island is apparently very suitable for all kinds of domestic stock, and I do not think there is any kind that does not do well there. I was told that the life of a mule is something like thirty years. Some fine buildings are to be seen and the plantations are well laid out and run on the best lines. Some of them run into as much as 45,000 hectares of land planted almost entirely with cocoa and coffee.

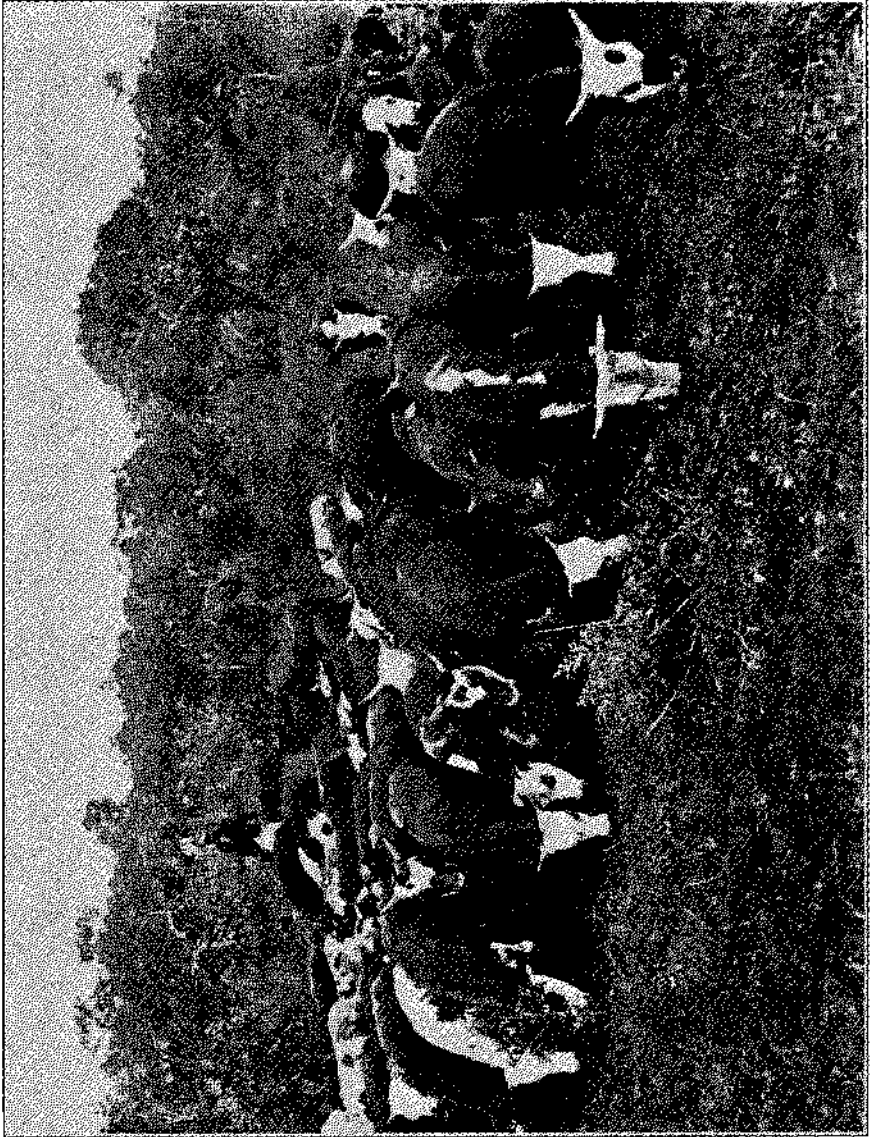
A great many of the flowers on São Thomé and also on Príncipe are peculiar to these two islands and found nowhere else in the world. Of begonias there are something like seven unique species on São Thomé alone. One of these is a giant form which grows up to ten feet in height and bears beautiful red berries : it is the only begonia that has a fruit of this kind, and yet another species has a very sweet perfume. Begonias do not as a rule smell at all, and, as far as I know, this is the one exception. Of those which have been described from São Thomé, six are peculiar to that island. If you are a botanist or a collector, it is an island with very great attractions indeed.

Another very beautiful flower which is found on the mainland as well, but which has evidently been brought across to the Guinea Islands by the current, is a delicate pink water crinum lily. One finds it in the backwaters and up the bigger rivers. It is a very beautiful thing, and I tried to bring back some bulbs, but they grow so deep down in the river-bed, three or four feet, and are so very difficult to get out, that I had to abandon the attempt. However, I brought back some numbers of plants, including the big begonia. Mr. Joicey of The Hill, Witley, a friend of mine who is a great orchid grower, has raised three very fine plants from the seeds I brought back, so it is now, I hope, established in England.

Steamers from Lisbon put into these islands, and one sometimes gets a complete day on each of them, which, of course, is of great interest for people making this voyage. They thus have time to go into the interior and to see something of life there.

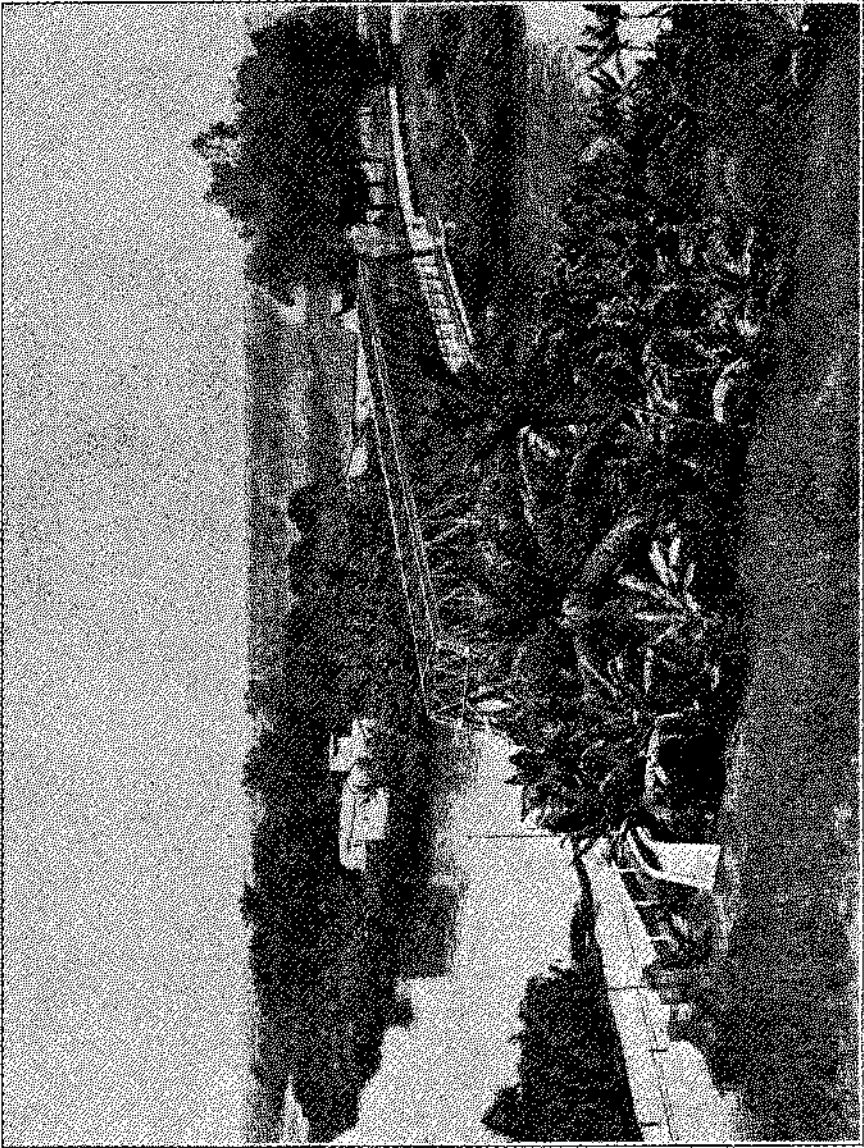
We will now leave them and go across to the mainland :

The capital of Angola is Loanda, where our ship called, but



HALF-BRED HEREFORDS ON A RANCH IN ANGOLA

[To face page 228.]



THE GREAT BRIDGE OVER THE CATUMBELA RIVER NEAR LOBITO IN ANGOLA, THE TERMINAL OF THE BENGUELA RAILWAY. SUGAR CANE PLANTATIONS IN THE DISTANCE

time forbids me to say much of this place except that it is one of the oldest West Coast ports where the Portuguese originally established themselves about 350 years ago. Going further down the coast we come to Amboim. In the hinterland a great deal of coffee is grown. A fine jetty has been built out into deep water, but the anchorage is unprotected and dangerous. After Amboim we touched at Old Benguella, and then reached Lobito Bay, the end of my sea voyage.

At Lobito a fine, new wharf has just been finished to accommodate large ships. I found, on getting to know something about the country inland, that stock-rearing is one of the great industries and several big companies go in largely for cattle. Stock evidently do very well over the south and central part of the country. They are shipped in fairly large numbers to the Belgian Congo through the port of Matadi and also to São Thomé, and the trade is increasing. There will be a still greater export into the Congo territory as soon as the railway is through. A great deal of building is going on at Lobito itself. It was a busy place, as thousands of Belgian rails and sleepers had just arrived and were being transported to railhead. It is going to be the great port of the future, and many people are looking for building sites and buying up plots for offices and so forth. The Benguella railway is going to develop enormously the whole of South Central Africa, especially the Katanga and those Rhodesian copper mines of the Congo Border Concession of which we have heard so much lately—Nkana, the Sable Antelope, Bwana Mkubwa and others. It is almost entirely a British enterprise, and its value to these great mining concerns will be incalculable. Lobito is just a great big solid sand-spit, running out into the sea for three or four miles parallel to the coast and enclosing a wide bay with very good anchorage, enabling the largest ships to draw up close to leeward of its sheltering arm. Buildings are extending right along this finger of land, and in years to come the mainland will probably be built over. The coastal belt is very dry with practically no rainfall at all. When you get over the coastal mountains, however, climatic conditions improve, and agriculture can be carried out with success. Practically the whole of the coast is composed of big limestone cliffs; but oil palms

and sugar-cane thrive exceedingly along the edges of the river-mouths, where there are rich deposits of alluvial soil. Maize is one of the great products of the country at the present time, and it is mostly grown by natives themselves. Very few white men are engaged in the production of this crop.

Passing up the railway line from Lobito, one is at once struck by the good workmanship and good materials put into everything. Everything is of the very best, and the stations are well designed and artistically finished. Even some of the employees' houses have parquet floors and are made of cement and brick. The rolling stock is the best procurable, and a fine new restaurant and sleeping-car train has been put on the line, and I saw six of those monster Garratt double bogie engines at work there. The whole thing has been wonderfully done and is entirely of British material, making one realise what a great outlet this has been for British enterprise.

Some little distance after leaving the station of Lobito before reaching Benguella, and before turning inland, the rail runs over a very fine bridge. It is about 240 metres in one span, one of the five biggest in Africa, I believe. In a hot country like this it must be a great proposition to build such a bridge. Looking across the alluvial flats as one passes, one sees them covered by broad plantations of sugar-cane, and, thereafter, the rail runs into Benguella and then negotiates the coastal ramparts lying behind, and enters what is known as the Lengue Gorge.

The Lengue Gorge and Ravines are crossed by three viaducts, one built on a similar plan to the bridge over the Victoria Falls. It must have been a very big proposition to get the railway through such an arid and inhospitable region. I think Sir Robert Williams, who is the founder of the railway, commenced operations there something like twenty-five years ago, and it is only quite recently that railhead has reached its objective at the Belgian frontier.

There is good shooting in the southern portion of Angola, and those fortunate enough to get permission can hunt the giant sable antelope. There are not, however, a great many of them and a licence to shoot one is difficult to obtain. Other big game animals to be found in this southern country include

elephant, rhino, hippo, giraffe, kudu, oryx, eland, roan, springbok and most of the other game animals of south Central Africa. It is a very fine game country indeed.

From Huambo, which is going to be the capital of the country under its present official title of Nova Lisboa, I made different excursions north and south. It is a great centre from which a number of roads radiate. Taking a motor-car from there, I made trips up and down the country. Nova Lisboa has become a great centre for the railway works. There one finds the central locomotive workshops, which are just being finished. Probably they are some of the biggest and best-equipped machine shops in the sub-continent. The main building is a very large one, measuring perhaps 250 feet square, beside which a small town has grown up for the personnel.

Referring to farming enterprises on either side of the railway, one may mention the Angola Estates. It is an English Company, and they have some very large farms carrying fine herds of stock, including a lot of half-bred Herefords. The Benguella highlands are proving to be a very fine cattle country indeed. There is practically no tsetse fly anywhere in this portion of the country, which is a very great boon when one comes to think of the other parts of Africa one knows where the tsetse fly is such a danger to life and the scourge seems almost impossible to cope with.

The roads I found exceedingly good all over Angola, acting as feeders to the railway, motor-cars and trek-oxen being used on them. I do not know what has happened since the Boers have left the country, but when they were there they did most of the ox transport work. They took a great pride in their waggons and teams. At present one can buy a whole span of oxen, waggon complete, for about £100. By ox-waggon would, I suggest, be a very pleasant method of touring the country for a shooting party. One can get about anywhere and go hundreds of miles a day by car, north and south, along these fine roads. The southern part of Angola is probably the most interesting, as one can see there both the primitive Bushmen and the Kunama warrior-herdsmen tribes still living their lives on the borders of the Kalahari, quite untouched by the white man's civilisation that is pushing through

their country along the Benguella railway. But this southern part is still unexplored and is well worth a visit by anybody going out that way.

I met on the roads and in the villages beside them some very interesting types of native people. Like many primitive tribes, they pay great attention to their personal ornaments. Especially the hair comes in for attention, which is done or worked up in a very peculiar manner. One is used to seeing natives with their hair very closely set to the skull, but these people pull it out by tying it to small pieces of stick and helping it to grow by traction; in that way they lengthen it sometimes to a foot or more, and once having had it done up, I believe it lasts for years. The native belle does not have to visit the hairdresser once a week! Over on the eastern borders of the country, near the Congo frontier, the people are more fetish-ridden than in the desert country to the south. The villagers are entirely under the thumb of the fetish or medicine-men, who make gigantic masks of gourds with frightening features of plastered mud, and wear curious costumes made of strands of fibre cord sewn together to frighten the gullible.

On travelling through these wild countries one cannot forget the missionary element. The missions are the great centres of civilisation, perhaps more so in Angola than elsewhere. They do wonderful work. One of the biggest cathedrals I came across in Angola was built entirely by black labour. This was the life-work of a missionary of the Order of the Holy Ghost, Père Bonnefaux. I think he has been something like forty-seven years in the country. It is very wonderful to see such a huge building right in the heart of a wild country like this. From my pictures it will be seen what remarkable work has been put into the chancel and altar, and everything was made locally with the exception, probably, of the brass candlesticks. The altar was made of local green marble quarried and polished on the spot.

Going farther into the interior to the north-east, I took occasion to visit some more of the farms and plantations round the Bula-vula country, a very open part of the Angola uplands, and in places very much like Scotland. Parts of this area are practically treeless but beautifully watered. Beyond

this Bula-vula country one comes to the Kwanza Valley, the river being crossed by a four-span railway bridge of massive construction. In this neighbourhood are the Kohemba Falls, which are very beautiful, resembling in miniature the Zambezi Falls. The country round about is splendidly watered, where the growing of sisal and tobacco is now being taken up with vigour, and large crops of wheat are being grown under irrigation.

On approaching the Congo border the traveller passes over the Chifumadzi Flats, a rather sterile region which lies on the watershed of the Congo and Zambezi, and stretches as far as the eye can reach on either side of the railway line. During the rainy season these flats are entirely under water, and great flocks of wild-fowl congregate there in search of mud-fish and frogs which have taken up their residence in the burrow pits. To the south are the small lakes of Dilolo and Tembe, which are very little known and whose shores are inhabited by fisher-folk, the study of whom would provide anthropologists with a good deal of original data about these border tribes. It is interesting to note that the almost stagnant water which accumulates over these Flats in the rainy season has a tendency to run away slowly to the Congo Basin, and one gathers from this observation that the Congo watershed is gradually capturing the sources of the Zambezi.

After the Flats we reach the Congo border which runs along the Luao River. The railway has just been carried over this into the Belgian Congo. From Dilolo, the new railway station just over the frontier, I motored over to the Katanga mines. On going eastward the first mines one comes to are those of Musonoye and Ruwe. They are big open workings, and here all was hustle and bustle and dust, as the work is being hurried forward and the mines opened up to forestall the advent of the railway. Contractors were at work on buildings and earth-works, and contractors' lorries were cutting the roads to bits and pounding them to fine dust. Then came Fungarumi—here more work and new railway and mine cuttings. Then Tenke, where the new railway will join the Cape-Congo line. Then Likasi and La Panda leeching and concentrator plant of the Union Minière; after that Elisabethville.

I left Elisabethville by one of the bi-weekly mail trains

on my journey to Beira. There is little to be said about it, as most people know the route well, if not through having travelled along it, then through the local handbooks, so I will not detain you with more than a passing reference to this part of my journey. First comes the long and tedious wait at the rather dirty border station of Sakanya. Then comes Livingstone, hot and dusty at this time of the year. Then the Victoria Falls, at their lowest volume when I reached them in September, but still the eighth wonder of the world—the haunt of the world's honeymooners! The sprawling caravan-serai of the Falls Hotel, like Piccadilly or the Place Vendôme, is fast becoming one of the world's meeting-places.

Bulawayo—Salisbury—Beira! The Beira of the old days has gone, though the bad water and worse food still remain. There are improvements—the eighteen-hole golf course for one—and the health standard has risen greatly. Its future as a port, with the ever-changing attractions of other ports and railways, is in the lap of the gods. The reconstruction of the line embankment across the Pungwe Flats was nearing completion when I passed. A costly business, as, apart from the new bridge across the Pungwe, it includes many miles of reinforced concrete trestles to carry the line over the flooded and waterlogged areas.

But to hark back to the Lobito—Congo—Cape route: as I passed through Northern Rhodesia I heard on every hand wonderful reports of the richness of the new copper-fields there. A figure of 50,000,000 tons of ore was given me as having been proved on one property alone. Some say that it will prove to be the richest copper-field in the world. Rhodesians are, of course, fully alive to the possibility of this new Benguella route, and also look to the time when direct connection between some point on this railway and Livingstone is afforded them.

Investigations are now being undertaken with a view to putting such a scheme into effect, which, in the first instance, will probably be carried out by a combined air and rail service direct from Livingstone to Lobito Bay, making use, if possible, of the Zambezi and Lungwe—Bungwe waterways en route.

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