

Letter to John Washington, 26 November, 20 December 1860

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)
[0001]

2^d Tette 26th Nov^r 1860

Dear Captain Washington

The water in the river having
been lower than ever known by the
oldest people, we could examine the
Victoria Falls with ease: people
could even wade from the North
bank to the garden island and we
could see well to the bottom. the
depth is 310 feet sheer down
probably a few feet more as the
weight on the line rested on a slope
near the bottom. the breadth from
bank to bank is not a thousand
yards as I conjectured but between
one statute & one geographical
mile, we say 1860 yards though
[0002]

it is little more by way of assisting
the memory. We measured with a
tape line & allowed 2 feet in every
67 feet for slack & curvature. then
even at low water there were 800 feet
of water falling. I measured the
width of the fizzle at the island in
the middle with the sextant and got
80 feet but this is doubtful as we
could not throw a stone across
Looking from above it is the
shape of the letter *LL* but
the crack of the most wonderful

zigzag shape ever seen. Fancy
this rude sketch all of one
level except the bottom of the
crack which is 300 feet below
[0003]

The dotted line shews the

course of the water after
it has fallen down to
be from both sides
to the prolongation
of the crack. There
is but 400 paces
between the fall &
the first elbow made by the
Fizzure and all the land
formed by the zigzags into
promontories is of the
same level as the bed of
the river above the falls
You walk along and see the
river deep down on each
side of you and at least
300 feet ~~down~~ below. It is
really the most wonderful
affair in waterfalls in the world
[0004]

We could not visit Mosilikatze
and arrange matters about our
post. We could not leave Sekeletu
so soon as we wished on account
of his disease - then the Elephant
hunters whom we met at the Falls
had unfortunately departed before
we got our Despatches written
The heat became excessive too
At Sinamanés the soil was
136° at 3PM. not a single shower
had fallen and the country had
suffered one of its periodical
droughts. A thermometer held
in the shade of the body & 3 feet
above the soil was 102° at that
hour and during a march
our blood even became
1 1/2° hotter than that of the natives or 99.5
or 99.5°
[0005]

We could not moreover have
made a decent visit as to time
without breaking entirely our
promise to be at Kongone at
the end of this month. But we
got to the head man at the falls who
had always treated the Matibele
of Mosilikatze who came with
the letters in a scurvy manner
removed to another part &

orders given to his sucessor
to treat & feed them well. Letters
were waiting for me at Linyanti
M^r John Moffat is now with
Mosilikatze and in time matters
will be arranged.

I have not by an means
given up hope in the Makololo
[0006]

The delay caused by failure to
ascend at once to them has
led to opening a new field of
perhaps still greater importance
in reference to the slave trade
I have no doubt as to being
able to ascend in flood. We
saw the whole river in our canoes
from Sinamanés downwards
many rapids were developed
below Chicova by excessive low
water which were under 4 knots
when we ascended - the most
rapid part we saw was scarcely
six knots - Morumbua is a
sloping cataract at low water
and the water may come down
in the space of 30 or 40 yards
[0007]

20 or 30 feet but the rise
there is 80 feet and the flood
will certainly smooth the cataract
over. Chicova seen from
the land looked like a basaltic
dyke across the stream but
we passed through it in the canoes
without observing it in coming
down. There is a large seam
of coal in the bank there from
which steamers will one day
lead. There is another seam
in the bank at Manyerive hill
and the coal field extends up
near to Sinamanés. The
part of the Zambesi between
Sinamanés & Kansalo is
the deepest & most navigable
of it all and Kansalo has
[0008]

has nothing formidable in it
except to canoes whose gunwale

is scarcely 6 inches above the water.

I thank you for all your notes which came now in a heap, & for all you have done to aid us most heartily. I am really unfeignedly thankful. It was very kind in you to dissuade M^{rs} L. from coming, and I sincerely hope she acceded to your most proper advice. The Makololo are excessively anxious to have her but until more progress is made she would be in the way. I have 16 of them here though I wished but 10. It is arranged that as soon as we get up to Kafue all remove to us