

TRADE AND TRAVEL IN EARLY BAROTSELAND

*The Diaries of George Westbeech
1885-1888*

AND
*Captain Norman MacLeod
1875-1876*

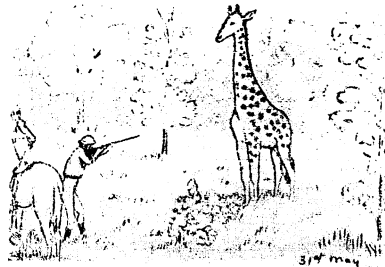
ILLUSTRATED WITH
THE SKETCHES OF
Lieutenant William Fairlie

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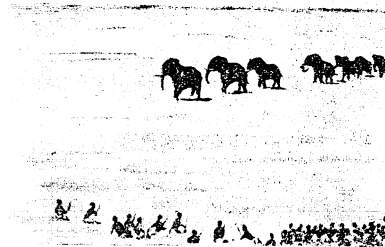
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THE DIARY OF NORMAN MACLEOD

1875-1876

January 19th, 1875. Engaged 4 boys, Zulus, for trip to Zambesi at 3/- a month, 2 as foreloupers, 1 cook, 1 groom.

29th. Back to Maritzburg.

30th. 13th P.A.L.I. marched in, come from Malta, to relieve

75th. Bought pointer 'Clem' for £3-10.

February 1st. Bought pointer 'King' £3. Got another, 'Dinah,' from Woodroffe.

5th. Bought 12 oxen from Hawkins, £10 each. Zulu, all inoculated.¹

7th. Started at last for our trip to Zambesi. Fairlie, myself, and Cowley,² a young fellow out here by way of learning farming. We had a wagon and span of oxen apiece, supplies for a year, 5 or 6 dogs. I had 2 horses, the others 1 each. My wagon stuck on the town hill. The oxen did not know their places, and the boy couldn't drive. Then I broke the disselboom.³

9th. Got to Howick with difficulty. Halted to get

10th. new disselboom. Shot a few ducks & snipe. Rain.

14th. Started again at 2.30. Borrowed a driver from a transport rider⁴ McIntosh, a good man. Soon put the oxen together. Rain every day. I shall only give a general account, as each day's notes are in the diary (Letts)⁵ for 1875.

16th. Got into a tremendous hail storm as we were going to outspan. Stones as big as bullets fell. Hurt my head and frightened

¹ Zulu oxen, a small native breed of cattle that was very hardy. They were inoculated against lungsickness, or pleuropneumonia, a disease of cattle introduced into South Africa in 1854. The yellow virus from the lungs of an animal dead of the disease was allowed to soak into a piece of twine, which was passed through a hole punched in the skin of the tail just above the tuft, tied in a loop, and left there. This induced a mild form of the malady, though it sometimes resulted in a loss of the tail.

² Dr. Holub calls him Frank Cowley, but his name appears to have been Richard.

³ The wagon pole.

⁴ One who freighted for hire, by ox wagon.

⁵ This diary has not been found.

April-June, 1875

wick, about 660 miles. I lost my best horse 'Guts' from inflammation of lungs¹ yesterday. Saw our first giraffe yesterday also. Bamangwato is a trading station with several stores. Most of the Zambesi traders load up & start from here. It is also a Kafir town, the capital of the Bechuana nation. Population said to be 10,000. Kama the present King is about 45 & seems a nice, intelligent fellow. He is a Christian and dresses as if to walk in Rotten Row. He is now stopping Boers coming in to hunt as they kill off everything for skins and he will not allow liquor to be taken in. The trade is feathers & ivory.

16th. Left Bamangwato for the Zambesi in company with George Dorehill, a young fellow who had been trading and hunting for 3 or 4 years. I will not continue daily records, which are in Letts diary for 1875 but just state generally that we travelled by the western and more direct road by the Kari Kari,² leaving the road for a bit and following the R. Nata from the drift to Matlomoganyani³ into road again. A great deal was heavy sand, and slow travelling, also long distances without water (once 3 days) and water generally only muddy pools. The weather was beautiful, not too hot.

Fairlie & Cowley each lost a horse close to Bamangwato, after which we had no sickness either amongst horses or oxen. We hunted every day and had fair sport, chiefly giraffe, but also buffalo, eland, quagga, koodoo, sable antelope, wildebeest, springbok, & elephant on the Nata R. and a rhinoceros. Also lots of pheasants, partridges, & guinea fowl. The thermometer in April & May were to vary from about 80 to 100 in the wagon during the day, from about 50 to 70 at daylight, but in June it got down to 44 at daybreak.

On the 13th June we arrived at Pantamatinka where the Zambesi traders leave their wagons while trading across the river.

¹ The African horsesickness. See sketch 100.

² This road led north from Shoshong past the eastern side of the Makarikari Salt Pan, and joined the Westbeech Road from Tati at Nwasha Pan.

³ Matlamanyane, a chain of four permanent waters on the road to the Zambezi. Nwasha Pan was the last of these towards the north.

June, 1875-July, 1875

Pantamatinka is about 400 miles from Bamangwato, and about 60 from the Zambesi at Impaireira,¹ where the Chobe joins, and where the crossing is. Wagons come within 12 miles of the river crossing through 2 narrow belts of fly (tsetse)² in the night, but go back to remain at Pantamatinka where we left ours for 7 months.

We waited on the Zambesi 5 weeks for permission from Sepopa, King of the Barotse people, to visit him, at Sesheke his capital on the northern bank and 60 miles up river. After the dearth of water it was a great pleasure to be camped on the river, to bathe every day, and have good water to drink. We shot a few buffalo, and there were elephants about, but we could not follow them, as we expected messengers from the King every day. One night a large troop of elephants came within 30 yds. of our camp, but it was too dark. We could not see even the outline.

At last we got to Sesheke in canoes. Our idea was to get shooting on the north side, where game is abundant, as no one can cross the river ever without the King's permission, and no white men hunt there, but the King's idea was to get all out of us he could, and give us nothing in return. After some time he sent us up the river to shoot sea cow. We saw several, but could not get one. Then another delay, and he sent us about 40 miles inland north for elephants, but he took care not to send us to a good place. We saw one troop. I shot one, an enormous one, tusks about 100 lbs. each, 7 ft. 5 in. long, but the King did not give them to me. We saw great quantities of other game of all sorts. Cowley shot two lions,³ but the game on the Zambesi flats on this bank of river was a marvellous sight, leche & pookoo buck, wildebeest & quagga, also buffalo.

Hearing wonderful stories of the annual elephant hunt which

¹ Impalera Island and Village. See note 2, page 32.

² The tsetse fly, which was confined to relatively well-defined areas. It transmits nagana, a virulent disease of domestic animals, hence the need to protect the oxen by crossing fly belts in darkness, when the fly is inactive.

³ Cowley was anxious to make a name as a lion hunter. In September, when he asked Sipopa where he could shoot lions, the King told him he seemed too young for it, but that his people would show him the animals. Four Africans took Cowley to the left bank of the Kasaya River, where he killed a lion that charged him determinedly.