

Letter to Thomas S. Livingstone, 10 October 1862

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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68 Rovuma Bay 10th Oct^r 1862.

My Dear Tom

We have been up the Rovuma 114 miles in a straight line from the coast but 156 by adding the Latitude & Longitude together, and having given Oswell an account of our voyage up from Zambesi to Johanna I now give you some information about our trip up this river. The Orestes is a fine large Man of war with 21, 68 powder guns came to Johanna as we were about to leave for this coast, and Captain Gardner very kindly offered to tow us over, and there by save our coals for our return. She walked away with the Pioneer as if she had nothing behind her. Up and down over huge waves, for it blew very fresh the Poor little Pioneer had to tumble & tear along till snap went a cable as thick as your thigh, and we had to get up stream on our own hook. And soon came into this bay. Captain Gardner went up with us for two days to see us fairly started. He turned at a little Lake called "Chidia" about 3 miles long & one wide. It lies among the hills, and before parting with our good friends we walked up to see it, and some ebony trees which were needed. I saw some bits of fossil wood lying on a sandstone rock. This we know as a sign that coal lies beneath and having said so was rather glad when a few days afterward I found bits of coal in the sand in the bed of Rovuma. the people knew that it would burn and said it came down with the water but they knew not whence

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While we were up the hills looking at the Lake a marine officer said he had been fired at by the natives three times - we did not believe it, as they seemed quite friendly and we were equally so with them,

but set a gaurd. On proceeding farther up we spent Sunday on the North bank and an old man having come to us & understood that we were quite friendly lots of people visited us - In the afternoon I walked up to their villages but found them very much alarmed. They shewed no surprise at our warship and we could make ourselves but little understood as the language differs much from those on the Zambesi. but seeing women and children all fleeing I called to a man not to fear as I was only looking at the country. He asked if I would drink & bought me a cup of native beer. there was much cultivation though the country was covered with thick forest & brush-wood which has always to be cleared away. Above this we found people living on sand banks in the River. They have villages on the land & plenty of corn stowed away in the woods but are afraid of being stolen themselves. Stealing & selling each other seems the only trade they have. In one village there were two human heads cut off. they tried to induce us to land among them but when we stopped it was only to make purchases and go on. At last a large party followed us evidently bent on mischief but we were kind to them and paid them well for dragging one of the boats a short distance. At a narrow part where the passage comes close to a high bank they began to fire shoot their arrows on us we stood and expostulated with them a long time - and having induced them to come to the boats gave them over thirty yards of cloth as a token of friendship. They repaid our kindness by telling us to go on and at once firing a volley from muskets and bows at us. Four bullets went through the sail of my boat. They evidently expected that we should run away and seeing that we did not they did. & on our return we only looked at each

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other. They had no cause whatever for wishing our blood. "We wont let white people go up this river." there are a lot of river pirates, and as soon whenas we passed them, all were friendly, and much trade is carried on by means of canoes. Seven canoes went with us three deep. They come down to buy salt with rice - I was glad that we used every means in our power to avoid collision but we see that slave slealers are blood thirsty murderers. The river has a table land on each

side which looks like hills 500 feet high till we get up about 60 or 70 miles. We then leave the hills & have what seems a large plain with small granite hills in front. This continues till we come among rocks in the stream with numerous passages between, through these small canoes pass with ease but our boats would have been smashed had we gone on as we returned. We were informed that about 30 miles in front the Rovuma is joined by the Lienda which comes from the hills on the East side of the Lake. The Rovuma comes from the West but is narrowed by rocks. Our object in coming was to ascertain if this river will afford a better outlet from the Lake region than that to which the Portuguese lay claim. We found the river unusually and excessively low. Tsetse abounds but should Englishmen be established on Lake Nyassa they will undoubtedly prefer carrying their commerce out by this outlet to paying dues to Portuguese for the Shire & Zambesi which they now virtually blockade against free trade. This looks a more healthy looking river than any we have seen - the rocky table land I have referred to rises from the banks though sometimes there is a mile of fine level alluvial soil between [...]

[...] unwilling to
[...] in the
[...] of the people on
the Shire who were more alarmed when we first came than the Makonde of Rovuma.

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To leave them now would be just leaving them to be eaten up by the Tette slavehunters. We propose therefore to go back and put Lady Nyassa on her Lake by way of Shire which is much more our country than it is Portuguese. In that land too the remains of dear Mama rest. Her body consecrates that soil and will always be interesting to us. She died in the cause to which our lives are consecrated. It took us 15 days to go up and 10 to come down. We know but little more than the river. The people cultivate oil seeds largely they put hives on the trees as at Londa & honey is plentiful. Cotton is cultivated and Ebony abundant their clothing is very scanty, and calico is in great demand. At our furthest point and at another part of the way we come to the slave route from

the lake to Quiloa(Kilwa) there an English merchant might introduce lawful trade with advantage to the cause of humanity if merchants would try and direct their trade so as to produce the greatest amount of good -

Your friend M^r Rae had to turn back with Captain Gardner from a little illness - we had fever in our party but it did not last long. The trip gave us a month in the boats - we never stopped except Sundays & one half day and came back pretty brown & tired. You will let AgnesRobert & Oswell have a reading of this but I dont like many people to see my letters. I shall write to Agnes next, but it will be a good while before I can give an account of our operations at Nyassa. We shall go back to Johanna Mohilla and then to the Zambesi. Captain Gardner wished me to meet him at Mozambique on New years day but I hope to be in the Zambesi then. God bless & guide you [...]