

Letter to Roderick I. Murchison, 4 December 1863, 10 [February 1864]

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Murchison's Cataracts 4 Dec^r
1863

My dear Sir Roderick

The Despatch containing
instructions for our withdrawal though dated
2^d Feby did not reach me till 2 July when the water
had fallen so much the Pioneer could not be taken
down to the sea. To improve the time therefore
between July & the flood of Dec^r I thought that I might
see whether a large river enters the Lake at the North
end and also verify the impression that most of the
slaves drawn to ZanzibarIboe & Mozambique
come from the Lake District. Our plan was to
sail round the East shore & North end of Nyassa, but
we very unfortunately lost our boat by five of
our natives trying to shew how much more clever
they were than five Makololo who had the management
of it. It broke away from them in a compacting
still reach of the river and [rushed] away like a shot
over the cataracts. We then went forward on foot
and now struck nor west so as to come to the
Latitude of the north end of the Lake without coming
in contact with Mazite or Zulus who have de-
populated its shores there. but we soon came to
a range of mountains running N. & S. The
valley on its Eastern base was 2000 feet above
the sea - of remarkable beauty and well supplied
with streams of delicious cold water. the range
at least 4000 feet above it forms the edge of the
high table land on which the Maravi dwell. ~~but~~
we were [however] falsely informed, that no people lived
on the other side and went along the valley till we
came out at the neck of the Lake. the bold mountainous
promontory of Cape Maclear on our right and
the hills of Tsengain front. again going N. W. we
came to a stockade which the Marzite attacked
the day before and we saw the loathesome evidence

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of the fight, and wishing to avoid them turned
North East till we came to the Lake & marched

along its shores. On coming to Kotakota Bay
Lat 12° 55' S. we found two Arabs busily engaged
in transporting slaves across by means of three boats,
and building a dhow to supply the place of one
said to have been wrecked. they pay one fathom of
calico, value one shilling for a boy and two for a
good looking girl. yet they would not pay
but for the ivory which they carry. a trader with
twenty slaves must pay at least the price of one
Twenty slaves must pay at least the price of one
slave per day for their sustenance. It is the
joint ivory and slave trade which allow traders the
speculation profitable. This is the crossing place
for nearly all the slaves that go to Quilloa,
(or Kilwa) Iboe, and Mozambique. A few go
down to the end of the Lake and for Leapuego
cross the shire. But here lies the great trades route
to Katanga-Cazembe &c. The Babisa are the
principal traders - the Manganja are the cultivators
of the soil. The Arabs, the same we met before
were very civil[.] [They] came forth to meet us and presented
Rice, meal, sugar-cane, and a piece of Malachite.
Leaving them we went due West, and in three days
ascended to the edge of the plateau which from below
looks like a range of mountains. The long ascent,
adorned with hill and dale, and the ~~therunning~~
streams fringed with evergreen trees, ~~was~~ [was] very
beautiful to the eye, but sore upon the legs, often
causing [us] all to puff and blow as if broken winded.
The heights have a delicious but peculiarly piercing
air. It seemed to go through us - Five Shupangamen
who had been accustomed all their lives to the malaria
of the Zambesi Delta were quite prostrated by that
which to me was exhilarating and bracing.

We ~~went~~ [travelled] about ninety miles West then turned
up to the North West. The country is level but
the boiling point shewed a slope in the direction
we were going. the edge of the plateau is 3440
feet above the sea

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at the Loangua of the Lake the height shewn is
3270 feet [//] The direction of the streams verifies these
approximate heights and your famous hypothesis
too - [:] for the Loangua of the Lake finds its way
backwards to the Nyassa while another called
the Loangua of the Maravi, flows to the westward
and at enters the Zambesi at Zumbo. The feeders
of these rivers are boggy valleys with pools in their
course. We were said to have crossed one branch of
the Moetala or Moitawa which flows N.N.W. into a

small lake called Bemba. The valleys in which the rivers rise closely resemble those in Loanda or Lunda but here each bank is dotted over with villages and a great deal of land is cultivated. The vegetation is more stunted and the trees covered with [flat] lichens like [those] on old Apple trees in Scotland, and a long thready sort like orchilla weed, shews a humid climate. We were going in the direction where a great deal of ivory is drawn by people on the slave route and this induced them to put hindrances in our way, refusing to sell food, and misleading us &c. [//] The time that could be spent with safety had expired[,] our aura from food was expended and dysentery fell upon us. I was under explicit orders not to take any long journey but have the Pioneer down to the sea by the Earliest flood. I might have speculated on a late rise in that river, but did not like the idea of failing in my duty with the vessel, and gave up further progress. The temptation to go on was Lake Bembawas, said to be but ten days distant. Thence according to native, and Arab report, issues the River Loapula or Luapula which flowing west ward forms the Lakes Mofu or Mofue and Moero, then passing the town of Cazembe it turns round to the North and is lost in Tanganyika. Is there an outlet to Tanganyika on the west into the R. Kasai East of where I formerly crossed that river? All agreed in asserting that no river flowed Eastward into L. Nyassa. Two small ones do. but at a distance of say 80 or 90 miles from the Lake the watershed is to the west. One should have no bias in investigating these questions by the aid of travelled natives, but I had a strong leaning to a flow from Tanganyika

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into Nyassa.~~but~~ I wished I was [however]shortly of one & by all. and I had crossed so many running streams, which from entering the Lake among sheds had not been observed from the boat in our first visit, that before reaching Kolakola, I had come to the conclusion that a large river was not needed to account for the perennial flow of the Shire. I am sorry to give only native information instead of observations by my own eyes; but having been confined to work of much more importance than exploration, the above was all I could do when set free. The work on which I [had] laboured for years has all been spoiled by the Portugese [omit] slave hunting, my only regret is ever having given their nobles the smallest credence for a desire to civilize Africa.

As we (the steward of the Pioneer and I [myself]) were on our metal not to overstep the limited time at our disposal it may be worth mentioning, that we travelled 660 geographical miles in 55 travelling days - averaging 12 per day in straight lines. the new leaves on the trees of the plateau were coming out fresh & green there. and we reached this on the 31st Oct^r to find all, except the evergreen ones by the streams as bare of leaves as in midwinter.

: Shupunga 10th Feb

P.S. the river rose in tremendous force on 19th January. Much later than usual. It extracted many a groan from me for it was plain that I had plenty of time to have examined Bemba, the beginning I suppose of the drainage system which finds an outlet by the Congo. Mofu or Mofue was seen I believe by Monteiro in his journey to Cazembe. We travelled part of our way on the route from Quillwawa to the same chief. I hope a report of my being murdered has not reached my family as they may believe it more the readily on account of the loss already sustained. I have never known any difficulty with an interior tribe or any other not engaged in slaving I am deeply grieved to hear of the death of our good friend Admiral Washington. He did everything in his power for us David Livingstone