

Letter to George Back, 30 November 1860

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Tette 30th Nov^r 1860

Dear Sir George

I have been very far from forgetful of your kindness, though you have recieved no evidence of my remembrance since I came back to Africa - but you know the sort of life an Explorer leads and will be disposed to make allowances.

We have just come off a trip of about 1400 miles. We went up this river to the country of the Makololo travelling along the North bank on foot and returning partly in canoes and partly on foot by nearly the same track. We had thus a good opportunity of examining the whole river at ~~dr~~ low water and saw about a hundred miles of it which the tsetse prevented me from seeing in 1855. We crossed the Kafue at its confluence and went along the fine fertile valley in which the river gently flows among a people who may all be called Batoka though each small tribe has its own name besides. they were remarkably hospitable and being in the habit of cultivating the ground extensively they had plenty of food to bestow. They cultivate great quantities of very fine cotton too though the men go stark naked. the women have more sense and go decently covered. their country is well furnished with coal - many rivulets contain fragments of the precious mineral but none knew that it would burn. We saw two fine large seams in the bank

[0002]

of the Zambesi from which steamers will one day be loaded - for the river above Chicova is finer i.e. more navigable than below Tette and Lupata

On a second visit to the falls of Victoria about which you shewed a kind interest. I am inclined to say that they are the most

wonderful in the world. the breadth is not 1000 yards as I conjectured but between one statute and one geographical mile we say 1860 yards though it is a little more, by way of assisting the memory. the depth is not 1000 [feet] as I stated but 310 feet and even now at extreme low water there were 800 feet of water falling After leaping sheer down 310 feet it is collected from both ends of the fissure to the escape which being nearer the North than South bank is like the letter but come to the

other or Eastern side of the crack and you find it prolonged in the most wonderful zigzag manner. If you will excuse the following it may convey my meaning the promontories formed by the zigzag are of the same height as the bed of the river

above the Falls - they [are] flat & covered with trees but the sides are perpendicular and you in walking along their tops can see the river some 300 feet below jammed in a space of 20 or 30 yards the base of one promontory is only 560 paces [0003] and of another 400. The river being very low we could see clearly the bottom of one half of the full fissure. The columns of vapour were smaller than when I was there in /55 - but still very high as we saw them distinctly at a distance of 20 . And this wonderful water fall exists in what we were all thought to believe were interminable plains of burning barren sand where the most enterprising rivers ran only to be lost.

We found it hot enough on our return though in going we climbed up to the Highlands of the Batoka and saw hoar frost and a little ice. The soil becomes disagreeably hot even for [a person with] shoes. 136° at 3 P.M. and a thermometer in the shade of the body when marching is often over 100° . the blood even becomes hotter than that of the natives $99^{\circ} \frac{1}{2}$ while the natives shew 98° but the most remarkable feature in the climate was the rate of evaporation

there was often a difference of 33°- 36°
and even 40° between the wet and dry bulbs

In meeting with our old friends the
Makololo we were grieved to find that
many of them had died of fever and
indeed if they are not permitted to
remove from their unhealthy swamps
soon they will break up as a tribe.
A party of missionaries had
[0004]
suffered severely from the same com-
plaint.their loss makes me value
a remedy rather highly which I have found
quite effectual in curing the disease ever
since 1850 - but I do not like to
make a fuss about it as I would
look as we medical people say
Quackish. We have however enjoyed
good opportunities for testing it during
this Expedition.

Your knife is my constant companion
and it has often brought you vividly
to my recollection. Please present
my kindest remembrances to
Lady Back and believe me

Faithfully Yours

David Livingstone