Report of a Reconnaissance of Lake Albert, Made by Order of His Excellency General Gordon Pacha, Governor-General of the Soudan

Author(s): A. M. Mason-Bey and Samuel Baker

Source: *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1877 - 1878), pp. 225-229
Published by: Wiley on behalf of The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1799906
Accessed: 07-02-2025 18:15 UTC

subsidising, actually converted into preservers of it; as the minor tribes could be frightened into preserving the telegraph intact, if threatened with descent of these newly-converted "police." North of that again we arrive at Lake Bangweolo, amongst Livingstone's friends, who do not seem at all difficult to deal with; and thence, working through Arab influence, almost up to Albert Nyanza. In fact, the only *terra incognita* is just north of Nyangwe and the Lualaba: even here they must have heard of Englishmen and felt a desire to see them. I suppose stations would have to be erected at every hundred miles or so, and also at important points of branch communications with Delagoa Bay, Quillimane, Mozambique, Zanzibar, &c. Of course, the missionary settlements and other points forming a nucleus of white settlements, would have to stand on the line of route. These are mere matters of detail.

I now approach the main subject—

The Exploration of the Route.—I think this a favourable time to move in the matter, when Governments and people are so intent on African exploration.

The Colonial Government at this end might step forward, and by subsidising one of the contemplated routes of the African Exploration Committee so divert its contemplated course as to secure its services in the exploration of a telegraphic route.

The Committee could also, when relieved of some part of the expense at this end, so devote the saving as to divert some of their northern journeys to connect the route through to Gondokoro; thus assisting all parties and serving an immediately practical and useful end, without sacrificing the requirements of Geographical science.

I believe at least one of your Ministers—the Honourable the Commissioner for Crown Lands and Public Works—is convinced of its entire practicability.

As the advantage would be even more Imperial than Colonial, your Excellency, as High Commissioner, is no doubt in a position to see the matter from both standpoints.

I presume to write on this subject from the experience of the Portuguese and the adjacent independent Kaffirs, in the southern portion of the province of Mozambique and the interior, which five years' travel among them has given me.

ST. VINCENT ERSKINE.

---

5. *Report of a Reconnaissance of Lake Albert, made by order of His Excellency General Gordon Pacha, Governor-General of the Soudan,* By Colonel MASON-BEY.

Khartum, 29th August, 1877.

EXCELLENCY:—I have the honour to report my return from Lake Albert-Nyanza, and to submit the following Report, with the accompanying maps, papers, &c., as the results of observations.

Leaving Magungo on the 14th of June, with the steamer *Nyanza*, we returned on the 19th, having made a careful reconnaissance of the entire shores of the Lake.

In all we were fifty-two hours under steam, during which time I examined every inlet or indentation of the coast-line.

Following down the western shore, I found it overhung by lofty and almost precipitous mountains, notwithstanding which there

seemed to be a large population. Wherever the configuration of the mountains permitted, or ravines had formed a flat point, there would be quite a large village; but in general the natives lived behind the cliffs, in small valleys, the only signs of their presence being their boats on the beach, and the smoke curling up from the valleys.

At sunset on the 14th, we anchored under the shelter of a flat point, on which was quite a large village, surrounded by plantations of bananas. I was agreeably surprised to find the chief, Hakikie by name, come off to us, bringing a large sheep as an offering. He gave us as the name of the village, *Nurswar*.

His principal reason for coming off was to induce us to assist him in making an attack on some villages a short distance to the north, which he represented as very rich in cattle. This I declined, advising him to keep the peace. This chief wore yellow metal bracelets, which he had received from Aufina's people. He protested that they had no ivory.

The following day we continued our route to the south-west, skirting along the mountains; after six hours' run, the coast-line trends more to the south, forming a wide plain, in some places covered with very heavy, thick forests. The shores had now become very low. At 3 P.M. we reached a wide bay; here I came to anchor, for the purpose of examining the country, cutting wood, and observing the latitude. The following morning we crossed the bay, and made fast to the beach, where we took in a supply of wood. We were visited by some of the natives, who gave us as the name of the place, *Kavalee*. They informed me that we were near the end of the Lake; that they could cross to the mountains on the other side in three days. They said that they could not get through the *Ambatch* to the southern shore of the Lake, as it was deep marsh; but that beyond the marsh there were many villages and people. Leaving Kavalee soon after noon, I found that we soon turned to the eastward. After two hours' run, we were close in with the Ambatch. The southern end of the Lake is very shallow, and there is much grass. In the south-west corner of the Lake I noticed a second large bay; and from a depression in the mountains, and a thick line of forest, fancied that there might be a river emptying into the Lake at that point. I could find no entrance. This accorded with what the natives told me at Kavalee, that there is no river joining the Lake near there.

Continuing our route until sunset, we anchored among the Ambatch, and were soon enveloped in clouds of musquitoes, which seemed to be twice as numerous there as on other parts of the

Nile. The following morning, after entering a number of small bights, from which I was forced to retire owing to the shallowness of the water, I finally entered a broad river, the waters of which were reddish in colour, with a slight northerly current. There was no floating vegetation, only a little dried matter, bits of straw or wood, floating on end, as if water-logged.

The width of this stream is about 400 yards; the banks high and well defined, clothed with forests. I was only able to proceed one hour, after which I constantly got aground.

There seemed to be a mass of vegetation blocking the way to the south, or up the stream. To the south-east I observed an immense forest of date-palms. To the south and south-west, an undulating country, clothed with large trees.

After leaving this river, I found that we had crossed the Lake, and that our course turned to the northward. On both sides of the Lake the mountains diminish in altitude; and to the southward, at the foot of the Lake, and between the two ranges, was a large isolated mountain; the meridian altitude of the sun gave me for the latitude 1° 11′ N. We were then in the south-eastern corner of the Lake. Thus it does not extend to the first parallel of north latitude. Going to the northward, the mountains are not so high as on the western shore; and only in one place are the cliffs of about the same height as the highest of the western ones. There is a marked difference in the vegetation: to the west, the mountains are well covered with timber and verdure; in many places the natives have cleared places for cultivation: on the east, the mountains are barren, with neither timber nor vegetation. While going southward, the eastern shore was visible; while going northward, the western shore was more plainly visible. As we approached the villages on this side, the people invariably fled at the sight of the steamer.

Near the south-east corner I noticed a small cascade, that the *M'Tongoli* said comes from a stream called *Katooka*.

The following day we passed several large villages, one of which was said to be the residence of *Kava-Gonza*, brother to Kava-Rega. Soon after, we passed the village of *Tiaboa;* here I remained for an hour, persuaded the people not to run off, but to remain and bring me some wood, which they did, bringing it off in their canoes.

To the north of Tiaboa, the country is flat: the coast-line trending to the north. With that part of the country your Excellency is acquainted.

The value of the track of the steamer, as laid down, is dependent on the accuracy of the observations for azimuth, taken in the bay

at Kavalee, to ascertain the deviation of the steamer's compass. The other positions are independent. At Kavalee I also determined the difference of longitude from Magungo, which agreed very well with the departure. The measure of value was the difference of latitude, as observed; the courses were kept in minutes of time, and the azimuths reduced therefrom.

The distance of each course was determined by the coefficient arising from the number of minutes of time and the miles of latitude made between certain observations—as the measure of the steamer's speed.

The longitude of Magungo was determined by the mean of four observations of the eclipses of the satellites of Jupiter. The latitude by the mean of a large number of meridian altitudes of stars, north and south of the zenith.

The latitudes of other points on the Lake from meridian altitudes of the sun; at Kavalee on the artificial horizon, at the other places on the sea horizon.

The latitudes of all other places, mean results, as at Magungo. The difference of longitude of Kavalee, by means of a watch that kept a very uniform rate, and which was treated as a chronometer. The difference of longitude for Duffli, Labore, Kirrie and Lado were carried on by the same means, the results agreeing with the difference by the azimuths.

The annexed sheet (p. 229) contains the *resumé* of the astronomical observations.

I have the honour to be,
Your Excellency's most obedient Servant,
(Signed) A. M. Mason,
Colonel Staff Corps.

To His Excellency Gordon Pacha,
Governor-General of the Soudan.

Note.—Sir Samuel Baker, in a letter to the President, calls in question the accuracy of Colonel Mason-Bey's determination of the latitude of the S.W. and S.E. corners of the Lake. According to Sir Samuel's own observation from the heights at Vacovia, and his calculation of the number of hours' steaming of Colonel Mason-Bey, the southern end of the Lake would lie much further south than 1° 11′ and 1° 22′ N. The observations on which these positions are founded, are meridian altitudes of the sun: but Sir Samuel states that observations of meridian altitude of stars would have given a different result; in corroboration of which view he points out that where Colonel Mason-Bey determines a position by such observations, as at Magungo, his latitude agrees with that ascertained by himself by means of the same class of observations.

Results of Astronomical Observations. Equatorial Provinces, 1877.

	Latitude North.			Longitude E. of Greenwich.			Mag. Var. Westerly.		
	°	′	″	°	′	″	°	′	
Lado	5	01	33	31	49	36	..		The latitude from a mean of 6 merid. alts. of stars north of the zenith and 6 south. Longitude referred to Magungo.
Beddene ..	4	35	48	31	36	06	9	34	Mean of 3 merid. alts. of stars north and 1 south of zenith. Longitude referred to Lado by azimuth. Mag. var. obs. for amplitude and for azimuth.
Kirrie	4	18	10	31	40	28	..		Latitude mean 5 merid. alts. of stars north and 5 south of zenith. Longitude referred to Magungo.
Laboré.. ..	3	55	42	31	51	24	11	15	Latitude mean of 6 merid. alts. of stars north and 6 south of zenith. Longitude referred to Magungo. Mag. var. from obs. for amplitude and azimuth.
Duffli	3	34	55	32	02	45	7	15	Latitude mean of 4 merid. alts. of stars north and 5 south of zenith. Longitude referred to Magungo. Mag. var. from obs. for amplitude and azimuth.
Magungo ..	2	14	42	31	31	45	8	23	Latitude mean of 12 merid. alts. of stars north and 12 south of zenith. Longitude mean of 4 obs. of eclipses of satellites of Jupiter. Mag. var. obs. for amplitude and for azimuth.
Kavalee, S.W. angle of Lake Albert.	1	22	20	30	31	23	..		Latitude merid. alt. of sun. Artificial horizon. Longitude A.M. Obs. referred to Magungo.
S.E. angle of Lake Albert.	1	11	03	..			..		Latitude meridian alt. of sun on sea-horizon.