

MASHONALAND VIA KHAMA'S COUNTRY

PART II - MACLOUTSIE TO TULI

"THE MISSING LINK"

In Part I we saw that the pioneers assembling at Macloutsie during 1890 were served by Company post carts from Palapye. By July the column was on its way and by August the rear depot had moved forward from Macloutsie to Tuli. Colquhoun was with the column at the Umshabetsi River when he wrote to Harris at Kimberley on 17 July -

"..... I am arranging with Pennefather to have a Scotch cart and trotting oxen postal service between Macloutsie Camp and Tuli Camp,"⁽¹⁾

At this time the service was a simple extension of the Company post route from Palapye, but by 10 March, 1891 the carts were connecting at Macloutsie with the newly extended Bechuanaland Exploration Company line from Mafeking. Tye described the Macloutsie-Tuli service in a telegram to Cape Town dated 1 August, 1891 -

".....(the mails) are conveyed in a scotch cart belonging to the Company costing about two hundred and forty pounds per annum against this I charge passengers two pounds either way cannot give you the average of passengers but (they) are sure to increase"⁽²⁾

Within a few months the Bechuanaland Exploration Company was interested in a further extension of its passenger service northward from Macloutsie and began to dicker with the Chartered Company for the carriage of the mails. From a letter dated 12 October, 1891 -

"The Honourable Mr Gifford, when travelling through Tuli on his way to Mashonaland had various discussions with Major Tye with regard to our extending our postal service from Macloutsie to Tuli if your Company be willing to grant a fair and equivalent subsidy for same. Mr Gifford had at first suggested £50 per month, which amount however, after consulting us was reduced to £40.

We may mention that in the meantime all arrangements have already been made by us to run a post cart (spring wagon) regularly between Macloutsie and Tuli in connection with our

regular mail service from Macloutsie to Vryburg."(3)

The apparent presumption in the final paragraph should not be misconstrued. The Bechuanaland Exploration Company was simply indicating that it was putting on a cart for passengers - no mails would be carried until an adequate subsidy had been agreed between the two companies. Cape Town wrote to Tye for his views on the suggested subsidy but in the meantime replied to the offer from the Bechuanaland Exploration Company in predictable fashion -

"..... In the absence of Mr Rhodes it is not possible for any alterations to be made in the service for the carrying of the mails between Macloutsie and Tuli, and under any circumstances it would not be possible to give the premium suggested as the cost of the present service is less than the amount it is proposed the Company should contribute."(4)

Meanwhile the rains had commenced and the mails were delayed. Tye's reply to Cape Town's enquiry was not written until 21 November, 1891 and was probably not received there until well into December -

"POSTAL SERVICE

With reference to your letter of the 16th ult. The total number of passengers to and from Macloutsie for the past six months is as follows - 5 fares @ £2 = £10

The Bechuanaland Exploration Company run a passenger coach now every week and so take whatever passengers there may be. It would be a saving to the Company if the Bechuanaland Exploration Company would undertake the service, but not at £40 per month."(5)

Clearly the Chartered Company had yet to discover and assess the true cost of running its own mail services. ~~a lesson only to be properly learnt from their experiences during the first wet season in Mashonaland.~~ However further correspondence between the two companies ensued and a bargain was finally struck on 16 December, 1891 -

"I have to acknowledge (your letter) which has received Mr Rhodes' consideration (who) is prepared to accept your tender (for a service) once a week each way, the weight of mails not to exceed fifteen hundred pounds by each conveyance and the Company's contribution towards (the) service to be £30

per month.

Mr Rhodes would like the arrangement to come into force from the 1st January, 1892"(6)

Tye was informed by telegram of the new arrangement and told to "remove the police engaged on the service on the 1st January".(7)

Although the Bechuanaland Exploration Company "spring wagon" had been able to attract passengers away from the police carts during the period that the two had been running together it was described in less than glowing terms by a passenger in June, 1892 -

"The conveyance was a covered Scotch cart drawn by six or eight Zulu oxen. These were a small breed of oxen supposed to "trot" but only doing so when they thought fit."(8)

Neither was the service particularly fast, the southbound leg leaving Tuli on Sunday morning and arriving at Macloutsie on Monday night.(9) The total distance was no more than eighty miles but early maps show a Semalali Post Station at about the halfway mark and passengers probably spent the night there in some wayside store or hotel.

At the end of 1892 the Bechuanaland Exploration Company was advised that its contracts with the Postmaster-General of British Bechuanaland for the Vryburg-Mafeking and Mafeking-Macloutsie services, due to expire on 28 March, 1893, would not be renewed - lower tenders from the Wirsing Brothers had been accepted. In turn the Bechuanaland Exploration Company advised the Chartered Company that it would "not be in a position to carry on you/ mails from Macloutsie to Tuli after the end of March".(10) Although these circumstances would seem to have dictated a new arrangement between the Chartered Company and the Wirsings for the Macloutsie-Tuli section this was not the case. By March the Company was negotiating with the firm of Hollins and Zeederberg, the operators of the Pietersburg-Tuli service, for them to take over Bezuidenhout's main line run up to Salisbury and it seems that the short Macloutsie-Tuli section was included as an adjunct to the main service. In the Rhodesia Herald of 13 May, 1893 -

"By way of showing what they can do for passengers to Mashonaland prior to starting their line, Messrs Zeederberg are already running a fast passenger's cart from Tuli to Macloutsie, a distance of over one hundred miles (sic). And

this is without any subsidy whatsoever."⁽¹¹⁾

The journey was now taking twelve hours⁽¹²⁾ - a significant improvement over the earlier timings.

Hollins and Zeederberg's service lasted for not much more than a year. In Part I we saw that mail contracts were re-negotiated after the conquest of Matabeleland, the main thrust of the mails being diverted from the lowveld route to the Bulawayo-Charter route. There was no longer a need for a Macloutsie-Tuli connection - Macloutsie would be served by a light service from Palapye; Tuli by the new service from Bulawayo. A letter posted between the two places would travel a somewhat roundabout route. The last through mail on the route was southbound and arrived at Tuli on 28 July, 1894.⁽¹³⁾

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. NA: CT1/1/1
2. NA: CT1/17/2/5
3. ibid. - letter from Adolph Mosenthal & Co., Port Elizabeth, as agents for the Bechuanaland Exploration Company Ltd. to the Secretary, Cape Town.
4. ibid. - letter from Actg. Secretary, Cape Town to Mosenthal & Co. dated 26 October, 1891.
5. ibid. - letter from the Office of the Senior Commissariat and Transport Officer, B.S.A. Co's Police, Fort Tuli to Actg. Secretary, Cape Town.
6. ibid. - letter from Actg. Secretary, Cape Town to Mosenthal & Co.
7. ibid. - handwritten note on the file.
8. "Memoirs of D.G. Gisborne - Part I". Rhodesiana No. 17 December, 1967.
9. NA: CT2/11/9 - letter from Secretary, Cape Town to Postmaster-General, Cape Town dated 11 November, 1892.
10. NA: CT1/17/2/5 - letter from Mosenthal & Co. to Secretary, Cape Town dated 17 December, 1892.
11. Unfortunately the contracts entered into with Hollins and Zeederberg at this time do not appear to be on record. However a letter from the Postmaster-General, Salisbury to the Secretary, Cape Town dated 23 June, 1893 (NA: CT1/17/2/7) makes it clear that a subsidy (unspecified) was eventually agreed for the Macloutsie-Tuli section.
12. PN: in the Rhodesia Herald 24 June, 1893
13. NA: CT1/17/2/7 - telegram from Postmaster-General, Salisbury to Postmaster-General, Cape Town dated 22 June, 1894.