

MASHONALAND VIA THE TRANSVAAL

PRETORIA TO TULI

This route, the first Zeederberg connection with Rhodesia, was introduced mainly to cater for passenger traffic, the carriage of mails north of Pietersburg being a secondary issue. Although the route was faster from Cape Town than the Bechuanaland route the latter was favoured for various obvious reasons and efforts by the Mashonaland settlers to have their mails routed via the Transvaal came to nought. Even after the Zeederberg service replaced Bezuidenhof's line from Tuli to Salisbury in August, 1893 providing a fast through service from Salisbury to the Rand, the major part of the mails carried from Salisbury were still diverted at Tuli to the Bechuanaland route. The story of the route within Mashonaland is dealt with elsewhere - this part will deal only with the external connection from Pretoria.

What of the route itself? Zeederberg wasted little time after the occupation of Mashonaland in introducing his service from Pretoria to Tuli and it was certainly in operation by mid-1891. On 27 June, 1891 the Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times announced -

"The Chartered Company has adopted the Pietersburg route for the Mashonaland Mail, a saving of six days."

but later events showed this statement to be both optimistic and premature. On 1 August, 1891 Major Tye, the postal officer at Tuli, advised that "mails arrive here regularly every Monday afternoon from Pietersburg leaving again Tuesday morning"⁽¹⁾, and on 5 August the Postmaster-General, Cape Town wrote to the Acting Secretary, Cape Town -

"..... I beg to inform you that the Postmaster-General, Pretoria informs me that a passenger cart runs between Pietersburg, Hendrikzdal and Tuli Camp as per the following time tables:-

Leave	Pretoria	Tuesday
Leave	Pietersburg	Thursday noon
Arrive	Hendrikzdal	Saturday noon
Leave	Hendrikzdal	Monday morning
Arrive	Tuli Camp	Monday 3 p.m.

Leave	Tuli Camp	Tuesday a.m.
Arrive	Hendrikzdal	Tuesday 3 p.m.
Leave	Hendrikzdal	Friday noon
Arrive	Pietersburg	Monday
Arrive	Pretoria	Wednesday noon

As this route would appear the most expeditious means of effecting communication with Fort Tuli, I shall be glad to learn whether there would be any objection, as far as you are aware, to my availing myself of it for the transmission of a letter mail."⁽²⁾

The existing mails mentioned by Tye probably consisted of letters between Mashonaland and the three Southern African territories of Natal, Orange Free State and the Transvaal itself - no mails to and from the Cape Colony and overseas were being sent via Pretoria. Clearly the Transvaal authorities would not have been averse to such ^{through} mails at the time and the service would have been fast as there was a rail connection between Pretoria and Cape Town. The receipt of the letter caused much deliberation in the Cape Town Secretary's office and the matter was eventually sealed with a manuscript note from Rhodes -

"For Political and other reasons I prefer the Protectorate route. The Home Government has behaved so liberally in every matter that we should certainly assist their postal service by all means in our favour."⁽²⁾

This ended the matter until mid-1894 by which time the Pretoria connection was with Bulawayo and the subject of another chapter. In the meantime Zeederberg continued with his service, enjoying a subsidy of £2 000 per annum from the Transvaal government for the carriage of mails between Pretoria and Pietersburg.⁽³⁾ Despite evidence that small Mashonaland mails continued to be carried by this route, mostly to and from the three South African territories already mentioned, there is nothing to show that Zeederberg received any sort of payment from the B.S.A. Company. What stamps were used on outgoing letters? There is evidence that the postmaster, Tuli held stocks of Transvaal stamps for franking these mails⁽⁴⁾ but I know of no such covers in present-day collections.

On 7 November, 1891 the Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times carried an advertisement for -

"LIMPOPO HOTEL AND STORE

LIMPOPO RIVER, TRANSVAAL

This hotel is situated close to the pont over the Limpopo River and is 25 miles from Tuli. The Tuli-Johannesburg coaches stop at the above hotel....."

This is the site of the drift that later became known as Rhodes' Drift and is also the site of the mythical Hendrikzdal, probably Zeederberg's northern Transvaal terminus, which featured so prominently in the schedules of the *time*. I have no idea why Zeederberg held his passengers over at Hendrikzdal for such long periods - maybe the Limpopo Hotel had more attractions than were mentioned in the advertisement!

By May, 1893 Zeederberg had combined with Hollins to displace Bezuidenhout on the Tuli to Victoria section while in Bechuanaland the main line contract had been given to the Wirsings. The following advertisement appeared in the Victoria newspaper ⁽⁵⁾ ~~of~~ 17 June, 1893 -

"THE CHEAPEST AND QUICKEST ROUTE TO AND FROM MASHONALAND

HOLLINS AND ZEEDEBERG'S

MAIL COACHES

TIME TABLE

PRETORIA TO VICTORIA

Leave	Pretoria	Thursday morning
Arrive	Tuli	Sunday evening
Leave	Tuli	Monday morning
Arrive	Victoria	Wednesday 2 p.m.

VICTORIA TO PRETORIA

Leave	Victoria	Thursday noon
Arrive	Tuli	Saturday evening
Leave	Tuli	Sunday morning
Arrive	Pretoria	Wednesday 6 p.m."

- a considerable improvement on the 1891 timings.

Confirmation that limited mails were being carried by this service is found in a report published in the Rhodesia Herald of 1 December, 1893 -

"THE UP MAIL

The Zoutspanberg paper points out that by the acceleration

of the train service between the Cape Colony and Pretoria, which came in force on the 1st of last month, the mail which, until quite lately, only reached the capital on Sunday night, now arrives on Saturday night. There is, consequently, no reason why the coach to the north, which now leaves Pretoria on Monday morning, should not be despatched on Sunday morning, arriving at Pietersburg on Monday night instead of Tuesday. A whole day is therefore to be gained if the Transvaal post office will take advantage of the change. The Zeederberg Coaching Company, (says the Review) is perfectly willing to make the necessary alterations. As far as Rhodesia is concerned a day would be gained on letters and papers from the Transvaal and Free State only. As for the Cape mail it continues to crawl up by the Bechuanaland route taking sixteen days instead of eleven."

The service continued in the same form until June, 1894 when new contracts were negotiated with Hollins and Zeederberg for a Pietersburg to Bulawayo service. Hollins and Zeederberg agreed to carry the mails to Bulawayo from 8 June, 1894 although the formal contract was not to commence until 1 August. There was therefore a short period when they were running services from Tuli to ^{bulw} Bulawayo and Salisbury simultaneously.

The prospect of losing the direct Transvaal connection caused much concern among the residents of Salisbury and their feelings were summed up in an editorial in the Rhodesia Herald of 8 June, 1894 -

"THE MAIL ROUTES

The Chartered Company would do well, we think, not to abandon the direct postcart route between the Rand and Salisbury with the haste that appears to have been determined on. By giving up the present route it entirely throws away an offer from Messrs Hollins and Zeederberg to keep the line going with a mule service though only for a half-subsidy price, and what is much worse, as far as the public are concerned, makes Salisbury more distant from Johannesburg by at least two, and probably three days' travelling. Victoria would at the same time become shut off from the Capital and Umtali, except by a circuitous route via the Iron Mine Hill.....

We trust we are not unreasonable or complaining in stating

that after three years the post office has succeeded in obtaining the official passage of the Home and Cape mails neither by the Coast nor by the Transvaal - the two quickest routes."

The story of the new service to Bulawayo is related in Chapter
"Matabeleland via the Transvaal".

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. NA: CT1/17/2/5. Telegram to Secretary, Cape Town.
2. NA: CT1/17/9
3. NA: CT2/11. Letter from Secretary, Cape Town to Postmaster-General, Cape Town dated 8 August, 1891.
4. NA: L05/2/20. Letter from Salisbury to Secretary, Cape Town dated 5 May, 1892 - reproduced by Ellenberger (V.F.) in "Genesis of the British South Africa Company's Postage Stamps and Postal Services" - supplement to the "South African Philatelist", Vol. 43 No. 6, June, 1967.
5. "The Mashonaland Times and Mining Chronicle"
- 6, NA: CT1/17/2/7