

MATIPIS

This agency, situated between the Buby and Nuanetsi Rivers on the route of the Pioneer Column, existed for a few months during the latter part of 1893 and the first part of 1894. Its official opening period seems to have been for the two months of April and May, 1894 only.

On 2 April, 1892 the "Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times" detailed the new "wayside hotels" that had been opened or were about to open on the Tuli to Salisbury route. At a distance of ninety-two miles from Tuli was "M'Tibi's" where the proprietor was Drummond. The northward sequence of "hostelries" in the immediate area was as follows -

M'Gobie's	80 miles	Withers
M'Tibi's	92 miles	Drummond
?	106 miles	Dillon & Perkins
Nuanetsi	122 miles	Saunderson

Much had changed since the Column opened the road and set up the early primitive post-stations in 1890. At that time the police post-riders were based at Setoutse's, just to the south or west of the Buby, and at the Lundi River itself, well to the north of the Nuanetsi. In the interim the post-riders had been replaced with post-carts and the telegraph was through. Things were getting more civilised. Setoutse's seems to have been abandoned and a Telegraph Office had been established at the Nuanetsi.

On 22 April, 1893 the "Rhodesia Herald" commented -

"It seems rather a pity that the Telegraph Office, when changed from the 'Unetzi, was not shifted to the Gondokwe at which place the Transvaal road joins the main road, instead of to Matipi's."

The only map I have found that mentions Gondokwe (as Gondoka) is an 1896 War Office map of "Part of Matabililand".⁽¹⁾ Gondokwe is shown to be where a road from Main Drift on the Limpopo joins the Column road at a point near the Umsawe River crossing and more or less equidistant between the Buby and Nuanetsi Rivers. There was a hostelry there in June, 1892, referred to as a "wayside store on the Gondokwe River"⁽²⁾, and in the same month the Salisbury authorities addressed a letter to "Mr Hilton Perkins at the Gondokwe Hotel"⁽³⁾ which connects the place with the "Dillon & Perkins" establishment mentioned earlier. I can find no reference

to a Gondokwe River on either old or modern maps. For some reason the authorities had decided to move the Telegraph Office from the Nuanetsi - possibly because of fever - and had chosen Matipis.

When Hollins and Zeederberg displaced Bezuidenhout, the successor to the Company post-carts on the mail run, they advertised for a supply of mealies at the following places relevant to our story -

"..... Bubyee, Matibis, Gondoque, Riet Spruit, Lundi"

This places Matipis between the Bubyee River and Gondokwe and confirms earlier information regarding its position.

All the evidence so far regarding the existence of Matipis is a little consequential but on 22 July, 1893 the "Mashonaland Times and Mining Chronicle" of Victoria reported -

"MR EVA'S ROAD REPORT FROM TULI

On my arrival at M'Tibi's on Tuesday last, I found all the transport riders in laager and they informed me that fifty-two Matabeles had been there the day before, on which I suggested a wire being sent to Tuli. The wire came back that the Matabeles were on the Shashi also."

These occurrences were a prelude to the Matabele War but were obviously not considered of sufficient consequence to prevent the Salisbury G.P.O. sending the following memorandum to Cape Town on 10 August, 1893 -

"POST OFFICE AGENCY : MATIPIS

Please order the necessary forms and date stamp for a Post Office Agency at Matipis. It is reported that a considerable demand for stamps exists on that portion of the road.

A.H.F. Duncan
Postmaster-General"⁽⁴⁾

A considerable delay followed before this memorandum was actioned and in the meantime problems with the Matabele continued. On 28 October they made a further raid on the office and the incumbents sought reimbursement of £4.16.0d for "personal property carried away". Their claim was dated 2 November, 1893 and was in the form of an account headed "P.O. Matipis".⁽⁵⁾ Possibly Duncan had started the agency before the "necessaries" arrived from Cape Town?

On 1 November a detachment of Police ^{was} ~~were~~ sent to Matipis "on

special duty and to form a Police Station".⁽⁶⁾ The Matabele problem was eventually overcome by the occupation of Matabeleland and on 24 March, 1894, some seven months after the original request had been made, the G.P.O., Cape Town advised the Secretary, Cape Town that the stores for the agency had been forwarded. This was followed by a telegram from Salisbury to Cape Town advising the opening of Matipis on 1 April, 1894.⁽⁴⁾

In the meantime events had overtaken the place. Matabeleland had become the new "Eldorado". Hollins and Zeederberg's contract was terminated at the end of July, 1894 and their activities were diverted to the Tuli-Bulawayo route. They were to maintain a Tuli-Victoria service for the 1894 dry-season only, but this was no more than a sop to Victoria residents. The usefulness of Matipis had come to an end. Records indicate that the stock of postage stamps, datestamp and obliterator were returned to the Postmaster, Victoria in June, 1894.⁽⁷⁾ The type from the datestamp was forwarded for use at Charter in the same month⁽⁸⁾ but the obliterator was still on hand when the Victoria postmaster made his return of assets at the end of 1899.⁽⁹⁾ At some stage the datestamp, minus type, must have been sent to headquarters in Salisbury where it was unearthed in March, 1939 and illustrated by Dann in the "Romance". I suspect that the re-discovery in 1939 is the only record of the mark and that no actual postal usage is known, although I would welcome a correction on this point. A proving cover from April or May, 1894 with marks of both the datestamp and obliterator would be one of the greatest rarities of Rhodesian philately.

Where exactly was Matipis? I can find no map of the period that mentions it but all the evidence points to a position just to the east or north of the Buby River on the route of the Column road and telegraph line. It was mentioned as a telegraph office and store near the Buby River in 1894.⁽¹⁰⁾ A Post Office linesman's report of July, 1894 helps -

"..... arrived at Nuanetsi River Friday morning (heading south); horse knocked up and useless; showed symptoms of illness; walked onto Gondokwe where I left horse, and proceeded to Matipis on Sunday morning."⁽¹¹⁾

The illustrated map of the area gives a general picture of the position of Matipis.

Although the postal agency had been of short duration, the telegraph office was still operating in 1901⁽¹²⁾ - probably more as a line office than a public office.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. NA: NBL/1/4. Reproduced by Dann (reprint between pp. 120 & 121).
2. Rhodesiana No. 17 - December, 1967. "Memoirs of D.G. Gisborne".
3. NA: A2/1/3
4. NA: CT1/17/6
5. NA: L2/2/106
6. NA: DV1/1/1. See letter from Martin E. Crowne & F.W. Drummond-Hay to Dr Harris, Cape Town dated 7 March, 1894.
7. NA: P1/1/1; P1/1/2
8. NA: P1/1/2
9. NA: P1/1/1. The number of the obliterator is not specified.
10. RSCJ 41/May 1961. "The Stage Coach Postal Routes of Rhodesia" by L.H. Lomax.
11. NA: P1/1/1
12. PMG: 31 March, 1901