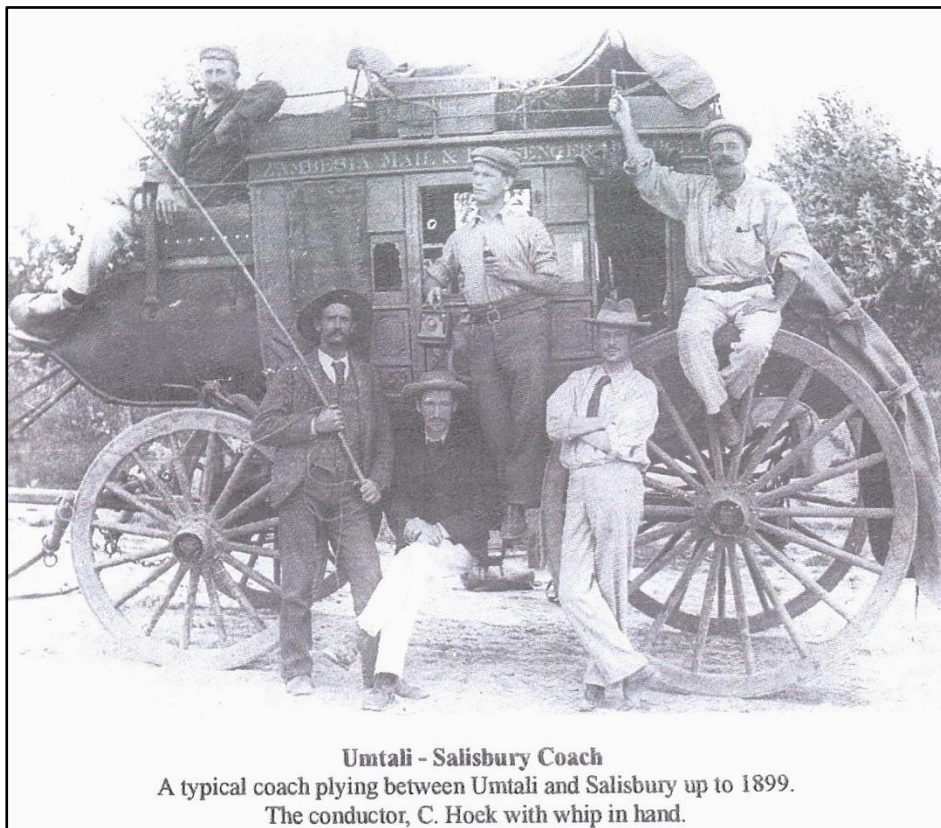


How Rhodesia's Mail Routes Evolved

A description of the people and events that determined
how Rhodesia's mails reached other countries



By

Mike Hughes

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

INTRODUCTION

The territory that was to become Rhodesia was born out of the 'Scramble for Africa' that occurred during the second half of the 19th century. By this time Great Britain had consolidated its possession of the Cape of Good Hope, the Germans were present in South West Africa, the Portuguese in East Africa and the Boers had established themselves in the Transvaal.

In the late 1880s Cecil John Rhodes, a young Englishman who had emigrated for health reasons, first to Natal before following his brother to the Kimberley diamond fields, proceeded to amass a huge fortune which he used to further his ambition of expanding the British Empire northwards in the face of competition from these other countries. Communications – the telegraph, the mail and the railways – were crucial in establishing and developing this ambition.

The territory that was to constitute Rhodesia was remote when the first white settlers arrived to occupy it. Communication was seldom faster than speed of a horse or even a walking man. It was landlocked and depended on treaties and services provided by others. Added to this was the fact that Southern Africa is vast so that the distances between isolated settlements was measured in days or weeks rather than in miles. Opportunities to coordinate with other similarly isolated settlements seldom arose so that progress, and even the maintenance of life itself depended to a large extent on individual endeavour.

Cecil Rhodes knew that colonising, developing and administering this new territory depended on two essential factors – military strength and communications. The Charter Company he founded prioritised communications with the Cape Colony to the south and the fledgling port of Beira in Portuguese East Africa on the east coast. Communication routes were developed comprising the telegraph and the mail which was transported by native runners, post riders, ox carts, horse or mule coaches and finally the railways. These transport links were also essential for the importation of the materials and machinery required for developing the infrastructure to support the towns and settlements, mines and farms being established.

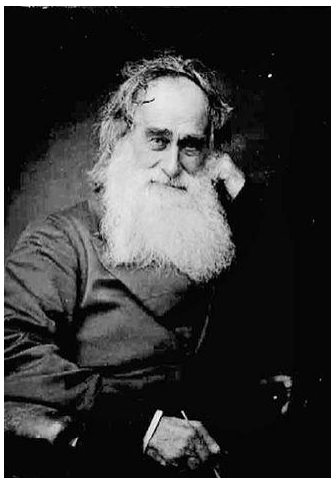
Numerous books and articles have been published describing how these transport routes developed, some in great detail. However, I have found it difficult to gain an understanding of how different aspects of the process related with each other and with the overall circumstances. This work is an attempt to provide a relatively simple and short account, in chronological order as far as possible, of when and importantly why Rhodesia's mail routes developed in the way they did and to explain how this process resulted from the historical events.

Mike Hughes
July 2024

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

CONTENTS

PRIOR TO THE OCCUPATION OF MASHONALAND 1890	3
The Cape Colony Looking North	3
Early History of Matabeleland	4
Establishment of a formal Mail Service to the North 1888	6
Tati	8
Macloutsie	9
From Vryburg to Macloutsie	10
MAILS FROM MATABELELAND TO THE SOUTH	14
Before the Occupation of Matabeleland November 1893	14
Tuli	16
Following the Occupation of Matabeleland November 1893	17
MAILS FROM MASHONALAND TO THE SOUTH	21
Before the Occupation of Matabeleland	21
Following the Occupation of Matabeleland	24
The coming of the Railway	28
The impact of the Anglo-Boer War	33
MAILS FROM MASHONALAND TO THE EAST	37
Salisbury to Umtali	37
Umtali to Beira – Fontesville to Chimoio	38
Umtali to Beira – Fontesville to Beira	43
Umtali to Beira – Chimoio to Umtali and Salisbury	44
George Pauling	46
Bibliography and acknowledgements	47



*Robert Moffat 1795 to 1883.
He founded the LMS Mission
at Inyati in 1859.*



*Cecil Rhodes 1853 to 1902
Premier Cape Colony
1890 to 1896*



*Dr Jameson 1853 to 1917
Premier Cape Colony
1904 to 1908*

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

PRIOR TO THE OCCUPATION OF MASHONALAND 1890

The general pattern as to how mail routes to and from Rhodesia developed was that they began with native runners or post riders, which were gradually replaced by mail carts drawn by oxen, coaches drawn by mules or horses as roads improved, to be replaced by rail transport as soon as that became available.

The routes taken by the railways were directed by several considerations, among them being:

- to avoid rivers with their associated cost of building bridges, by following watersheds
- to serve the towns, mines and farms which were fast being established before the turn of the century
- to link the landlocked country with sea-ports in Mozambique and the Cape Colony

The Cape Colony Looking North

Cape Colony

The colony, originally established by the Dutch East India Company in 1652, became a British colony following the Battle of Muizenberg in 1795. Then, resulting from the European Wars, it was ceded to the Napoleonic Batavia Republic in 1803 in terms of the 1802 Treaty of Amiens. It was re-occupied by the British following the Battle of Blaauwberg in 1806. British possession was affirmed with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814. The Cape of Good Hope then remained in the British Empire, becoming self-governing in 1872.

The colony was coextensive with the Cape Province, stretching from the Atlantic coast inland and eastward along the southern coast, constituting about half of modern South Africa: the final eastern boundary, after several wars against the Xhosa, stood at the Fish River. In the north, the Orange River served as the boundary for some time, although some land between the river and the southern boundary of Bechuanaland was later added to it. From 1878, the colony also included the enclave of Walvis Bay and the Penguin Islands, both in what is now Namibia.

Griqualand West

Griqualand West was situated to the north of Cape Colony, bounded to the north by what was to become British Bechuanaland and to the east by the Orange Free State.

In 1866 diamonds were discovered along the Vaal River. Following a British arbitration, sovereignty was awarded to the Griqua Chief who promptly ceded his territory to Great Britain. It became a separate Crown Colony in January 1873. Griqualand West was merged with Cape Colony in October 1880.

Goshen and Stellaland

Until the 1880's the only Europeans in the area north of Griqualand West known as Bechuanaland were scattered traders and hunters and the missionaries, who had been establishing themselves at what was to become Kuruman since 1816. Tribal conflicts led to the intervention of the Boers who established the independent republics of GOSHEN (Capital Mafeking) and STELLALAND (Capital Vryburg) in 1882.

For many months, starting in 1883, pressure was placed on the British Government to do something in Bechuanaland because of unrest in the area. In 1884 The British Government decided to annex these republics. On 29 October 1884 they appointed Sir Charles Warren as the Special Commissioner of Bechuanaland. On 13 November 1884 the British Parliament voted a sum of £675,000 for military operations in Bechuanaland. Sir Charles was authorised to recruit an irregular force of 1,500 in South Africa in addition to the Imperial regular troops that would be provided. A

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

force of 4,000 troops, under his command, set off to annex Stellaland and Goshen. On 7 February 1885 the force reached Vryburg, the principal town in Stellaland, then continued to Mafeking, the principal town in Goshen. On 8 April 1885 Sir Charles Warren sent a despatch to notify the British Government that he had occupied Bechuanaland and had entirely restored order. The two Boer republics had collapsed without any bloodshed.

British Bechuanaland

Following the occupation, all territory south of the Molopo River was constituted the Crown Colony of British Bechuanaland on 30th September 1885. Ten years later, on 16th November 1895, British Bechuanaland was annexed to the Cape of Good Hope.

Bechuanaland Protectorate

On 30th September 1885, at the same time that British Bechuanaland was constituted a British Crown Colony, all territory north of the Molopo River was constituted the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Early History of Matabeleland

In 1817 Dr Robert Moffat of the London Missionary Society arrived in South Africa and three years later he and his wife Mary moved to Namaqualand where they established the LMS mission at Kuruman.

The Matabele were descendants of a faction of the militant Zulu people in Zululand in South Africa. The Zulu King Shaka had his royal kraal near Eshowe in Zululand. Mzilikazi was one of his principal generals whose regiment had its headquarters called Bulawayo nearby. In about 1820, Mzilikazi rebelled and fled north, leading his followers away from Zulu territory. In the late 1830s, they settled in what was to become Matabeleland, but they claimed sovereignty over a much wider area. Moffat had established a close and personal relationship with Mzilikazi whom he visited in 1829 near modern Pretoria and then at the Groot Marico River, near Zeerust in 1835.

In 1857, during one of Moffat's visits to Mzilikazi in Matabeleland, Mzilikazi permitted him to establish a London Missionary Society station at Inyati. The Inyati Mission was established during his next visit at the end of 1859. Having established the mission station he returned to Kuruman, leaving it in the care of the Reverends William Sykes, Thomas Morgan Thomas and John Smith Moffat, his son.

The first record of the use of native runners comes from John Smith Moffat's journal: -

"On the 9th November 1859, a post arrived from Kuruman. It was a delightful surprise. My mother (in Kuruman) had prevailed upon two young men to undertake the journey. They had walked all the way, more than seven hundred miles, driving a pack-ox which carried their blankets and food. This was the first news since our departure from Kuruman on the 14th July. It was an adventurous journey, for apart from the hardship involved, there were real dangers, not only from wild beasts, but from the possible misunderstandings with suspicious people along this route, of which we had some instances later on. After a fortnight's rest, our two messengers started on their return journey, and reached Kuruman in safety. Very few but those who have passed through similar experiences can understand what these letters meant after our long famine and what a delightful episode this was in the dull time at the Impembezi River." This extract describes the strong motivation to establish mail routes for the isolated and lonely early settlers in Rhodesia.

Upon the death Mzilikazi in 1868, Lobengula succeeded him as King. He decided to relocate the Royal Kraal to Bulawayo. As a result a second mission station was established in 1870 by the Rev T.B. Thomson at Hope Fountain, thirteen miles south-east of Bulawayo. Rhodesia is a big place and

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

the white men were thin on the ground. They mostly arrived from the south using the seven hundred miles "Missionary Road " which had been pioneered in 1854 by Dr Robert Moffat from Kuruman, through Shoshong to Matatlokotioke in the Bulawayo-Inyati area which was the headquarters of Chief Mzilikazi.

On 2 December 1875 the Revd. Charles Helm, who was to play a central role in setting up the postal services in Matabeleland, both informal and formal, arrived at Hope Fountain and took over the mission when Thomson left the following year. Before 1888 missionaries, hunters, traders and explorers made their own arrangements for their mail to be carried to or from the nearest post office in the Cape Colony or in the Transvaal. Bulawayo was the capital of Lobengula's kingdom. As a result, it became the centre of the London Missionary Society's activities in Matabeleland.

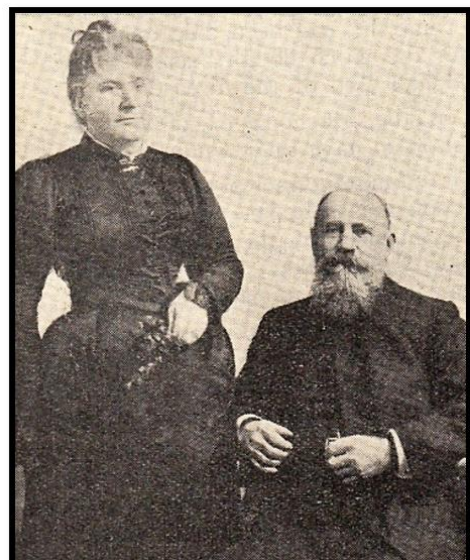
John Smith Moffat 1870 – 1918

John Moffat, the son of Robert Moffat, left Inyati in 1865 and spent some years at the Kuruman mission station. He resigned from the London Missionary Society in 1879 and, after holding a number of government posts, became Assistant Commissioner for the Bechuanaland Protectorate in June 1887. In November, he was sent to Bulawayo as British Representative to use his influence with Lobengula to counteract the pro-Boer Grobler Treaty of 1887 and successfully negotiated the Moffat Treaty, signed on 11th February 1888, in terms of which Lobengula undertook not to grant any rights to foreign states without the sanction of the British Government.

After the treaty had been made, Moffat returned to Bechuanaland. He travelled back to Matabeleland in August 1888 to pave the way for the Chartered Company's negotiations which resulted in the Rudd Concession, signed by Lobengula on 13th October 1888 – Moffat having left shortly before the signing. In January 1890, he was appointed British Resident in Matabeleland, though his expenses were paid for by the British South Africa Company. He left Bulawayo for the last time on 1st June 1892.



John Smith Moffat



Revd Charles Helm with his wife Elizabeth

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Revd. Charles Helm 1844 – 1915

Charles Helm had, for at least eight years, organised his own postal service to the south.

In 1875 and 1876 the Rev. T. Jensen posted letters at Linokana or Zeerust in the Transvaal which had been carried to him by runner from mission stations in Rhodesia. By 1880 the Revd. C. D. Helm of the London Missionary Society was serving as postmaster at Gubulawayo, despatching and receiving mail from Shoshong via Tati fortnightly.

Charles Helm himself gave an account to The Rhodesian Philatelist of September 1912: -

"The postal service was started in 1875 with himself as postmaster. Every trader, hunter and missionary paid an annual subscription of £1.10.0 to £2.10.0. Temporary residents paid 5/- per letter. In addition, letters had to bear the Transvaal postage which at that time was 1/- per half ounce to England. Later on, the Matabele concession (sic) – presumably the Chartered Company – had charge of the mails. Every letter on delivery, was taxed to the extent of 4d".

In a letter dated 20 May 1887, HJ Borrow wrote: - *"Bulawayo - ...the runner leaves this evening & the letters have to go to the missionaries place to be forwarded....postal arrangements up here are rather expensive, the price for a letter being 5/- so that one does not wish to be in receipt of a great postbag."* ('Postage' was paid for by the addressee).

Establishment of a Formal Mail Service to the North 1888

Since his early days at Inyati in 1859 John Moffat had been familiar with the use of runners. In 1887 Rhodes sent John Moffat, the Assistant Commissioner of British Bechuanaland, to negotiate a concession with Lobengula. While there, he successfully maintained communications with Sir Sidney Shippard, the Administrator of British Bechuanaland at Vryburg, using relays of native runners who carried his despatches over the five hundred miles to Mafeking. The success of the service led Moffat to suggest to Sir Sidney that a regular postal service between Gubulawayo and Mafeking be introduced. The proposal was accepted and on the 15th June 1888 Moffat was instructed to conclude the necessary contracts with responsible people along the route, the whole organisation being left in his hands.

In August 1888 this service was implemented on an official basis and the subscriptions levied in Matabeleland described above were discontinued. Helm was officially appointed postal agent in Gubulawayo by Moffat as Hope Fountain was already recognised as the post office. He was permanently resident at Hope Fountain from 1875 until 1914 except for furlough from 1886 to May 1888 and for a short period in 1896 during the Matabele Rebellion. While Moffat set up the new postal service, Revd. Helm initially operated it from Hope Fountain.

A Bechuanaland Protectorate postal notice issued on 28th July 1888, confirmed in a supplementary notice on 7th August signed by E.C. Baxter, the Acting Postmaster General, stated that the native runner post had come into operation and would supersede the old route to the interior via Zeerust.

This notice was published in the Bechuanaland News on 8th August, 1888 stating that postal agencies were being opened within the present limits of the Protectorate at Kanye, Molepolole (Secheli's) and Shoshong (Khamers), and outside those limits at Tati and Gubulawayo. The service would be a weekly one as far as Shoshong, and fortnightly from there to Gubulawayo (via Tati), and the return mails were at similar intervals. To operate the new service Moffat appointed postal agents to cover the route including Charles Helm at Gubulawayo and Samuel Edwards at Tati. The service was limited to letters and newspapers only. It must be emphasised that these first formal postal arrangements which served Matabeleland were inaugurated and organised by the Bechuanaland postal authorities and that Bechuanaland Protectorate stamps were used. The new

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

service was announced in Vryburg on 28th July 1888 and inaugurated on 9th August 1888 from Mafeking. Postal agents were appointed at five stations along the route – GUBULAWAYO, TATI, SHOSHONG, MOLEPOLOLE and KANYE.

Each postal agent was to be issued with a supply of Bechuanaland Protectorate stamps, a circular date

stamp showing the name of the office at the top with Bechuanaland below, the date in the centre in two lines, and with barred cancellers. Gubulawayo was 678, with the barred diamond a 'D'.



The five date stamps with the office name above, Bechuanaland below, each dated AU 21 88.

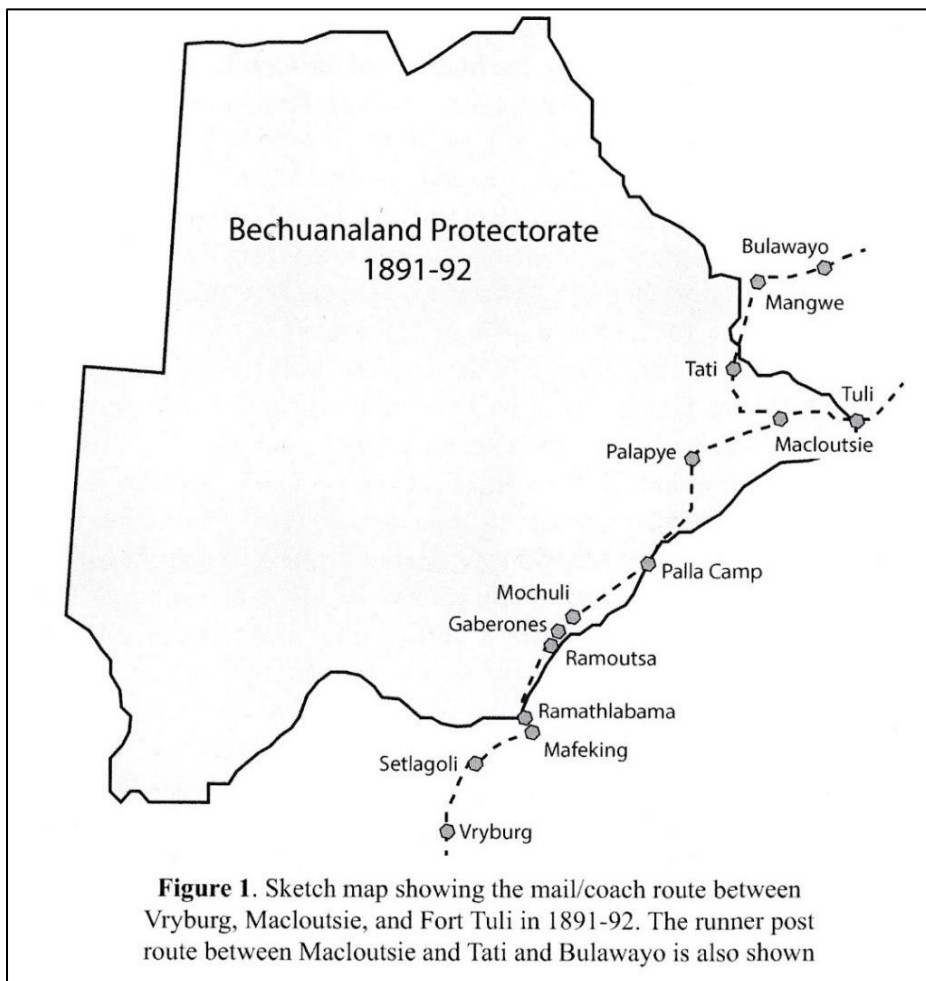


Figure 1. Sketch map showing the mail/coach route between Vryburg, Macloutsie, and Fort Tuli in 1891-92. The runner post route between Macloutsie and Tati and Bulawayo is also shown

In 1887 John Moffat maintained communications with Sir Sidney Shippard, the Administrator of British Bechuanaland at Vryburg, using relays of native runners who carried his despatches over the five hundred miles between Bulawayo and Mafeking.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

The excision of 'Bechuanaland'

21st August 1888 is the only date on which the postmark GUBULAWAYO / BECHUANALAND has been recorded. Ten sets of these examples are known to have survived. No covers or stamps on piece are recorded. The postmarks are all on the stamps of British Bechuanaland and comprise one ½d, five 1d and four 2d denominations.

Many romantic explanations have been written about the decision to excise the country name 'Bechuanaland' from the Gubulawayo and Tati date stamps, about when it was done and by whom. Even Jessie Lovemore (the daughter of Charles Helm), in her *autobiography "Thy Beginnings: Missionary Life Under Lobengula"*, edited by JAA Hughes (my father), states that it was her father, Charles Helm, who discovered the offensive name and excised it.

E. B. Proud in *The Postal History of Southern Rhodesia* describes the excision exercise as follows: - *"Date stamps for the new postal services were ordered from Cape Town and had arrived at Headquarters in Mafeking by August 1888. Evidently an official, probably J. S. Moffat, noticed that the Gubulawayo and Tati instruments were inscribed 'Bechuanaland' and realising the political significance evidently sent them back to the workshop (at Cape Town) via Vryburg for the name to be removed. Before this was done someone cancelled to order a quantity of low values either as a souvenir or as a philatelist. These may have been postmarked by Mr. E. C. Barker, Postmaster General at Vryburg, who was a philatelist. The excised date stamps were not received back and distributed until a few weeks later, the earliest known use at present being 10th November 1888 (Gubulawayo). John Moffat only arrived exhausted at Lobengula's camp, about eleven miles from Gubulawayo on 22nd August 1888 and was joined by Revd. Helm on 24th August".*

Tati

In 1864 gold was discovered by Europeans in the Tati River area.

Rhodesian Jewry and It's Story by Eric Rosenthal recounts an early event at TATI –

"When Eduard Mohr arrived at the Tati Settlement on the morning of July 26 1868, he observed the huts of the miners on the left bank of the Tati, tributary of the Shashi. This camp has come into being in consequence of the discoveries of gold made by the German traveller, Carl Mauch, which at the time created a stir, not only in Cape Colony and Natal, but also in England....."

Among the 30 or 40 whites toiling away, Herr Mohr came upon one of the most picturesque characters of Victorian South Africa, the English nobleman, Sir John Swinburne (later to become the British Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate). *"Enticing reports in the English newspapers had stirred in him visions of Australian and Californian treasures, until, without awaiting confirmation, he had succumbed to these Utopian temptations, bought a steam engine for rock crushing, engaged an engineer and, after purchasing a supply of foodstuffs, clothing, implements, powder, lead, arms, etc, sufficient to fill a whole magazine, trekked up to the Tati.....But now the same miners, led by the speculative Baronet, were confronted with shortages of food as well as with disappointing returns from the mine".*

In 1870 Lobengula granted Swinburne's London and Limpopo Mining Company a concession.

In 1880 the concession was revoked for failure to pay the annual fee, and at 'The White Stones' on 2nd September 1880, Lobengula granted an exclusive concession to mine and prospect for gold between the Shashi and the Ramaquabane rivers for a yearly payment of £30, to a syndicate comprising Danial Francis, Samuel Howard Edwards and R Dodds. The King also revoked all previous grants in the area. The document was witnessed by James Fairbairn and TM Thomas. The grantees formed the Northern Light Gold Mining Company. Edwards visited Lobengula at Bulawayo on behalf of the company and on 2nd September 1881 a new agreement, witnessed by Deans, Peterson, Selous and TM Thomas, enlarged the concession area and added the right to erect

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

machinery. In return, the Company formally recognized Lobengula's sovereignty over its area and agreed to pay an increased royalty of £50 per year.

On 9th August 1886 Dodds sold his interest to EW Tarry and by 1888 William Francis had sold his interest to Alfred Beit. On 3rd May 1886 Lobengula reconfirmed his grants to the Northern Light Gold Mining Company in a document witnessed at Bulawayo by James Dawson and WF Usher. The King appointed Edwards his deputy in the Tati district in February 1887 which helped the enterprise. In October 1888 Edwards, Francis, Tarry and Beit ceded their rights and property in the Tati area to the Tati Concession Mining & Exploration Company Ltd. which was floated at Kimberley with A. Beit and Daniel Francis as major shareholders.

In a written note to Edwards dated 15 November 1888, Lobengula granted the Company the power to prevent settlement in its concession area and to the exclusive right to pasture livestock and cut wood. Lobengula also gave Edwards magisterial and legislative powers in the area. Edwards was called from Tati to New Bulawayo by Lobengula in June 1890; the King asked him about the intentions of the Pioneer Column.

In 1893 the disputed Tati land was detached from Matabeleland and placed under the jurisdiction of the British Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Tati Concessions Limited was formed by Swinburne in 1895, the British Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. In 1914 this became Tati Company Ltd.

Macloutsie (Also spelt Macloutsi)

The native runner service had been inaugurated between Mafeking and Bulawayo on 9th August 1888. During 1889 runners were replaced with mule drawn carts operated by the Bechuanaland Exploration Company between the railhead at Vryburg and Shoshong/Palapye for a short period without success. The considerable difficulties encountered in transporting the mail are illustrated in an 1891 letter from the Postmaster General of British Bechuanaland:

"The service from Mafeking through the Protectorate to Macloutsie is however subject to considerable delay at times owing to the difficulties to be encountered. During one portion of the year, these consist of scarcity of water and horse-sickness, and other times swollen rivers and heavy roads. The mail contractors lost over 350 horses and mules from horse sickness alone in four months last year. This will give you some idea of the difficulty in maintaining a punctual service."

However, the arrival of the Pioneers at Macloutsi in 1890 and the subsequent occupation of Mashonaland resulted in a huge increase in the volume of mail and as a result the British South Africa Company introduced ox drawn Scotch carts between Macloutsie and Palapye, and later extended this wagon service to the Tuli – Macloutsie section. In 1891 the Bechuanaland Exploration Company assumed control of the stretch between Palapye and Macloutsie, and on 14th October 1891 they also assumed control of the 80-mile Macloutsie-Tuli stretch. This increase in postal business resulted in Macloutsie being upgraded to a Post Office by the Bechuanaland Exploration Company, this being the only full post office in the Protectorate.

The postmaster's duties at Macloutsie were to handle the telegraph exchange and the mail flows from both Vryburg and the Cape and from Mashonaland via Tuli. This involved sorting and making up the mail bags for both the northward Mashonaland and southward Vryburg and Cape mail in addition to the runner mail for Tati and Bulawayo. He also had to evaluate and mark each mail item for which surcharges were required when delivered within the Protectorate and the Trans-Protectorate (the Tati Concession and Matabeleland territories) and to collect those surcharges for local mail deliveries in Macloutsie.

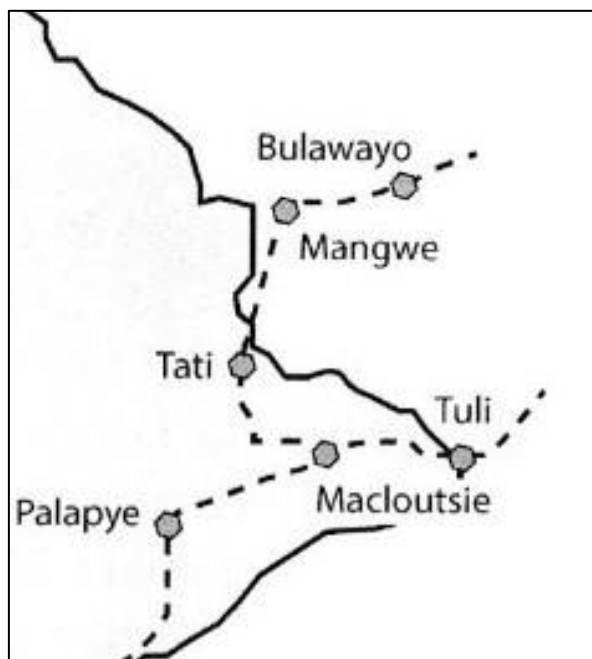
In the book *The Macloutsie Post Office and its Postmaster Bechuanaland Protectorate 1892: JE Symons*, edited and introduced by Peter Thy, Symons is quoted –

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

"Macloutsie is a very busy office on mail days as the whole of the mail going into the British South Africa Company's territory is dealt with here – letters, papers, parcels, mail bags etc. It is the most northerly camp of the Bechuanaland Border Police in the protectorate, manned by E, F and G troops, about 250 men, who mostly live in huts, some in tents. The Macloutsie river, running east to west, is about 4 miles north of the camp".

JE Symons had assumed duties as Postmaster of Macloutsie on 4 January 1892. During 1892 it was decided to prepare the Mashonaland mail in Vryburg (and later Mafeking). In late 1892, the mail contract to convey 1 500 pounds of mail per week between Mafeking and Macloutsie passed to the Wirsing Brothers of Vryburg and shortly thereafter, the Zeederberg Brothers accepted the Macloutsie – Tuli mail route to connect with their already – operating Mashonaland – Tuli – Transvaal service.

As a result of these changes Macloutsie was downgraded to an agency. Symons had been the first and only Postmaster of Macloutsie.



Sketch showing the relative location of Macloutsie

From Vryburg to Macloutsie

In an article published by *The London Philatelist* at the time, Symons describes his journey in the mail coach between Vryburg and Macloutsie. The route from Vryburg to Macloutsie was about 440 miles and took approximately 7 days, travelling night and day.

28 December 1891 – Day 1

The coach departed the Vryburg Post office at 2:30pm on 28 December 1891. Symons entered the coach along with two other passengers. Towards midnight they stopped at Setlagoli for four hours waiting for a heavy rainstorm to pass. The acting postmaster there sorted his mail in a few minutes and they proceeded, arriving at Mafeking at 12:30pm the following day.

29 December 1891 – Day 2

Symons describes the Mashonaland mail in Mafeking as heavy, with mountains of newspapers and parcels. Mafeking's great ambition was to have a railway and a bonded warehouse.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Here Symons changed from the 8-horse American coach to *'a square box on wheels with a couple of springs and eight mules, dignified by the name of coach'*. He and four other passengers departed Mafeking at 6:00pm, crossed the border between British Bechuanaland and the Protectorate, and arrived at Ramatlabama at 8:00pm. 'Here took in a cup of tea at the store/hotel and changed the mules. The coach capsized about 500 yards out but nobody was hurt and we soon had the coach righted again and on its way'. A stop at a store about midnight for a hot meal.

30 December 1891 – Day 3

After a very bumpy ride, arrived at Ramoutsa at 9:40am 30 December 1891. This is a large African town with a few traders and the BSACo Telegraph Office. No post offices at these small places in the protectorate; a storekeeper is generally appointed postal agent who does the little postal work required. Macloutsie is the only Post office in the Protectorate.

Arrived at Gaberones at 1:45pm. Fort Gaberones is a Police Station. After a wearisome six hours trek with one team of mules, without water, through sand and bush covering about 30 miles they arrived at Mochuli at 9:00pm. Mochuli is the head kraal of the protectorate Chief Linchwe. Tinned herrings for supper, transferred their luggage and the mails to a smaller coach and an hour later were on their way.

Their new 'conductor' was a huge "an *'whom could even hold up the coach while the wheels were greased'*".

31 December 1891 – Day 4

Early the next morning, 31 December 1891, they bought a *pannikin* of coffee from an old Hottentot woman at one of the outspans. At midday they stopped for a meal using provisions they had brought with them – coffee, a stale loaf of bread, biscuits and a variety of tinned meats.

Towards 5:00 pm they arrived at Palla Palla camp on the Limpopo River. Here they changed the coach again, to a two-wheeled cart on springs, drawn by oxen as horse sickness was too bad for horses and mules. The oxen trotted with a runner in front to guide them, who was required to run the whole 8-miles stage in hot tropical sun, occasionally needing to continue on the next stage if the next leader was not available. Late that night they crossed paths with the 'down' cart, stopped and wished each other a 'Happy New Year' before continuing through the night.

1 January 1892 – Day 5

At midday 1 January 1892 they stopped on the banks of the Limpopo and were able to wash for the first time since departing Mafeking.

2 January 1892 – Day 6

At about 8:30am the next morning 2 January 1892 they changed the team of oxen for the last time before Palapye, a sandy stretch meaning the oxen would slow to a walk. Palapye – Khama's chief town - was a large African town with about 20 000 inhabitants of whom perhaps 30 were Europeans. It was a deadly looking place. Their journey resumed an hour later, now with only two passengers. During the night they were stuck for 5 hours in a heavy rainstorm making it too dark to see the road.

3 January 1892 – Day 7

Sunday 3 January 1892 'they picked up the pace' and arrived at Macloutsie at 8:00pm.

Travelling night and day, the journey from Vryburg had taken about a week.

Included in the 1893 Annual Report of the Cape Postmaster General: -

From the 1st of April 1893, the administration of the Postal and Telegraph Services of British

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Bechuanaland, and the Postal Service of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, was placed in my hands by His Excellency the High Commissioner, the separate office of Postmaster-General of British Bechuanaland being at the same time abolished. Other reductions in the Headquarter Staff of the Post Office at Vryburg were concurrently affected.

British Bechuanaland was subsequently annexed by the Cape Colony on 16th November 1895.



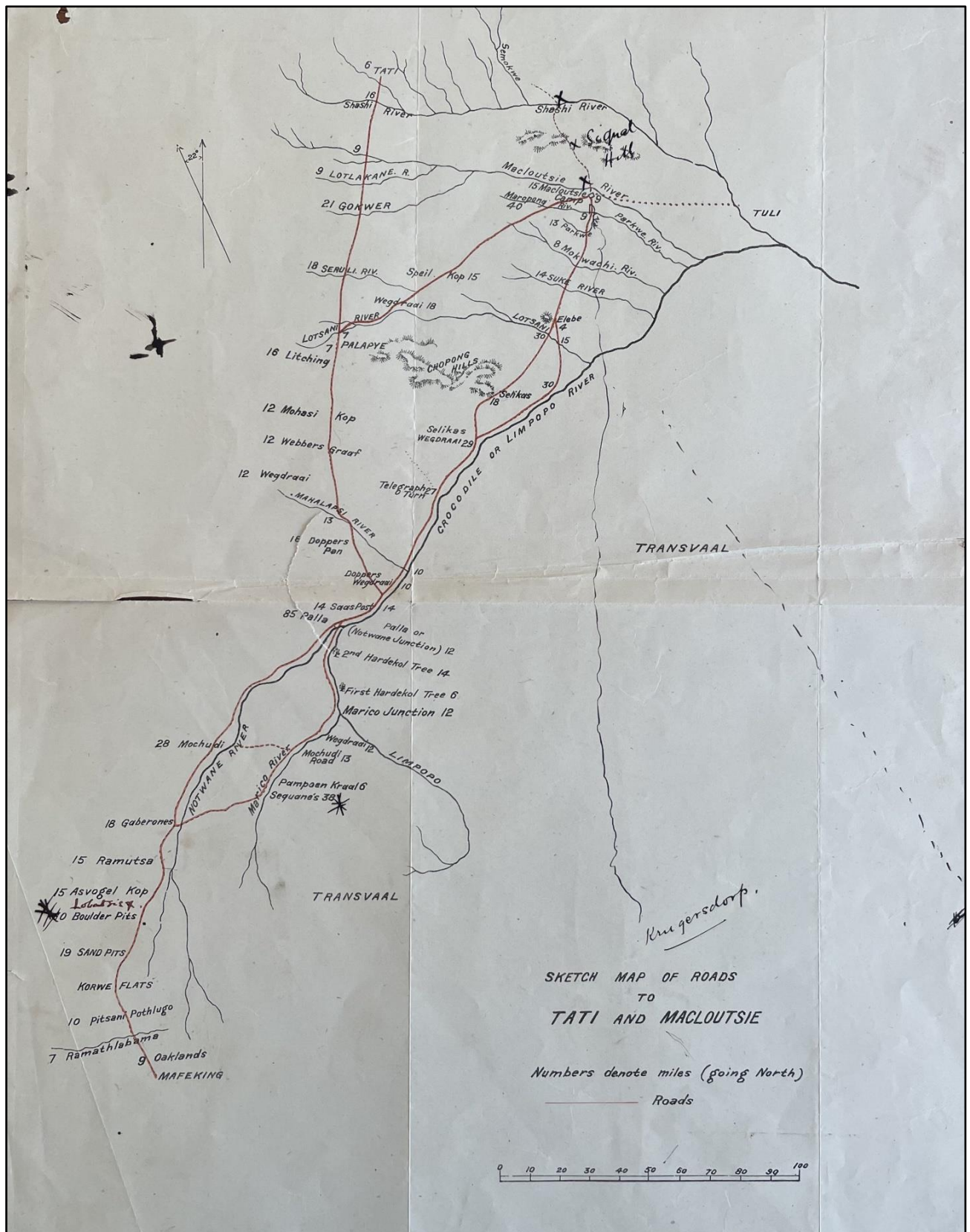
[Scan of a cover illustrated on the Deverell & Macgregor website]

Letter posted at Macloutsi 25th July 1892.

JE Symons had assumed duties as Postmaster of Macloutsi on 4 JAN 1892.

The reverse side of the cover shows Vryburg (1 Aug), MIDLAND T.P.O. / DOWN (3 Aug) and Uitenhage (3 Aug) transit / arrival backstamps

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



*Undated sketch map of the roads and settlements
from Mafeking to Tati and Macloutsie*

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

MAILS FROM MATABELELAND TO THE SOUTH

Before the Occupation of Matabeleland November 1893

By September 1879 Revd. Charles Helm, located at Hope Fountain Mission, was operating a privately funded mail service from Gubulawayo, located at the Hope Fountain Mission about 13 miles from Lobengula's royal kraal.

In August 1888 John Moffat introduced the runner service between Mafeking and Gubulawayo via Shoshong and Tati, administered by the Bechuanaland Protectorate authorities. This was a formal state-run system passing through all-British territories and it formalised Gubulawayo as an official postal agency within the Bechuanaland-administered postal system. Although Hope Fountain was about thirteen miles from Bulawayo, Helm's unofficial postal arrangements had already established it as the centre for mail and the journey into Bulawayo, which took about two hours, was frequently undertaken. At that time, it is thought that there were about fifty Europeans in the area and it is thought unlikely that the first mail would have included more than this number of items.

Despite Tati and Gubulawayo's new formal status as postal agencies, the route remained tenuous as Benjamin "Matabele" Wilson's diary entry for 24 October 1888 shows: *"The post boys arrived with the mail that they had to throw away a few days ago, on the approach of the Impi, who got hold of the boys, and gave them an unmerciful thrashing, after which they cleared out and lay low till it was quiet enough for them to come on. We generally pay them one flask of powder, one bar of lead, and a box of caps for the return journey from Bulawayo to Tati, 126 miles each way, which they manage to do in six or seven days."*

James Dawson arrived in Bulawayo in 1884 and after entering into a legal partnership with James Fairbairn, opened a trading store there. Although Hope Fountain was the official Gubulawayo post office, it was located some distance from the capital and an informal post facility came into existence in Gubulawayo itself, first at Maxwell's Camp and then at Fairbairn and Dawson's store. In effect, Dawson's store became a sub-agency, given that it was a mail collection and distribution point and responsibilities included the collection of the postal charges. Letters posted at Dawson's store went to Hope Fountain where presumably they were postmarked and bagged together with any mail handed in at the Mission. From there they were entrusted to the runners. Incoming mail presumably followed this pattern in reverse. The Agency never moved back to Hope Fountain; even if Helm at Hope Fountain was nominally Postmaster; Fairbairn oversaw the actual work at their store in Gubulawayo.

The mail runner service inaugurated in August 1888 between Mafeking and Gubulawayo was relatively short lived. When the Pioneer Project began to assemble at Macloutsie during 1890, The British South Africa Company introduced ox drawn Scotch carts to convey mail between Macloutsie and Palapye and as previously recorded, the Bechuanaland Exploration Company had assumed control of the stretch between Palapye and Macloutsie during 1891. By mid-1891 Zeederberg had introduced a passenger coach service from Pretoria via Pietersburg to Tuli, although mails were of secondary importance. In 1892 the Wirsing Brothers had been contracted to convey the mail between the railhead at Vryburg and Macloutsie. By the time of the Occupation therefor, the terminus of the runner route from Gubulawayo to Tati had diverted from Palapye to Macloutsie (a shorter distance: refer to the sketch map on page 10) from where it could be transferred to either the Transvaal or the Cape route.

Until the defeat of Lobengula in November 1893, postal communication between Salisbury and Gubulawayo continued to be via Bechuanaland.

In contrast with the events of the 21st August 1888, comparatively little information is available

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

about the Matabeleland postal service during the period of nearly six years until mid-1894 when the first post-occupation post office was opened at Bulawayo. During this period there was only a small number of Europeans at Bulawayo. The rival concession seekers had gradually faded away after the Rudd Concession and no prospecting or mining was authorised. However, during these six years, except for the war period, the mail service continued its fortnightly service and quite a number of stamps must have been used. Of course, this would have been when the stamps of the Bechuanaland postal administration were required.

It is surprising that so few of the postmarks of this 1888 to mid-1894 period are seen: they would be on Bechuanaland stamps with the mutilated Gubulawayo postmark. There are several possible explanations: -

- i) Although the Pioneer Column gave Bulawayo a wide berth, Lobengula and his subjects viewed their progress with great suspicion. Life for those Europeans still living there became very uncomfortable and most of them departed, leaving only a few missionaries. Mail from Gubulawayo for 1891, 1892 and 1893 must have been very light.
- ii) Collectors have not been on the lookout for these postmarks. They are not on Rhodesian stamps, Gibbons do not catalogue postmarks and our interest in postal history is fairly recent. Additionally, the value of these strikes has usually been too modest to justify a place in an auction. John Michael writes that he has had more than forty specimens of Gubulawayo on Bechuanaland adhesives, mostly found at modest prices in dealer stocks under Bechuanaland.
- iii) A complementary explanation is that after 21st August 1888, with its meticulously centred date stamps, the barred oval was used to obliterate the stamps themselves, the circular date stamp being placed on the covers, few of which have survived.

Two examples of Gubulawayo postmarks on Bechuanaland Protectorate stamps: -



FE 28 No year



1893, month illegible

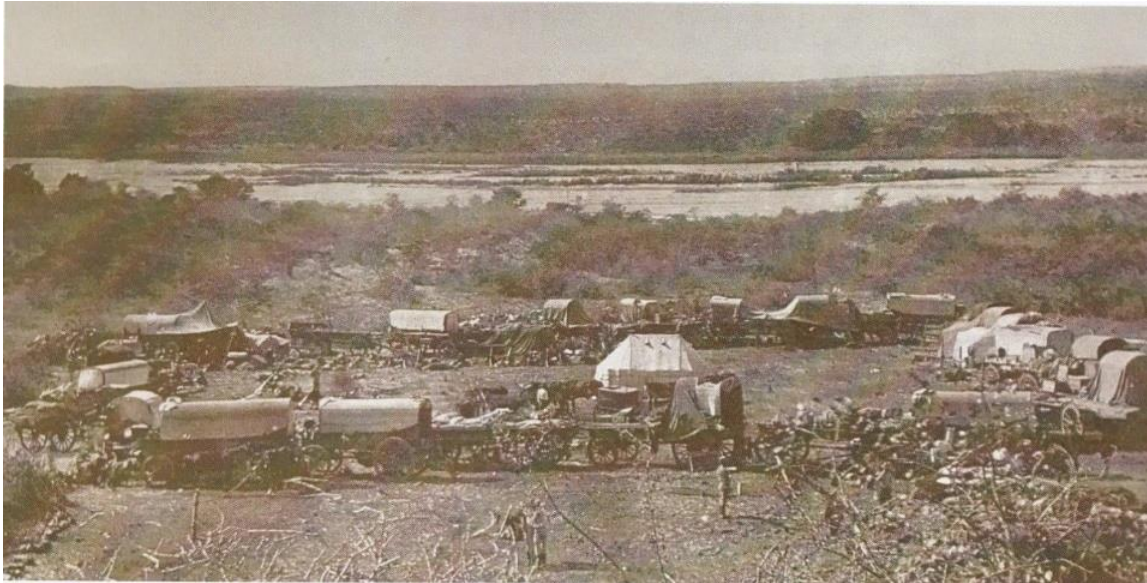
As soon as the BSACo assumed administrative responsibility for Matabeleland in May 1894, new postal routes were organised, with Mashonaland mails now being directed south via Bulawayo and Macloutsie rather than through Tuli and Macloutsie.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Tuli

Having assembled near Macloutsie, the Pioneer Column, guided by Frederick Selous, crossed the Shashi River into Mashonaland at Fort Tuli on 11 July 1890.

Fort Tuli was built in July 1890 on the west bank of the Shashi River, 30 miles below the confluence with the Tuli River, a major tributary which rises in the Matopos south of Bulawayo. It was described as *“a strong fort, situated on a small kopje, surrounded by thick thorn bush and flanked by the big Shashi River”*. The laager was at the foot of the kopje overlooking the river, the widest river the Pioneer Column had to cross.



Fort Tuli laager with the Shashi River in the background

Tuli's importance declined from mid-1894, when Bulawayo became the office of exchange for Mashonaland as well as Matabeleland mail and the Tuli – Salisbury postal service became redundant. Moreover the completion of the rail link to Bulawayo on 4th November 1897 provided a fast direct route to the Cape.

Tuli was the supply depot for the Column and the site of the base hospital. There is no evidence of any earlier settlement, but within a year there was a main street, a hotel, two drifts across the river and a rubbish dump. The telegraph line from Macloutsie was connected to Tuli on 28th May 1891, and to Salisbury on 16th February 1892. Rhodes visited the embryo township at the end of October 1890, the first time he stood on the 'hinterland' which was later to bear his name.

The township of Tuli had much in common with Tati; they were places of little substance which assumed a brief importance because they were at the hub of frequently used trek routes, but both were to be by-passed as communications improved. Tuli was sited on the Selous Road, the original lifeline of the Pioneers, which linked Salisbury and the settled areas of Mashonaland and Manicaland with Macloutsie and Palachwe and the route to the Cape. Tuli also connected with two other routes – to Gubulawayo via Mangwe (which later followed a more direct line via Gwanda) and the Zeederberg coach route south to Pretoria via Rhodes' Drift across the Limpopo River and Henriksdal (Zeederberg's northern terminus in the Transvaal), Pietersburg and Nylstroom.

Tuli differed from Tati in that it was a strategically important border post. It provided a base for the Police contingent which repelled a threatened Boer trek in June 1891, and the Tuli Column was to play a role in the occupation of Matabeleland in 1893. In 1899 it was one of several locations at which British forces were concentrated in an attempt to contain the Boers should war be declared.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

In this instance the policy was successful because, although the Boers established a laager on the Limpopo and besieged Tuli, they were unable to occupy it.

BSACo reports state that in September 1897 mail between Bulawayo and Tuli was being carried by runners; the Bulawayo – Pretoria coach service must therefore have ceased operating before then. However, reports of the Postmaster General state that the coach service was reconstituted on 26th August 1902, but this appears to have been used only for mail to the Boer Republics and Natal. The last coaches ran in 1904 after which Tuli became no more than a Police post. The post office, initially run by troopers, was downgraded to a Telegraph Office during the period April 1910 to August 1912 when it again became a post office agency until it eventually closed on 1 November 1941.

Following the Occupation of Matabeleland November 1893

The flag of the BSACo was raised in Bulawayo on 4 November 1893 when the forces of the Company under Dr. Leander Starr Jameson entered Lobengula's burnt out royal kraal and occupied Matabeleland.

The agency at Gubulawayo continued as an office of the Bechuanaland Postal Administration until the 5th May, 1894, from which date the BSACo took over the administration of Matabeleland and the Gubulawayo postal agency became a Rhodesian postal agency. Cape Post Office Circular No.150 of 1 June 1894 states: *"The agency at Gubulawayo continued as an office of the Bechuanaland Postal Administration until 5th May 1894, when the British South Africa Company took over the administration of Matabeleland and the postal agency became a Rhodesian postal agency"*.

A Rhodesian Government Notice of 30 May 1894, signed by HM Heyman as Civil Commissioner and Resident Magistrate, recorded the final break with the pre-occupation era's postal arrangements: *"It is hereby notified for general information that the Public Offices, Post Office and Standard Bank will be removed to the New Township on Saturday June 2nd."*

According to the Matabeleland News & Mining Record dated 5 May 1894, *"a Permanent Post Master has just been appointed, Mr AOD Gumley, and it will doubtless take him some time to get everything in good order, especially as the Mail Service is being changed, for the better"*. So Gumley was the first full-time Postmaster, as opposed to the part-time Postal Agents of the pre-occupation era.

The name of the town was officially changed to BULUWAYO on 15 May 1894.

The Dawson Store now had the original cancellers and a stock of Bechuanaland stamps on hand and worked from the same premises as before the Occupation – *"a barn like shanty, which serves, or has to serve the purpose of the present post-office, and where always a couple of troopers are allowed to sort at the busiest time of the delivery, it would be manifestly unfair to criticise, especially on the first occasion, the efforts of the P.M. Not only has he barely room to move about in, but he has absolutely no conveniences for coping with mails that grow larger every week. The present place was suitable before the occupation, but not now."*

This refers to Dawson's Store located at the "White Man's Camp" near Lobengula's old royal kraal, which according to the historian Oliver Ransford comprised three rooms and *"I have learned from several sources that the most southerly of the rooms served for a time as the town's original post office."* He also quotes from a Walter Howard manuscript in the Bulawayo Public Library which said that part of Dawson's Store served in November 1893 as a hospital and quartermaster's store, *"and later it was the first Bulawayo post office."*

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

The postage stamps issued by the BSACo were now officially used in Matabeleland for the first time.



GUBULAWAYO MY 17 9-



GUBULAWAYO NO 9 9- with Code 2

When did the first post-occupation Rhodesian post office open in Bulawayo?

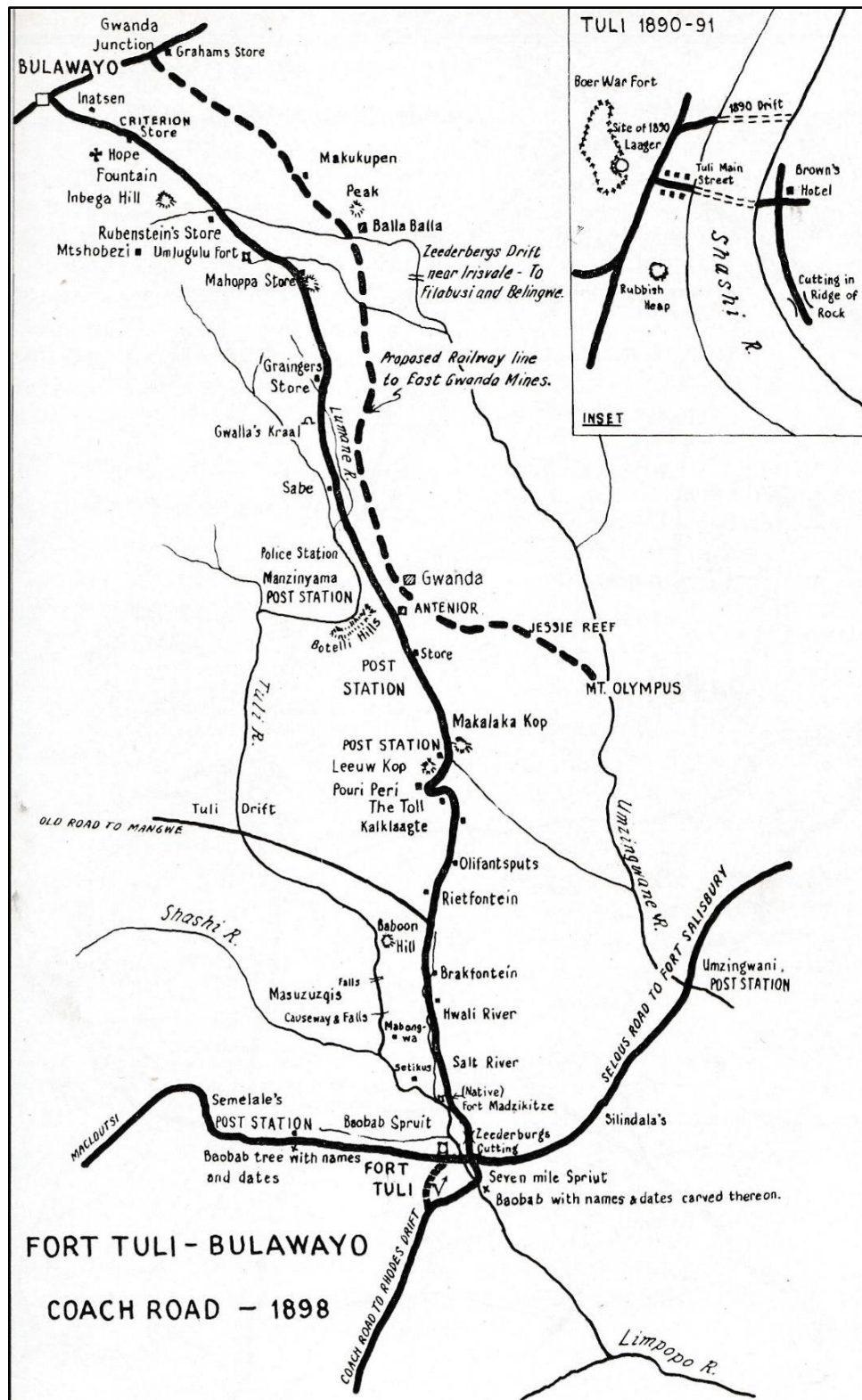
Otto Peetoom gives this date as 18th May 1894. However, Brian Zlotnick has provided this Gubulawayo postmark dated MY 17 9- (94) (above) so 15th May 1894 seems the more likely date. It is not until early June 1894 that the code 2 is added to the Gubulawayo postmark, perhaps indicating it's status as a sub-office of the newly opened Bulawayo Post Office 'in the New Township' which opened for business on Monday 4th June 1894 according to the Government Notice published on 30th May 1894.

Now that Matabeleland had been added to Mashonaland under the administration of the Chartered Company, Europeans poured into Bulawayo and by March 1895 there were 1329 white men and 208 white women there. Statistics for children are not given. By mid-1894 the Wirsing Brothers were moving the mails into Bulawayo via Tati and the Mangwe Pass, finally replacing the mail runner service entirely.

The telegraph service was regarded by Rhodes as an essential part of the development of the interior and civilizing the country and initially was funded by him personally. Telegraph lines followed the pioneer routes. As the postal routes developed following the occupation of Matabeleland, the telegraph system also received immediate attention. The British Government erected a light field line from Palapye to Tati where a telegraph office was opened on 22nd January 1894, shortly after which it was handed over to the BSACo who continued construction of a wooden pole line northwards to Ramaquabane where a temporary office was opened on 13th March and thence via Mangwe to Bulawayo where an office was opened on 9th July 1894. The line north of Tati was erected under the superintendence of the Cape Postal Department who controlled the working of the system in conjunction with their own. To strengthen the system a short alternative iron pole route from Macloutsie to Mangwe, completed on 21 June 1894. Macloutsie became an important junction in the system for traffic to both Matabeleland and Mashonaland, employing telegraphic staff of six morse operators.

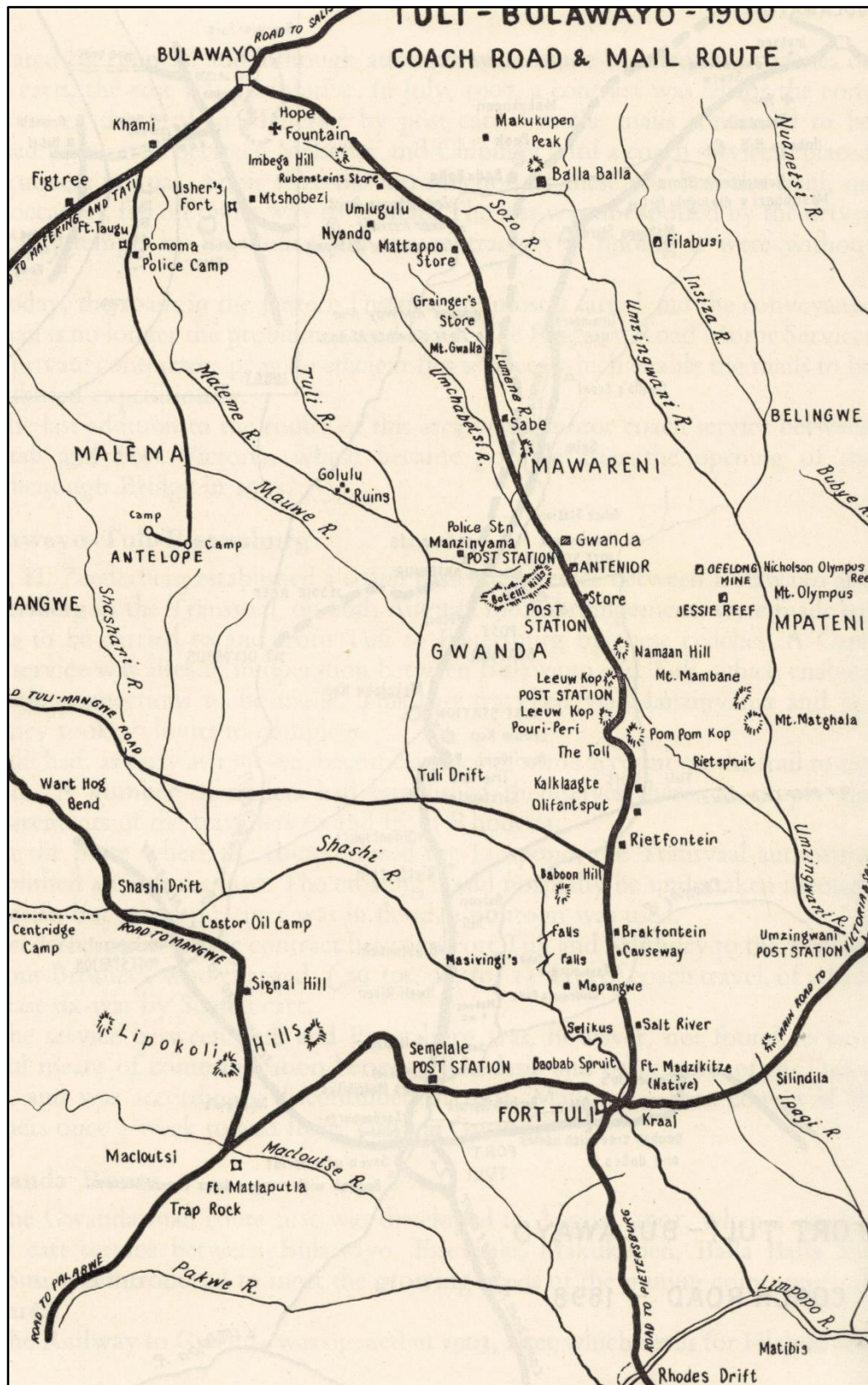
Line construction advanced at roughly three miles a day and when the BSACo team reached Tuli it consisted of about 250 men, most of whom were provided by Chief Khama who, alarmed at entering hostile territory, insisted on being armed.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



*The Coach Road between Tuli and Bulawayo until 1898
Layout of Tuli where the Pioneer Column crossed the Shashi River
into Mashonaland in 1890 is shown as inset*

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



The Coach Road and mail route between Tuli and Bulawayo from 1900 via Gwanda.

*Fort Tuli, the junction with roads leading to Macloutsie, Bulawayo,
Mashonaland and south to Pretoria
via the Rhodes Drift over the Limpopo River, Hendriksdal and Pietersburg*

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

MAILS FROM MASHONALAND TO THE SOUTH

Before the Occupation of Matabeleland

By 1890 the railway north from the Cape had been extended as far as Vryburg.



The Pioneer Column in the Matopos Hills

Having assembled near Macloutsie, the Pioneer Column, guided by Frederick Selous, crossed the Shashi River into Mashonaland at Fort Tuli on 11 July 1890. During the march of the Column and in the years which followed, Tuli was the focal point for mail to and from Mashonaland. The forts at Victoria and Charter and intermediate 'stations' which had been established by the Column served the police despatch riders who carried both Company mail and private letters. Bulky incoming mail, such as newspapers, books and parcels, was carried north by ox-wagon. During the next four years the police despatch riders were replaced by ox-carts and mule-drawn mail coaches. However, establishing the line of communications was challenging, as could be expected. Along the way, on 3 August 1890, Pennefather wrote from the Setoutse's on the Lundi (to Macloutsie) -

"I cannot control the long line of road with five hundred men if the Matabele are actively hostile. You must be prepared to abandon this road altogether, at any rate until next April. I do not know what we will be able to do about keeping open postal communication. I am leaving post riders along the road, but if the Matabele interference takes the form of cutting our communications, they will, I fear, make short work of our isolated posts." Fortunately for the new settlers, the Matabele did not interfere.

The Column arrived at Fort Salisbury on 12 September, 1890 and the Union flag was raised the following day. A postmaster was appointed. He collected postage for mail in cash. Bechuanaland stamps were purchased and affixed on arrival at Palachwe. Later, Bechuanaland stamps were put on sale in Salisbury.

September was the start of the wet summer season and several large rivers which had to be crossed sometimes flooded, creating a major hurdle in maintaining delivery schedules. Initially, post riders were employed, using the post stations which were at 50-mile intervals along the Pioneer Road linking Salisbury with Tuli. Each post station was manned by 4 to 6 post riders. The

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

post stations were rudimentary and conditions for the riders were very poor and horse sickness was common. A horse could pull up lame or die suddenly between post stations, so that the post riders sometimes had to walk 20 or 30 miles, carrying the bags, or abandoning them, depending on circumstances, adding to the difficulty of maintaining the weekly schedule.

Later, the transport which carried passengers and the mail bags between Tuli and Salisbury was described by passenger DG Gisborne: *'a four-wheeled covered conveyance on springs drawn by 8 oxen – only fit for the scrap heap'* which took 17 days'.



Post Station, Hunyami River, 1890, Mashonaland

"May 1891. The post is precarious. It starts from Tuli to Victoria (200 miles) with 2 men to ride the whole distance on the same horse. Then a further 200 miles by bullock cart and on donkeys". However, from mid-1891 only post-carts were used, still organised by the BSAC Police.

In the meantime, the telegraph line was moving forward rapidly. An office had been opened at Tuli on 28 May, 1891. Cape Town advised Jameson *"that Mr Rhodes does not care much for letters and he says that the men's letters can come by ox wagon rather than killing horses to carry them. Victoria will have a telegraph in October and this is all that is necessary. The fewer letters written on petty details the better and gold and other news of importance can be telegraphed"*.

As the rainy season approached in late 1891, post-carts took a different route in order to avoid the Hunyani and Umfuli Rivers. The route took the Montgomery's Road as far as Chief Marandella's Kraal before turning south along a new road called the Watershed Road, towards Charter and Victoria. This added 40 miles (2 days) to the journey time.

At Tuli, the mail connected with a service into the Transvaal.

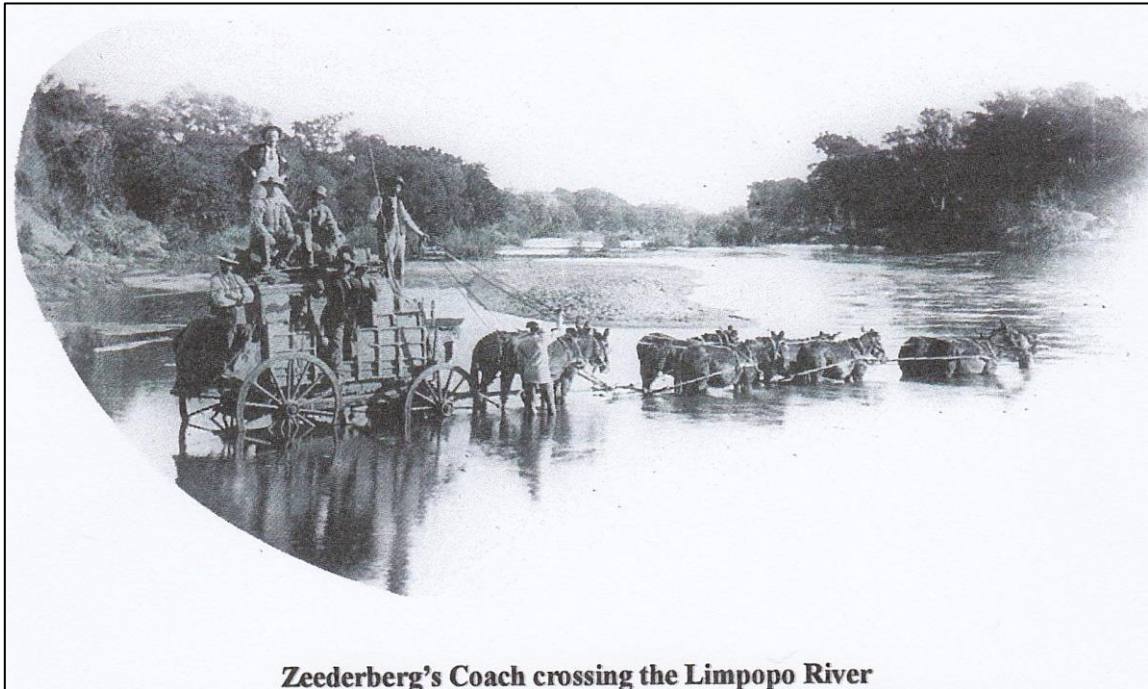
"Posts have been established between Vryburg, Macloutsie, and Fort Tuli, and between Pretoria and Fort Tuli via Pietersburg and Henriksdal. The time occupied between Fort Tuli and Fort Salisbury is 20 days. A quicker service is being organized by which the journey will be accomplished in about 9 days".

On 1 January 1892 the postal services in Mashonaland were taken over by the civil postal administration from the BSA Police and the stamps of the BSACo were issued for the first time. In August 1892 the Company signed a contract with H Bezuidenhout aimed at a 12 days oxcart service connecting Salisbury with the Zeederberg Tuli-Pretoria coach service. This continued until May 1893.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

On 15 May 1893 Richard Roger Hollis, Christian Hendrick Zeederberg and Hans Jacobus Zeederberg were contracted to run a weekly service using fast mail coaches between Pretoria and Victoria, timed to 6½ days and in June 1893 they were contracted to provide a mule-drawn coach service between Salisbury and Victoria. From July 1893 the Matabele began to threaten the functioning of this service, necessitating Zeederberg to arrange armed escorts, while flooded rivers continued to cause delays.

Salisbury mail was re-routed from the route via Vryburg to the Pretoria via Pietersburg route in the Transvaal, whence it went by train to the Cape. This reduced the time to Cape Town by 12 days and was a favourable arrangement for Mashonaland since *"it placed Victoria within 6½ days of Pretoria and Salisbury within 8½ days"*.



Zeederberg's Coach crossing the Limpopo River

The Rhodes' Drift crossing of the Limpopo River.

Extracts from the Cape Postmaster General's Annual Reports:-

1892 - *"On the first of August last (1891) the British South African Company.....has since that time been carrying on an organised system of postal business at the following offices: - **Fernspruit, Hartley Hill, Laurencedale, Mazoe, Salisbury, Tuli, Umtali and Victoria**. The Company has notified its intention to shortly open Postal Agencies also at the undermentioned places:- **Charter, Inyatitzi, Makori, Marandellas, Odzi, and Popotoque**" (located between Odzi and Umtali).*

1893 - *"Mashonaland Postal Services. - The mails to and from Mashonaland have steadily increased in volume during the past year, rendering it necessary for fresh arrangements to be made for their*

conveyance; a contract was therefore entered into in June last (1892), between the British South Africa Company and the Messrs. Zeederberg, for a service between Tuli and Salisbury by mule coaches in place of ox wagons, resulting ultimately in an acceleration of the mails by a week in both directions".

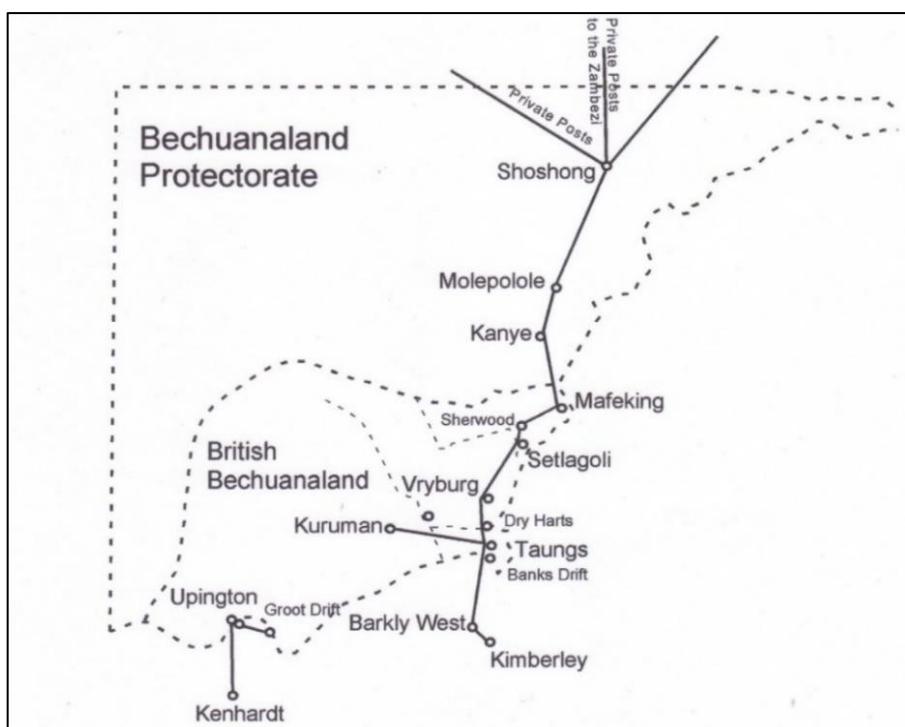
"A passenger and Mail Coach Service has also been established between Pretoria and Tuli via Pietersburg and Hendriksdal, connecting at Tuli with the through coach from Macloutsie to Salisbury. Mail matter is exchanged by means of this route between the South African Republic and Mashonaland. Letters from the Cape Colony are also sent via Pietersburg when so addressed,

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

but the Bechuanaland route continues to be the recognised channel for the circulation of mails between the Cape and Mashonaland. The Transvaal route is somewhat shorter in point of time, but the running of the coaches being undertaken primarily in the interests of passenger traffic, it cannot

be guaranteed in that respect, more especially as no official arrangements for the use of the route have yet been concluded between the Transvaal Postal Department and this Office”.

The new contract had been awarded to the Zeederberg brothers. In order to provide some measure of compensation to Bezuidenhout who was the previous contractor, he was awarded the mail contract between Salisbury and Umtali.



Coach routes through Bechuanaland 1894

Squared circle back stamps:



*VRYBURG 18 NO 94
MAFEKING NO 21 94
Transit time of 3 days*

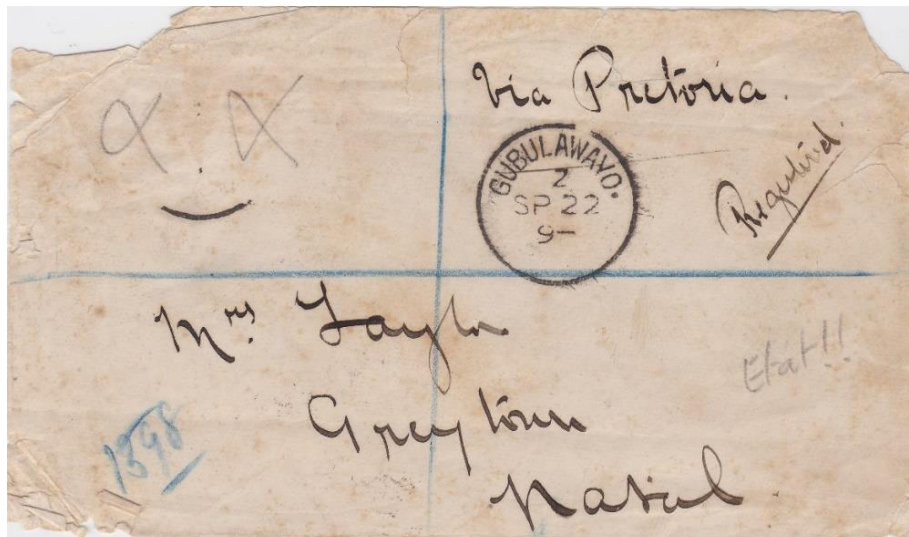
Following the Occupation of Matabeleland

Following the occupation of Matabeleland on 4th November 1893, the Company took over the administration of Matabeleland and on 5th May 1894 the postal administration of Matabeleland, which extended to the Tati Concession territory, was transferred from the Bechuanaland Protectorate. On 15th May 1894 Gubulawayo and Tati became Rhodesian post offices using the postage stamps of the BSACo. Tati was located within the Tati Concession territory whose sovereignty had still to be settled. For a short time, both the Pietersburg and the Vryburg routes seem to have been in use. Mashonaland residents preferred the Pietersburg route because it was quicker. However, the Transvaal was controlled by the Boers who were hostile to the Cape Administration.

When the BSACo took over the administration of Matabeleland in May 1894, the mail routes were reorganised. The Wirsing Brothers were contracted to carry the mail from Bulawayo via Tati to Macloutsie where it linked up with their Macloutsie - Mafeking mail coach. It was eventually

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

decided that all mail up to a weekly 1 500 pounds weight limit would be routed through Bechuanaland (British controlled) to Mafeking but that mail in excess of 1 500 pounds would be permitted to be routed through Pietersburg at a cheaper rate than the rate charged by the Wirsing Brothers for excess weight. The main weight of mail from Salisbury for the Cape and overseas was sent via Bulawayo, Tati and Mafeking.



*A registered letter posted in Gubulawayo on 22 September 1894 addressed to Greytown, Natal, clearly marked "via Pretoria", the quicker route preferred by residents.
The postage stamps have become detached. (Size reduced)*



Despite the direction written on the front "Via Pretoria", the four perfect transit postmarks confirm the route actually used was via Bechuanaland

TPO DOWN NORTHERN dated OC 1 94. The Northern Travelling Post Office operated between De Aar and Fourteen Streams, which is about 60 miles north of Kimberley at the junction of the C.G.R. line to Klerksdorp for Johannesburg. The CGR crosses the Vaal River a few miles to the south of Fourteen Streams/Warrenton. The railway line from Kimberley reached Fourteen Streams on 1 December 1890. The TPO service operated from December 1890 - October 1899.

EAST LONDON C.G.H. dated OC 2 94 Squared circle, code 1 above date

DURBAN NATAL dated OC 4 94

GPO NATAL dated 5 OC 94

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

In September 1894 Bezuidenhout was contracted to carry mail between Salisbury and Bulawayo via Iron Mine Hill and Gwelo in 4 days with mules and oxen, replacing the Salisbury – Tuli – Macloutsie – Bulawayo route. Shortly thereafter a coach service was introduced via Charter, Enkeldoorn, Selukwe and Gwelo to Bulawayo. The result was that the lowveld route via Tuli became superfluous and after only 4 years, the Pioneer Road had fallen into disuse.

This coach route between Salisbury and Bulawayo continued in use, though temporarily disrupted by the Matabele and Mashona hostilities during 1896/7, until partly replaced on 1st June 1902 by a rail route between Salisbury and Gwelo, thence by coach to Bulawayo, the railway line to Gwelo from Salisbury having been constructed more speedily than the Bulawayo to Gwelo section. This latter section was opened from 1st December 1902 and from that date practically all mail from Salisbury to the Cape and overseas travelled by rail to Bulawayo and the Cape.

Extract from the Cape Postmaster General's 1895 Annual Report:-

*"From the 1st of May 1895, an improved mail service between Mafeking and Bulawayo was commenced (the Zeederberg Brothers replaced the Wirsing Brothers) under which the mail coaches perform the journey twice a week **from Mafeking via Ramoutsa, Gaberones, Mochuli, Palla, Palapye, Tati, Mangwe, and Figtree to Bulawayo** in 144 hours (i.e., six days), as against a service once a week in 183 hours (7½ days) prior to that date. The coaches leave Mafeking on Sunday and Wednesday mornings shortly after the arrival of the train from Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, and connect at Bulawayo with coaches for Salisbury also running twice a week, and performing the journey in three days, as compared with five days, the time previously occupied. The weight of mail to be carried under the previous contract was 1,500 lbs. weekly, any excess over that weight being paid for at the rate of 1s. 6d. per lb. Under the existing contract, however, the weight to be carried on each coach is 2,000 lbs., making a weekly weight of 4,000 lbs., a limit which the mails have not yet quite reached. The projected extension of the railway in the direction of Gaberones, and subsequently to Palapye, will, it is anticipated, effect a further acceleration of the mails, and may possibly result in the running of additional coaches in the week between the railway terminus and Bulawayo".*

Major Baden Powell was Chief Staff Officer in Carrington's column of Imperial troops moving north towards Bulawayo after the Matabele Rebellion had started during March 1896. In his book *The Matabele Campaign 1896*, he describes his journey from the Cape to Bulawayo: -

"Kimberley. Miles of mineheads, mounds of refuse, town of tin houses and dust, a filthy refreshment room – and we go on."

"May 22nd - At last, after three nights and two days jogging along in the train, we rattle into Mafeking at 6am. Into Mafeking? Well, there's a little tin (corrugated iron) house and a goods shed to form the station; hundreds of wagons and mounds of stores covered with tarpaulins, and on beyond a street and market square of low-roofed tin houses. Mafeking is at present the railway terminus. The wagons and the goods are waiting to go north to Matabeleland, but here they're stranded for want of transport, since all the oxen on the road are dying fast from rinderpest. However, every train is bringing up more mules and donkeys to use in their stead". Mafeking to Bulawayo took 10 days and nights by coach.

"June 3rd – Bulawayo. Arrived at 1am. By breakfast-time I had investigated Bulawayo. A red earth flat laid out by ditches, in blocks and streets, over two miles long and half a mile wide. The centre portion of the town well filled with buildings, all single-storeyed, some brick, some tin, some of "paper" (i.e. wire-wove, ready-made in England, sent out in pieces), all with verandas. The more outlying blocks only boasting a house or shanty here and there. Most of the houses built with a view to ultimate extension; e.g. one consisted of, evidently, the scullery, back kitchen, and "offices,"

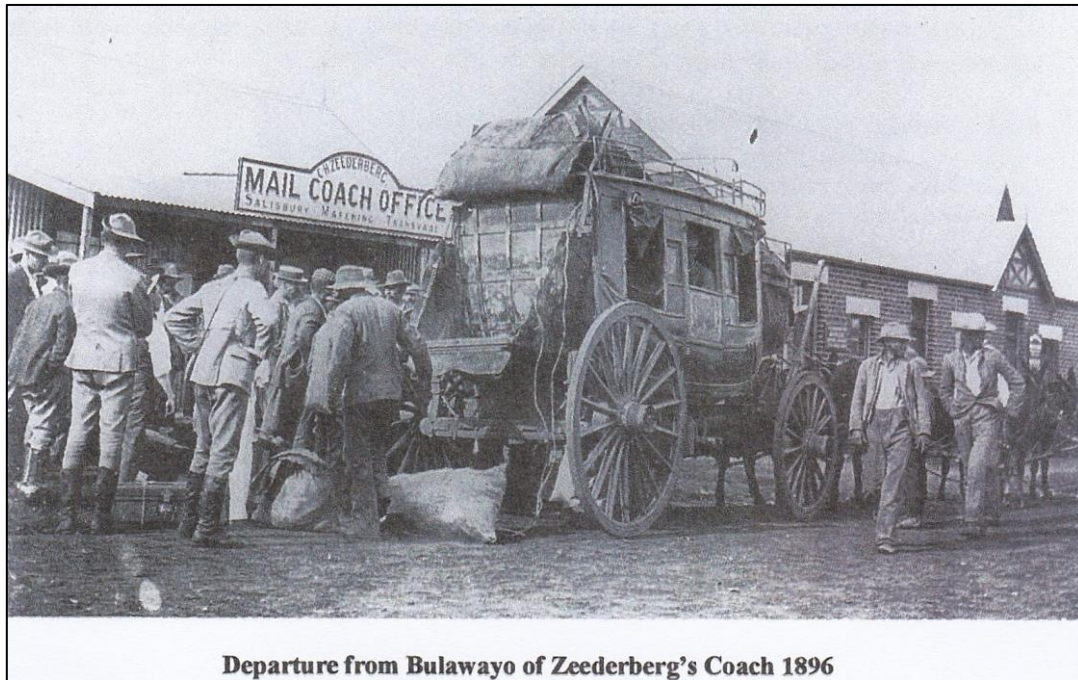
HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

the front to be added later, when better times came round. The gardens, streets, and vacant lots richly sown with broken bottles, meat tins, rags, and paper; scarcely a garden, shrub, or tree in the place. The houses, generally, if they are not "Bottle Stores" (i.e. public-houses), are either dry-goods stores or mining syndicate offices. Everywhere enterprise and rough elements of civilisation, - not forgetting the liquor branch".

In the forgoing narrative, the history of the events, the people, the politics and the places having a bearing on mail routes have been described. In summary -

- The runner route between Gubulawayo and Mafeking was established in August 1888. The Rudd Concession was signed shortly thereafter, on 30th October 1888. From Mafeking a mail coach conveyed the mail to Vryburg, a 24 hours journey, where it reached the railhead and was transported by rail for the remainder of the distance to Cape Town.
- The British South Africa Company obtained its Charter from Queen Victoria on 30 October 1889. During 1889 runners were temporarily replaced with mule drawn carts operated by the Bechuanaland Exploration Company from the railhead at Vryburg to Shoshong/Palapye. The runner route continued from here to Gubulawayo via Tati and Mangwe.
- The arrival of the pioneers at Macloutsie in 1890 resulted in a huge increase in the volume of mail. As a consequence the BSACo had to replace runners with ox drawn Scotch carts between Macloutsie and Palapye. Shortly thereafter they extended this wagon service to the Fort Tuli - Macloutsie section. The runner route south from Gubulawayo now changed from the Tati – Palachwe route to Tati- Macloutsie, which was closer and was now on the coach route.
- In 1891 the Bechuanaland Exploration Company took over control of the stretch between Palapye and Macloutsie and shortly thereafter they also assumed control of the 80-mile Macloutsie- Fort Tuli stretch. By 14 October 1891 mail from Salisbury was handed over to the Bechuanaland authorities at Fort Tuli.
- Mail from Salisbury to Bulawayo continued to be via Bechuanaland. However, the increase in the volume of mail from Salisbury increasingly strained the mail routes heading south.
- In late 1892, the Wirsing Brothers in Vryburg were awarded the contract to convey the mail between Mafeking and Macloutsie. The contract stipulated a maximum weight of 1500 pounds of mail per week. Mail in excess of this limit was subject to a costly surcharge of 1/6d per pound. The extension of the railway from Vryburg to Mafeking was officially opened on 3 OCT 1894 and was to remain the railhead for several more years.
- In mid-1894, following the Occupation of Matabeleland, the Mashonaland mail routes were reorganised. The Wirsing Brothers were contracted to carry the mail from Bulawayo via Tati to Macloutsie in place of the runner service where it linked up with their Macloutsie - Mafeking mail coach. In September 1894 mail was routed through Iron Mine Hill and Gwelo to Bulawayo and the route via Tuli was finally abandoned for Mashonaland mails.
- From the 1st of May 1895, as the BSACo officially took over administering Matabeleland from the Bechuanaland authorities, an improved mail service between Mafeking and Bulawayo was commenced (the Zeederberg Brothers replacing the Wirsing Brothers).

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



*"CH Zeederberg. MAIL COACH OFFICE. Salisbury * Mafeking * Transvaal".
Bulawayo - their pitch in early 1896.*

Several significant historical events took place at this time: –

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 23 rd April 1895 | The BSACo officially adopted the name "Rhodesia" (Gov. Gazette 3 May 1895). The British Government followed on 1 st June 1897. |
| 29 th December 1895 | The Jameson Raid. This left Matabeleland with little protection. |
| 12 th January 1896 | Rhodes was forced to resign as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony due to his involvement in the failed Jameson Raid. |
| 4 th March 1896 | The name Bul <u>u</u> wayo was officially changed to Bul <u>a</u> wayo |
| 20 th March 1896 | The 1896 Matabele Rebellion started in Matabeleland. The consequences of this situation, together with the outbreak of rinderpest, resulted in a transport emergency and the acceleration of rail construction from the south. |
| June 1896 | Rhodes was required to relinquish all his appointments with the Chartered Company although he was reappointed to the Board in 1898 and continued to control the Chartered Company until his death in 1902. He spent the last few years of his life living in and aiding in the development of Rhodesia. |
| 13 th October 1896 | The ending in Matabeleland of the 1896 Rebellion with the final Indaba in the Matopos. The rebellion continued for a further year in Mashonaland, blocking mail from using the Umtali to Beira East Coast route for several weeks. |

The coming of the Railway

Railway Construction Milestones

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Nov 1885 | Cape Government Railway reaches Kimberley |
| 29 Oct 1889 | BSACo incorporated by Royal Charter |
| Dec 1890 | BSACo completes railway to Vryburg; then purchased by Cape Govt Railway |
| Sept 1892 | Construction of 2ft gauge line from Fontesvilla towards Umtali begins |

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

May 1893	Bechuanaland Railway Company Ltd. incorporated
3 Oct 1894	Vryburg to Mafeking railway line, started 10 May 1893, completed
31 Dec 1894	Fontesvilla to Chinoio 2ft gauge line opened
Oct 1896	Fontesvilla connected by rail to Beira port
4 Nov 1897	Official opening of the Mafeking to Bulawayo line
4 Feb 1898	Beira to Umtali 2ft gauge railway line opened to through traffic
22 May 1899	Umtali connected by 3ft 6in gauge railway line to Salisbury
1 Jun 1899	Bechuanaland Railway Company Ltd. renamed Rhodesia Railways
1 Aug 1900	Conversion of Beira to Umtali railway line from 2ft gauge to 3ft 6in gauge completed in six months and opened to through traffic
1 Dec 1902	Bulawayo to Salisbury railway line opened to through traffic
20 Jun 1904	Bulawayo to Victoria Falls via Wankies opened to through traffic
12 Sept 1905	Victoria Falls Bridge opened connecting Bulawayo to Livingstone

Conditions in Nyasaland in 1887 between the Arab slave traders and the natives led Lord Salisbury, the British Prime Minister, to send Harry Johnston to that country as his agent to safeguard British interests. In their discussions Johnston used the phrase 'Cape to Cairo', which had originally appeared in a pamphlet by Edwin Arnold in 1876. The prospect of a railway from the Cape to Nyasaland through British territory and by-passing Portuguese interference in the context of a Cape to Cairo railway was of much interest to Lord Salisbury. However, in early 1889, despite support from Lord Salisbury, funds for the project were refused by the British Treasury. At this juncture Rhodes and Johnston met for the first time in London and discussed this dream. Rhodes immediately offered his support. He wrote a cheque for £2 000 to cover Johnston's expenses and offered the British Government £10 000 pa for the administration of Nyasaland on condition he was granted his coveted charter.

In 1889 Maud of the Bechuanaland Exploration company and Lord Gifford of the Exploring Company agreed to join with Rhodes, who was effectively working through his Goldfields Company, to petition for a Charter for the British South Africa Company. The company aims were to include extension of the railway and telegraph systems northwards in the direction of the Zambezi. The Exploring Company promised to proceed immediately with the construction of the first section of the railway and the extension of the telegraph system from Mafeking to Shoshong. It was agreed that the rights to construct the railway would be taken over by the proposed Charter Company in return for land and mineral rights in Bechuanaland and by December 1890 the railway extension from Kimberley to Vryburg had been completed by the BSACo. George Pauling was the contractor. His cousin Harold Pauling, in his capacity as a Government employee, was in charge of the line.

Following a delay due to financial troubles, Pauling met Rhodes and Sir Charles Metcalfe, Rhodes's consulting engineer for all his rail projects, in London in April 1893 where agreement was reached to extend the line northwards from Mafeking. George then appointed his cousin Harold Pauling to serve as his company's agent in charge of the construction of the line. Harold subsequently took charge of all George's railway construction operations from Mafeking through to Bulawayo and on to Gwelo.

Before starting the line northwards from Vryburg the BSACo deemed it expedient that a separate railway company should be formed and the Bechuanaland Railway Company Ltd. was incorporated in May 1893. 2 000 shares were issued to the BSACo., 2 000 to De Beers Consolidated Mines and 2 000 to Exploring Company with 2 000 additional shares subsequently issued to the BSACo. in connection with its guarantee of convertible debentures in the new company.

Vryburg had remained the railhead until the BSACo assumed responsibility for the administration

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

of Matabeleland in May 1894 following the Occupation of Matabeleland in November 1893.

Extension of the line as far as Mafeking was initiated in May 1894 at the time mail routes were being reorganised and this 96 miles section was completed in October 1894.

During this construction George Pauling and his brother Harry decided to form their own limited liability company, Pauling & Company Ltd. which was registered in September 1894. Shareholders comprised George, his brother Harry and Baron d'Erlanger, a wealthy and successful financier and Chairman of the Channel Tunnel Company.

The Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce started to raise concerns about the poor transport links resulting in increasing delays of materials required by miners and farmers in newly-occupied Matabeleland and the settlers became increasingly impatient with the handling of railway affairs. There were several proposals to connect Mafeking with Bulawayo by light railway, but by the end of 1895 earthworks had only progressed 40 or 50 miles north of Mafeking. The disastrous Jameson Raid into the Transvaal Republic on 29th December 1895 brought work to a halt. However, by the end of February 1896 things looked more hopeful, the survey to Palapye having been completed and the line for traffic through to Gaberones by July being forecast. March dealt the settlers two of their severest blows – the outbreak of rinderpest and the Matabele Rebellion. By now the thinking of the settlers was dominated by the need for the development of improved transport links and the conveyancing of goods and the necessities of life as the many hardships they had to endure were distressing and heart-breaking. These concerns apparently even exceeded their concerns arising from the Rebellion.

The Matabele Rebellion, or Umvukela, began during March 1896. Most of the settler security forces had been taken to support the Jameson Raid into the Transvaal, leaving the territory largely unprotected. Imperial troops were hurriedly brought up from the Cape Colony, arriving during May 1896. Supporting their presence put a huge strain on existing transport facilities. The book *Umvukela : The Anti-Colonial Rebellion of 1896 in Matabeleland* by IJ Cross explains the challenge placed upon the wagon transport links with the south : their horses could not be sustained without imported grain feed, the troops had to be fed and their arms and ammunition had to be brought up from the Cape. At the same time a very serious rinderpest outbreak had taken hold. Many wagon owners were reluctant to allow their vehicles to be taken from Rinderpest-free areas in the Cape Colony and the Transvaal into places where the disease was prevalent, lest they had to be abandoned due to the oxen dying and it was reported that no transport was permitted to cross the Ramatlabama Spruit.

It was largely Lord Grey's responsibility to secure the services of enough men for the purpose of quelling the rebellion and to make certain that sufficient supplies of ration and grain for horses reached Bulawayo. As soon as he arrived at Mafeking on the 18th April 1896 Grey concluded a contract with Weil & Company, the Cape Colony's prominent dry goods merchants, to transport 35 000 rations and 750 000 lbs of grain to Bulawayo, enough to sustain the local population and Plumer's corps, as well as feed their horses for 87 days. Weil planned to operate wagons from the Transvaal, using the road from Tuli to Mangwe, but fearing that the spread of the rebellion should close that road, Lord Grey agreed with Zeederberg that instead he would run his coaches daily to Bulawayo carrying 20 000 lbs of supplies and ammunition per week via the route through Tati. This route was vividly described by Major Baden-Powell earlier in the text as he passed through Mafeking Station with the stranded wagons and oxen everywhere dying from the rinderpest. The shortage of oxen put freight charges up to as much as £200 a ton for the 600 miles between the two towns. As a result of the crisis now facing the settlers, rail construction northwards from Kimberley received the highest priority by the BSACo. In early April Rhodes announced *that every penny required by the Rhodesian Railway would be put up*. In June 1896 George Pauling, now the

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Commissioner of Public Works, stated that about 2 000 people were being employed on construction. In August it was reported that the BSACo was paying the contractors an extra £200 per mile to speed up construction and there were to be heavy penalties for failure to meet target dates for completion. Importantly, in September Pauling announced that as far as Mochudi the line would be equal in finish to any section of the Cape railway but beyond that, rivers and gulleys would at first be crossed by temporary wooden bridges which would gradually be replaced by more solid and enduring structures, so as to reach Bulawayo as speedily as possible.



Unballasted track being laid at the rate of a mile a day north of Machudi

Extract from the Cape Postmaster General's 1896 Annual: -

"The Postal Service of the Bechuanaland Protectorate has continued to be administered by this Department, and during the year additional Post Office Agencies have been opened at Outsie and Lobatsi on the Mafeking-Gaberones section of the Railway. Arrangements are also being made for the opening of additional Offices as the Railway progresses, and for the transfer of the Telegraph Offices at Ramoutsa and Gaberones from the Village to the Railway Station at each place. The construction of the railway line from Mafeking in the direction of Bulawayo has progressed most rapidly during the year, and the Mail Contractors (Zeederberg) have been permitted to make arrangements with the Railway Contractors (George Pauling) for the carriage of mails by construction train as far as possible along the railway. It is anticipated that certain sections of the railway will be opened for public traffic early in the coming year (1897), thus enabling the Department to take full advantage of the train service, and to cancel the Mail Coach Contract so far as it relates to the sections over which the mails can be conveyed by rail. This will affect a considerable saving in expenditure for the conveyance of mails, and have therefore recommended to the Governments of the Cape Colony, the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Rhodesia, that advantage should be taken of the opportunity thus afforded for the reduction of the existing high postage tariff between the Protectorate and Rhodesia and other parts of South Africa".

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Northern Mail Service –

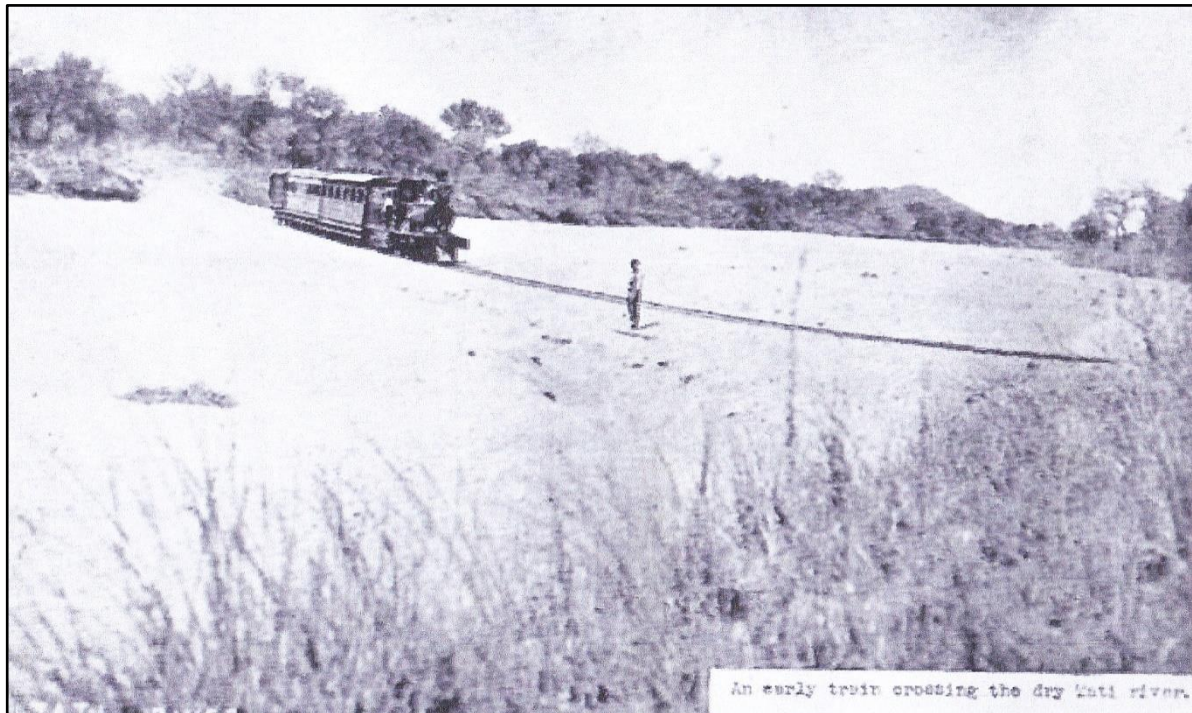
“The (existing) Mail Coach Service between Mafeking and Bulawayo was considerably disorganised for several months in the early part of the year in consequence of the ravages of rinderpest and the disturbances ensuring (sic) on the Matabele revolt. On several occasions, it became necessary to utilise the Mail Coaches for the conveyance of food supplies, medicine, arms and ammunition to Bulawayo, all transport by ox wagon and other means being entirely suspended. Indeed, very large numbers of wagons were at that time abandoned on the road between Mafeking and Bulawayo by the transport riders. During a period of several months the mail service between Bulawayo and Salisbury was entirely suspended in consequence of the native outbreak, and for several weeks mail communication with Salisbury was altogether cut off owing to the East Coast route between Umtali and Salisbury being also interrupted pending the arrival of troops via Beira. The Mail Coach, which left Salisbury for Bulawayo on the 24th March 1896 was attacked by Kaffirs near the Shangani River and had to be abandoned, the mails and other contents of the coach being looted by the natives. The full mail service between Mafeking and Bulawayo was resumed on the 17th May 1896, and, considering the difficulties which had to be contented with, great credit is due to the Mail Contractors, Messrs H.J. and C.H. Zeederberg, for the manner in which, during the most critical period, they adhered as far as possible to their contract obligations, seeing that even a temporary suspension of the Coach Service would have entailed the most serious consequences to the beleaguered inhabitants of Bulawayo and other towns in Rhodesia”.

The railhead had advanced to Machudi by 1 March 1897, to Palapye by 1 July 1897. The railhead advanced to Francistown on 1st September 1897, bypassing Tati and necessitating the transfer of that postal agency to Francistown during July/August 1897. The railway reached Bulawayo on 18th October 1897 with the official opening held with great fanfare on 4th November 1897. This was a distance of about 400 miles constructed by Harold Pauling in about 400 days despite constant delays in the delivery of construction materials and a dire shortage of water. It was a remarkable achievement.

Extract from the Cape Postmaster General's 1897 Annual Report:-

“In connection with the Postal Service of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the most important event has been the completion of the construction of the railway between Mafeking and Bulawayo, the opening of the line to the latter town taking place on the 4th of November. Advantage was taken for the transmission of the mails over the railway as the various sections of the line were opened, and the contract held by Messrs. Zeederberg for the conveyance of the mails by coach was, by arrangement, revised as the various portions of the railway line became available for the conveyance of the mails by train; Messrs. Zeederberg's services being finally dispensed with, so far as the main line contract was concerned, on the 31st of August 1897. It may be interesting to record that the opening of the railway as far as Mochudi took place on the 1st of March, the opening to Palapye Station on the 1st of July, and the opening to Francistown - the northernmost limit of the Protectorate - on the 1st of September. Owing to the diversion of the conveyance of the mails from the road to the railway, it was necessary to arrange for the establishment of side posts to the following places by native runners, viz.: - Kanye, Molopolole, Gaberones, Ramoutsa, and to enter into an agreement with Messrs. Zeederberg for the conveyance of the mails between Palapye Station and Palapye Village. The latter post being run in connection with the existing contract between Palapye Village and Macloutsie, also held by the same contractors”.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



In a concerted effort to reach Bulawayo before the 1897 rainy season, the line north of Mochudi was of pioneer character – unballasted and unbridged. Here a passenger train crosses the dry Tati riverbed near Francistown.

The administration of Francistown postal services by the BSACo continued until 30th June 1898 and reverted to the Bechuanaland postal administration on 1st July 1898.

“Re the transfer of Francistown Post Office. It may be noted that the Post Office at Francistown, situate in what is known as the Tati Concession, was, on the 1st July last (1898), re-transformed from the Rhodesian Postal Administration to that of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and it has been arranged that the conveyance of the mails between Francistown and the Rhodesian border shall in the future be paid for by the Protectorate Administration.” This action was taken by the British Government in part response to the Jameson Raid of early 1896.

- On 20 October 1898 the country was, for the first time, officially referred to as **Southern Rhodesia** by the British Government.
- The **Bechuanaland Railway Company Ltd.** was renamed **Rhodesia Railways** on 1 June 1899.
- The total cost of the railway from Vryburg to Bulawayo was £2 270 628.
- The passenger coach route from Bulawayo through Tuli to Macloutsie and Pretoria continued in use though it is recorded that a runner post between Bulawayo and Tuli was in operation in mid-1897.

The Impact of the Anglo-Boer War

On 12th October 1899, the Boer forces cut the railway line between Mafeking and Bulawayo. A despatch boat service from Beira to Durban was immediately organised and mail from Salisbury (and from the rest of Rhodesia) was routed by train to Beira - the railway line between Salisbury and Umtali having been fully opened on 23rd May 1899.

The routing via Umtali and Beira remained in use until after the Relief of Mafeking on 17th May 1900; the postal route south via Mafeking was used again from 31st May 1900.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

"The Postal Service within the Bechuanaland Protectorate was uninterrupted maintained during the year until the outbreak of hostilities between the Republics and Great Britain, since which time all mail matter for that Country has been circulated via Beira and Rhodesia".

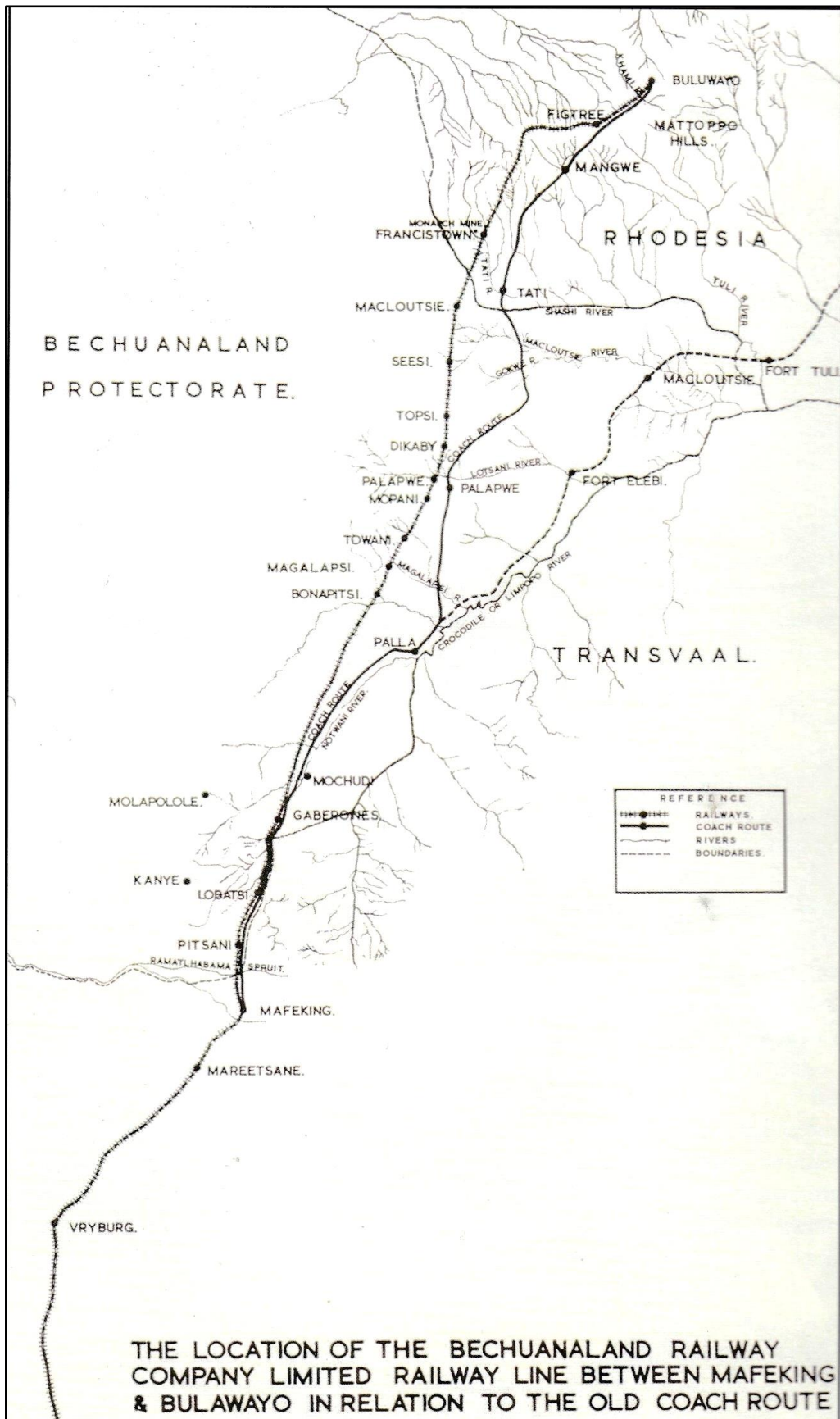


This letter was posted in Bulawayo on 28th October 1899, marked "Via Beira". It had to be routed via Beira because the normal rail route south through Bechuanaland was blocked due to the Siege of Mafeking during the Anglo-Boer War.

Construction of the railway within Rhodesia by Pauling & Company Ltd. continued. Construction of the line between Salisbury and Bulawayo was delayed by the Boer War because construction materials needed to be brought in on the new Beira – Umtali route.

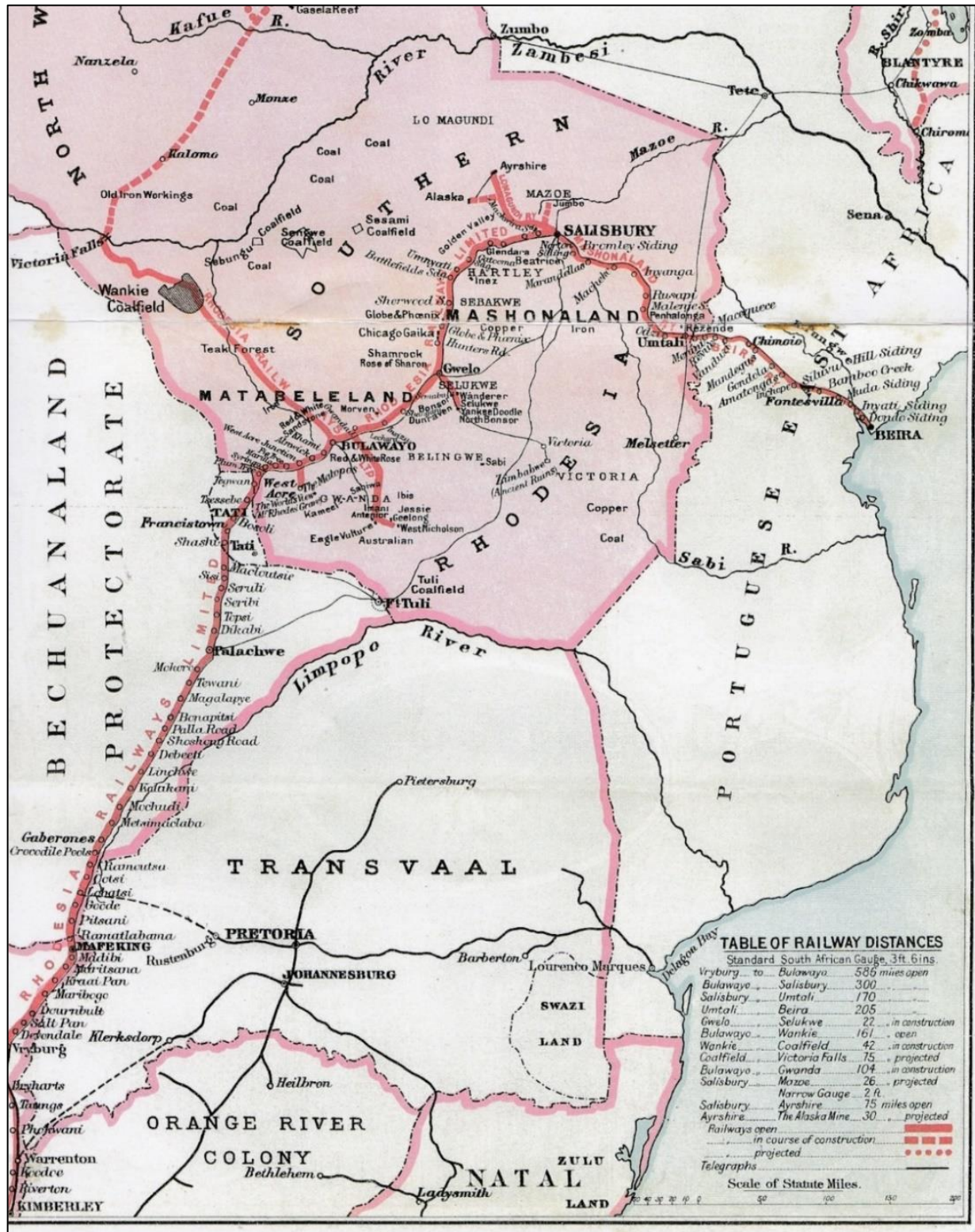
- 4 Nov 1897 The Railway from Cape Colony opened to Bulawayo
- 4 FEB 1898 Railway reached Umtali from Beira (the Eastern Route)
- 22 MAY 1899 Umtali to Salisbury opened
- 1 DEC 1902 Bulawayo to Salisbury opened to through traffic
- 20 JUN 1904 Bulawayo to Victoria Falls via Wankies opened to through traffic
- 12 SEP 1905 The Victoria Falls Bridge was officially opened

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



In Rhodesia the railway was routed well west of the coach road in order to avoid the Matopos Hills

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



The rail network early 1905

Railways in about 1905, stretching from Kimberley in the south, through Bechuanaland to Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Mozambique. The map also illustrates the relative locations of the Transvaal towns and the rail network connecting with the Cape Colony

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

MAILS FROM MASHONALAND TO THE EAST

Salisbury to Umtali

Umtali Post Office was established in 1890. Initially mail from Umtali went to Salisbury or Beira, as opportunity offered.

The lowveld route had merely been the means of entering the country - one that avoided the Matabele to the west and the Portuguese coastal settlements to the east. As the 1890 Pioneers made their way over one large lowveld river after another it soon became evident to the leaders of the Column that the road from the south would be unsuitable as a postal route in the wet season. The Company had eyes on an east coast route from Mashonaland and it seems that this would have been their next adventure had not the Imperial authorities in Cape Town applied a restraining hand when the early disputes with the Portuguese in Mozambique occurred. Following clashes with the Portuguese, Captain Heyman was despatched with his troop from Charter and on the way established the first post stations at the towns of Manguendi and Makoni and these were to become the first post stations on the Salisbury-Manica mail run.

Jameson instructed Selous to construct a road from Odzi to Salisbury which was completed in about April 1891. The Selous Road ran some thirteen miles south of Mangwendi's Kraal and the new post station was to be where the road crossed the Ruzawi River - later to become Marandellas.

The battle of Macequece took place on 11 May, 1891. On 1 June, 1891, the Anglo Portuguese Convention was signed at Lisbon. This provided, inter alia, the defined border, an improvement in communications and permission to construct a railway between the Pungwe and Manicaland. Relationships with the Portuguese improved rapidly and by August the Portuguese had introduced their own mail runner service between Macequece and Beira. *From Umtali to Massi-kessi [Macequece] is simply a track up and down precipices. From Massi-kessi there is of course no road at all.* There was also the tsetse fly problem in Mozambique which was to bedevil all animal drawn transport for some time to come.

On 19 August, 1891, the Administrator was able to report to Cape Town: "*The Portuguese, who, Mr Heany informs Dr Jameson, are extremely friendly, have opened a postal service from Massi Kessi to the coast, and onwards at a fixed tariff*". Toward the end of 1891 the police despatch riders were using native carriers to supplement their own service - probably to carry the bulk of the ordinary mail matter - while they reserved for themselves the carriage of urgent official despatches. The police posts continued until the introduction of a regular ox-cart service on 2 January, 1892.

On 21 December, 1891, Rhodes telegraphed Jameson instructing him to convert the military regime in Mashonaland to a civil administration. Large numbers of the Company's Police were discharged and only some were to find civil service positions.

The Company's first formal Postal Notice - published in Salisbury's cyclostyled newspaper, *The Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times*, of 28 December, 1891:

"B.S.A. COMPANY'S MAILS NOTICE

On Saturday the 2nd January, 1892, and thereafter on the 2nd and 17th of each month a post-cart will leave Salisbury for Umtali carrying passengers and mails. The post-cart is timed to reach Umtali on the 13th and 27th of each month thus enabling mail matter to be sent on by the Portuguese postal service via Massi-Kessi and the coast. The Portuguese Mail leaves Massi-Kessi on the 14th and 29th of each month. Intermediate post stations have been established at Manguendi's, Laurencedale (Mr Van der Byl's settlement) and the Odzi drift. The postage on letters between

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Salisbury and Umtali is 4d per 1 oz and on parcels 1/- per lb; this must be prepaid by means of the Company's adhesive postage stamps".

This is how the date 2 January, 1892 came into being as the date of issue of the Company's first postage stamps in all standard stamp catalogues.

The very slow pace of mails between Salisbury and Umtali did not last for long. Contractors were engaged. By 15 July, 1893 the contractor, J. D. Symington, was performing the service in four days each way, and from 1 September in three days. In August 1894 Symington's new contract provided for a 36-hour journey each way.

With the outbreak of the Matabele Rebellion in March, 1896, the route south to Bulawayo was cut leaving the route east to Umtali as the only route by which the Mashonaland mails to South Africa and Europe could travel. On 20 June, 1896, the route to Umtali was cut by the Mashona Rebellion and Salisbury was without postal communication with the outside world for some six weeks. All white settlement on the road east fell back on Salisbury or Umtali. The line of communication was re-established on 6 August 1896 having been closed for forty-six days. Mails were now forwarded between Umtali and Salisbury under military escort and these escorted convoys continued at least until November 1896.

Umtali to Beira – Fontesville to Chimoio

In 1890, not long after the arrival of the Pioneer Column at Salisbury, Leander Starr Jameson travelled to Beira to assess the feasibility of constructing of a port to serve the hinterland which had so recently fallen under the control of the BSACo. This shows remarkable alacrity since the date of arrival at Fort Salisbury had been 12th September 1890 it had not taken Rhodes long to realise that a port and railway facilities thereto were absolute necessities, so much so that by the 11th June 1891 he had arranged the signing of a treaty between Portugal and Great Britain which included agreement for the construction of a port at Beira and a railway between Beira and Umtali. In September 1891, Rhodes, Major Frank Johnson and de Waal travelled up the east coast on the *Norseman* as far as Beira, which they reached on 26 September. At that time Beira had fifty to sixty houses and some trading stores, almost all built of galvanised iron. They journeyed into Mashonaland to survey the route or, perhaps better described as to "have a look". They reached Penhalonga on 9 October 1891. By this time Rhodes was already the Prime Minister of Cape Colony. On the steep Penhalonga mountain-side he stood, overlooking a lush valley where the Sambi and Imbeza Rivers converged with the Umtali River, and saw in the distance the initial workings of the Penhalonga and Rezende gold mines. At the end of the valley, was the hill on which Fort Hill had been built by the BSA Police, and in the far distance the first buildings at Old Umtali. At Old Umtali they were joined by Maurice Heany and Dr Jameson and would sleep that night in comfortable huts with good food and drink, a huge contrast to the discomfort of their previous camps when they had been plagued by the sound of hyenas and lions. Already about three hundred miners and prospectors were staying in the district and next day the party visited several of the gold-reef claims. That evening they gathered their carriers to pay them and asked if any were willing to stay on and work with Maurice Heany. All but two decided to stay on at Old Umtali. Next day the party set off by wagon and cart for Salisbury.

The occupation of Rhodesia, which had ended Portuguese dreams of expanding all the way to Africa's west coast, and the humiliation of the arrest of D'Andrade and Gouveia by Forbes at Mutasa's Kraal in November 1890 infuriated the Portuguese public and officials in Portuguese East Africa. Consequently when Sir John Willoughby arrived at Beira on 13 April 1891 in the *Norseman* with two tugs, the *Agnes* and *Shark*, he found the Portuguese officials under their Governor Colonel Machado unhelpful and belligerent. They refused to accept the 3% customs due for goods

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

in transit and when Willoughby lifted anchor and got under way a Portuguese gunboat, the *Tamega*, fired a blank shot across his bows and he was ordered to stop. The Governor was courteous, but his officials made no effort to conceal their hostility and British residents in Beira were threatened. The Pungwe River under previous agreements was open to British shipping and so this action resulted in an international incident between the Portuguese and British authorities. The subsequent Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 11 June 1891 provided for the recognition of the Pungwe as an international waterway, for freedom of movement of people and goods between Beira and Manicaland, to limit transit duty fees to 3% for twenty-five years and for the building of a railway to connect Mashonaland with the east coast at Beira. No timetable was set, but the rail survey was to be completed within six months. The Portuguese Government agreed to construct the line from Fontesvilla, about 35 miles up the Pungwe River, to Mashonaland. These exclusive rights were ceded to the Companhia do Mocambique, but as it was almost bankrupt, a concession was granted in September 1891 to Henry Theodore van Laun of London. In exchange for forming a railway company with a share capital of £600,000 and debenture capital of £1,500,000, van Laun was given the right to build the railway including stations, docks and quays, and to blocks of land along the railway line, each five square kilometres in extent as long as they were not adjacent, and the 3% transit duties to offset the cost of the debenture interest.

In December 1891 Rhodes' British South Africa Company took over van Laun's contract in return for a down payment of £10,000 and £295,000 of fully-paid up shares in a new railway company. The Beira Railway Company was formed in July 1892, the 600,000 shares being issued at no par value; 305,000 issued to the subscribers for the £250,000 of 6% Debentures secured on the first 70 miles of railway from Fontesvilla to Mandegos (now Chimoio) and 295,000 in the name of the Companhia do Mocambique. Late contractual changes allowed the Beira Railway Company to charge the 3% transit duties to revenue and to set their own dock and warehouse and transport charges – in effect, granting a monopoly.

1892 - During 1892 Roach had managed to build a rough road from M'pandas, just north of Fontesvilla, to Old Umtali. The ever-confident Johnson sent Selous to open a road through to Mashonaland down which were sent wagons and coaches; Johnson planned to bring tugs to tow barges up the Pungwe River from Beira to Fontesvilla, the highest navigable point on the Pungwe River. However, the tsetse fly problem and the three weeks it took to travel between Fontesvilla and Salisbury meant this route would never be commercially viable and following their trip the year before, both Johnson and Rhodes realised that a railway was a necessity. This failed project was to cost Johnson £25,000.

Realising that the existing firm of "Johnson, Heany and Borrow" was undercapitalised and could not possibly fund the development of a road and coach service from Beira to Mashonaland, Rhodes

persuaded Johnson to form a new company "Frank Johnson and Co. Ltd" with an issued capital of £200,000 (Rhodes was Chairman and Johnson Managing Director).

Alfred Beit, on behalf of Rhodes, called for tenders for the construction of the first section. Frank Johnson was their agent and put in a bid to build the railway, but the Directors of the BSACo decided that "*a firm with more experience of railway building*" should do the work. George and Henry Pauling, who had already built railways in South Africa, were awarded the contract. They appointed Alfred Lawley, a man of strong physique who was also indefatigable and industrious and who had tendered his own unsuccessful contract bid, as chief engineer. As a consolation prize, Johnson was given the contract to transport all the railway material from Beira to Fontesvilla, but even this was a financial disaster for him. Because both the *Agnes* and the *Kimberley* required five

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

feet of water under their keels, he had to buy a shallow-draft paddle steamer, the "*Crocodile*", which was built at Southampton and shipped in sections to Beira where it was re-assembled. But on its maiden voyage it struck a submerged log and sank onto a sand bar and was never recovered. Between Beira and Fontesvilla supplies and mail were carried by river transport on the Pungwe River.

This hazardous, laborious project of building a railway from Fontesville to Umtali was full of problems, and its construction called forth great endurance and perseverance, so no better man could have been selected than George Pauling who was head of the firm Pauling & Company. George had made rapid progress from small beginnings, having originally worked as a navvy on the South African railways before starting contracting work on his own account. Writing about this period in his memoirs, he remarked. *"I fervently wished that I had never heard of the Beira Railway. At one time practically every white employee on the job was suffering from malaria. In one fortnight we lost six white men, including my bookkeeper and in one year sixty percent of the men died"*.

The railway was planned as a 2-foot light, narrow gauge line from Fontesvilla to Mandegos, (later Vila Pery then Chimoio). To reduce railway construction costs the railhead began at Fontesvilla, the highest navigable point of the Pungwe River, 35 miles inland. Passengers and cargo were loaded on barges which were then pulled by the tugboat Kimberley from Beira to Fontesvilla. Due to the ever-changing sandbanks, the barges grounded frequently and delays were the rule. This mode of transport lasted until October 1896 when Beira was linked to Fontesvilla by rail.

The initial contract was to construct the line from Fontesvilla (about 35 miles upstream from Beira) to Gondola (76 miles from Fontesvilla). George Pauling's estimated contract cost for this section was £70,000 to be completed at the rate of one mile per day, but his initial estimate proved completely inadequate for the swampy and malarial conditions and the railway became infamous for the cost of human lives. Many white workers died and, legend has it, one African died for every sleeper laid. Construction from Fontesvilla commenced in September 1892.

1893 - The line survey was begun by Harry Pauling, (who left before the rains begun but later died of fever at Beira) and was continued by Lawley and P. St. George Mansergh. The first rainy season was very heavy with most of the area flooded and the first 10 miles of line from Fontesvilla was submerged for about a month. The *Agnes* grounded 6 miles from the main stream of the Pungwe; there she remained high and dry for three years until, with the help of a canal, another flood rose high enough to float her off.

The first 50 miles of construction consisted mainly of building up the line above the level of the Pungwe River flats, but with the combined attacks of heat, tsetse fly and lack of knowledge of malaria and its treatment this section caused the maximum human casualties. It has been estimated that up to 400 (60%) of all the Europeans working on the line died of fever and on his arrival in May 1893, George Pauling found Lawley desperately ill with malaria but he recovered. The death rate among the African labour force has never been estimated and the 500 Indian and Chinese labourers nearly all died. Tsetse fly caused equal destruction amongst the animals — 500 donkeys introduced in the belief that they could withstand "*the fly*" all died.

1894 – A further £250,000 of debentures was issued to finance further construction from Gondola to Chimoio and work began in June 1894. Lawley employed over three thousand men on this section with the heaviest section requiring a mile of embankment 43 feet high. Chimoio was reached in November 1894, the higher altitude bringing healthier conditions and the tsetse fly belt being left behind.

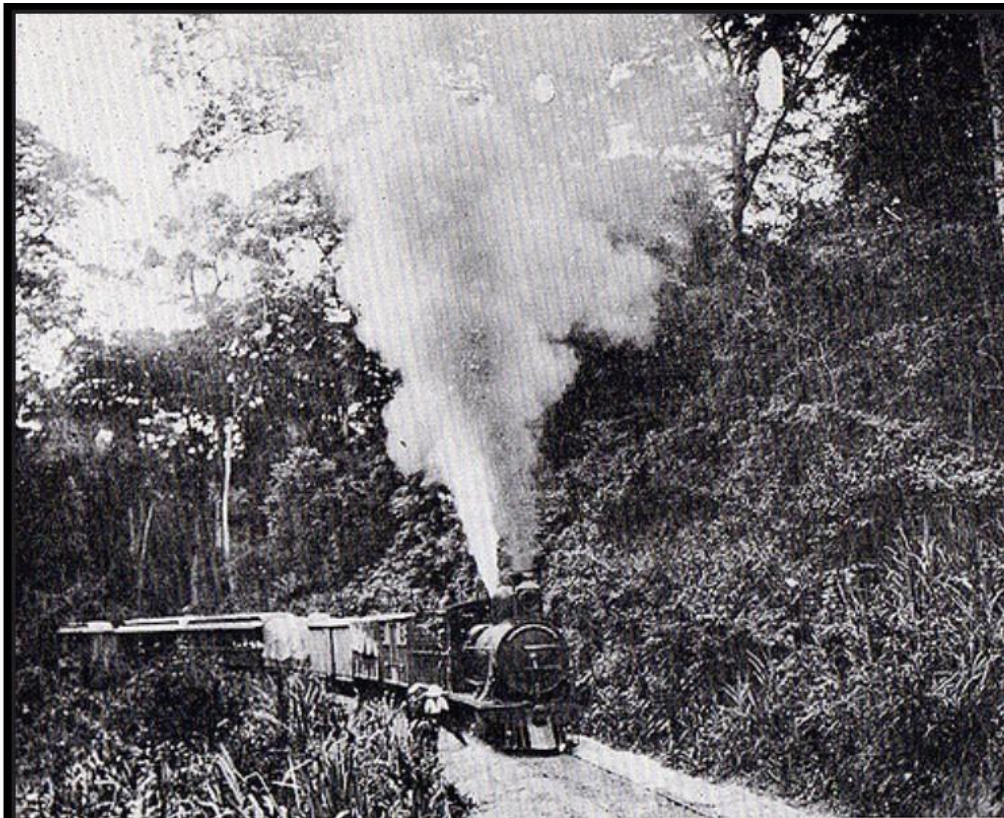
In September, newspaper advertisements were being run by Pauling and Co that stated the mail train was running every Wednesday from Chimoio at 6:30am to connect with the 'mail steamer' at

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Fontesvilla with the journey advertised as taking just over 9 hours. Passengers paid 6d. a mile first class and 3d. a mile third class; natives paid 1d. and corpses cost 1s. a mile! The boat-trip from Beira to Fontesvilla cost 25s. The 125-mile journey between Fontesvilla and Chimoio cost £3 first class and the final Zeederberg coach run from there to Salisbury £9. Goods cost 12/6 to £1 per ton from Beira to Fontesvilla, including landing charges; then £6 per ton to Chimoio by rail and a further £6 per ton by wagon to Umtali – about £13 per ton in total.

By January 1895 trains were running regularly two or three times a day to Chimoio, leaving Fontesvilla at 6:30am and reaching Mandegos in the evening and Chimoio next morning. The river journey was advertised as taking four hours; in fact, it was rarely completed in less than twenty hours.

The section to Bamboo Creek, later Vila Machado, was extremely flat, teeming with wild game of all kinds and prone to flooding. Gondola was reached in October 1893, an outstanding achievement considering that the line went through the Amatongas Forest which rose from 650 feet to 2,092 feet in 25 miles. At one section the steep terrain could only be overcome by constructing a series of zigzags ending in dead-end spurs; the train reversing direction at each halt.



Narrow-gauge Beira Railway Company locomotive in the Amatongas Forrest where the steepest gradients were encountered.

To some, the name of 'Fontesvilla' suggested cooling streams, but the reality was very different. The following extracts from "ZimFieldGuide.com" provide vivid descriptions of that journey: -

According to C. M. Hulley –

"Charting a course along the Pungwe River was difficult with the sandbanks moving position after each high tide. At such times, Captain Dickie became ever more eloquent as each sandbank came into sight, doing all he could to avoid it. When the Kirnberley became stuck fast on a sandbank

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Dickie would use a mirror to attract local natives who, after considerable bargaining, would jump into the water making a considerable noise to frighten off crocodiles and, up to their armpits in water, would forcibly push the boat into deeper water, their reward being a blanket. If all these efforts failed, there was nothing to be done but to wait for the turn of the tide to lift her off the mud. On arrival at Fontesvilla, the Kimberley halted at the mud bank and the passengers scrambled ashore with the help of natives and ladders"

William Harvey Brown, who wrote *On the South African Frontier* wrote: –

"Of all the deadly places I have ever visited, it was without doubt the worst. The yellow sickly appearance of the inhabitants suggested to our minds the idea of people who walk about to save funeral expenses, the houses were built on piles six feet above the swampy soil - the continuance of the railway to Feira doomed the future of the pestilential spot to nothing more than a sepulchre for the dead."

Marshall Hole in *Old Rhodesian Days* agreed: –

"...a loathly little camp with probably the highest death rate of any place in the world. There were two cemeteries, both nearly full and because the water level was only a few feet below ground level, heavy weights had to be placed in the coffins to keep them down while the graves were covered with soil. "

Another longer account by Edith Campbell quoted from a *Rhodesiana* publication is well described: –

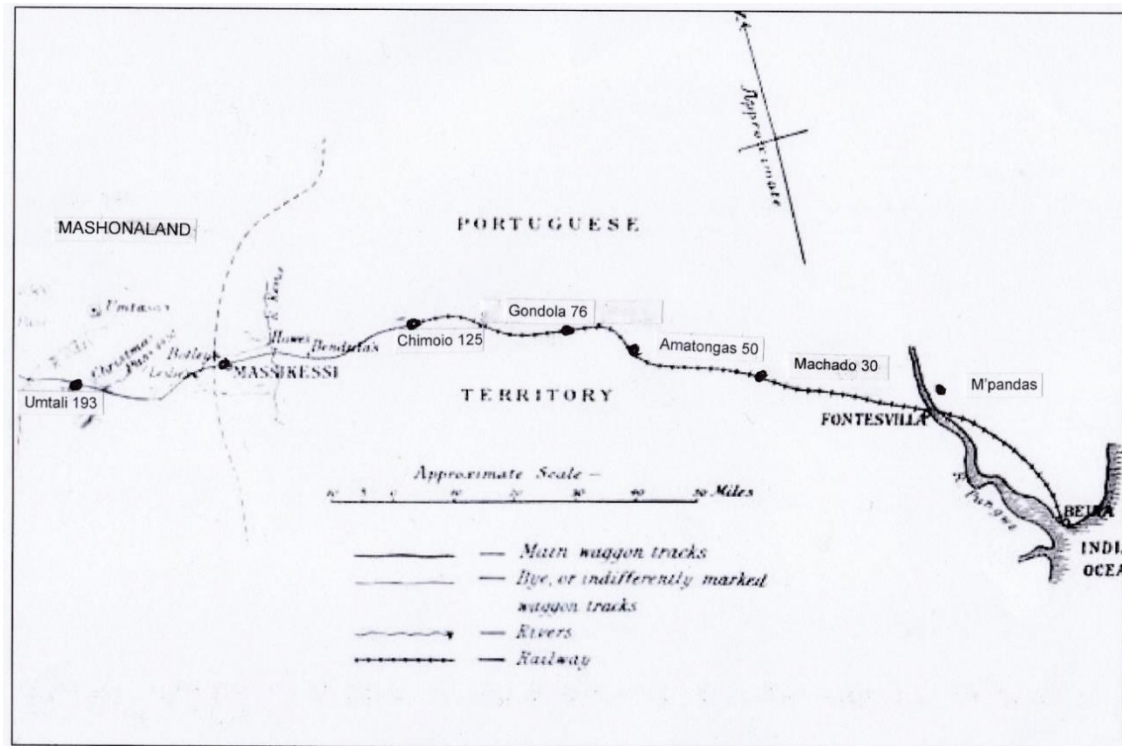
"Landed at Beira and joined the tug Kimberley which steamed 4 miles up the Pungwe...and then anchored for the night. The Pungwe is a wide river with an awful smell about it. Next morning, we went on but came bang on a sandbank where we stuck. There was a lighter fixed alongside of the tug and this went swing ahead breaking the ropes, then back again against the tug smashing the bulwarks. After a great deal of swearing on Captain Dickie's part the lighter was collared again. Breakfast on the tug cost 3/- eggs, bacon, curry and bread with beer or cold water...After an enormous amount of swearing on Capt. Dickie's part, I never heard anyone swear so much, but he informed me it was just habit and he never meant anything. Well, we managed to get off the sandbank and went on to Fontesvilla. It is on the right bank and is almost a river in itself. A few houses about 3 ft above ground level because everything gets flooded in the rainy season. We landed at Fontesvilla by climbing over the tug's side onto a lighter then scrambling on to the muddy bank. The next thing was to walk knee deep through wet grass and black mud to the hotel and such a hotel I never saw. The room I had was on the level of the ground, and to get to it I had to walk with black mud over my ankles for about 10 yards from the verandah; I nearly lost my shoes in that mud they stuck so tight in it...Well I inspected the room; the bedroom furniture comprised a bed slightly over a meter in length with a wire foundation, no mattress, one coarse sheet and one small blanket. Then went to lunch, about a dozen men elegantly attired in their shirt sleeves. The lunch consisted of tinned beef curried, tinned beef stewed, minced, boiled and all sorts of mess and the pudding is quite beyond description. In the dining room, only buck steaks were served and they were tough and inedible. The owner was: 'a pale, yellow, fever-stricken, listless spectre, perpetually drunk into the bargain'."

Kingsley Fairbridge travelled first class in a deck chair in an open wagon covered by a tarpaulin for shade. He wrote –

We saw great herds of game and men fired at them from the open trucks. A herd of zebra raced the train and we all shouted at them. Our train did not run off the rails, but most train did and then the passengers had to get out and push them back again."

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

After November 1894 progress beyond Chimoio came to a standstill for two years, partly because the initial contract had been completed, partly because of the combined difficulties of the rugged terrain ahead and partly because of the escalating costs. During this period the mail and passengers were transported the remaining 68 miles to Umtali by Zeederberg's 'foul' uncomfortable coaches.



Sketch map of the railway line when it ended at Chimoio

Umtali to Beira – Fontesville to Beira

It was clear that Fontesville was totally unsuitable as a port. The only solution was to replace the river steamer with a further section of 35 miles of rail from Fontesville to the port of Beira. However, the Beira Railway Company finances after the long and expensive construction period were almost exhausted, even the 6% interest on the debentures was unpaid. George Pauling used the banker and his long-time friend (and later to become a shareholder in Pauling & Company Ltd.) Baron Frédéric Émile d'Erlanger to promote the Fontesville – Beira section, a bridge over the Pungwe River and a wharf at Beira through a new Company, the Beira Junction Railway Company (BJRC) which enjoyed the same rights as the BRC, i.e., 3% transit duties and blocks of land along the railway line each five square kilometers in extent as long as they were not adjacent.

The new company was incorporated in Britain under 'The Companies Acts 1862-1893' with a capital of £62 500 divided into 250 000 shares of five shillings each. 7 shares were retained (by the BSACo?) and 249 993 shares issued to a trust on 10 December 1895. In turn the trust issued Certificates to Bearer transferable by delivery.

Construction of a narrow 2 ft. gauge railway started from Fontesville with Lawley in charge. Crossing the Pungwe Flats with the need for frequent small bridges and culverts slowed the work and the 35 miles took 15 months to complete. In October 1896 the Beira Junction Railway Company eventually linked Fontesville to Beira and this section of the trip became considerably quicker and more efficient, but until the bridge over the Pungwe River was completed, train passengers were carried through the mud to and from the ferry boat by local natives.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

Umtali to Beira – Chimoio to Umtali and Salisbury

Construction resumed at Chimoio in May 1896. Macequece was reached in August 1897 but even when the railway reached Umtali the problems were not over. As the line neared Umtali, it became evident that it would bypass the town by about 13 miles. In March 1896 Rhodes (who had been recalled to Britain following the Jameson Raid and had been forced to resign as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony and as a Director of the BSACo) called a meeting where the difficulties and costs of bringing the railway to the existing township were explained. He proposed that the township be relocated in order to be on the railway line being constructed between Beira and Salisbury. The BSACo offered a replica township, with all the owners of stands having a corresponding position in the new township, and the BSACo compensating owners for their existing buildings. This was agreed and a new site was selected by Rhodes in the Sable Valley. On 1st October 1896 the decision to route the railway via New Umtali, and to layout the new township stands identical with those at Old Umtali was finalised and gazetted by the Company. The inhabitants of the old township, about 150 of them, dismantled their buildings to use for rebuilding at the new site. The official date for the move was 1st August 1897, but people were moving before and after this date. On 20th August 1897 the *Rhodesia Advertiser* (the local Umtali newspaper) reported that the post office was to open on 30th August 1897. The railway between Beira and Umtali opened to through traffic on 4 February 1898. Although lightweight, the narrow 2ft. gauge track using twenty-two pound weight rails managed to deal with the traffic and was a huge success and freight traffic quickly increased.

It took the Mashonaland Railway Company a little over 12 months to build the railway between Umtali and Salisbury, constructed to the Cape standard 3ft. 6 in. gauge. By October 1898 it was in Rusape and opened through to Salisbury on 23 May 1899, the one hundred and seventy miles of track having been built with materials transported over the Beira railway. The Postmaster-General advertised a twelve-hour train service once a week to and from Umtali. This was soon to be upgraded.

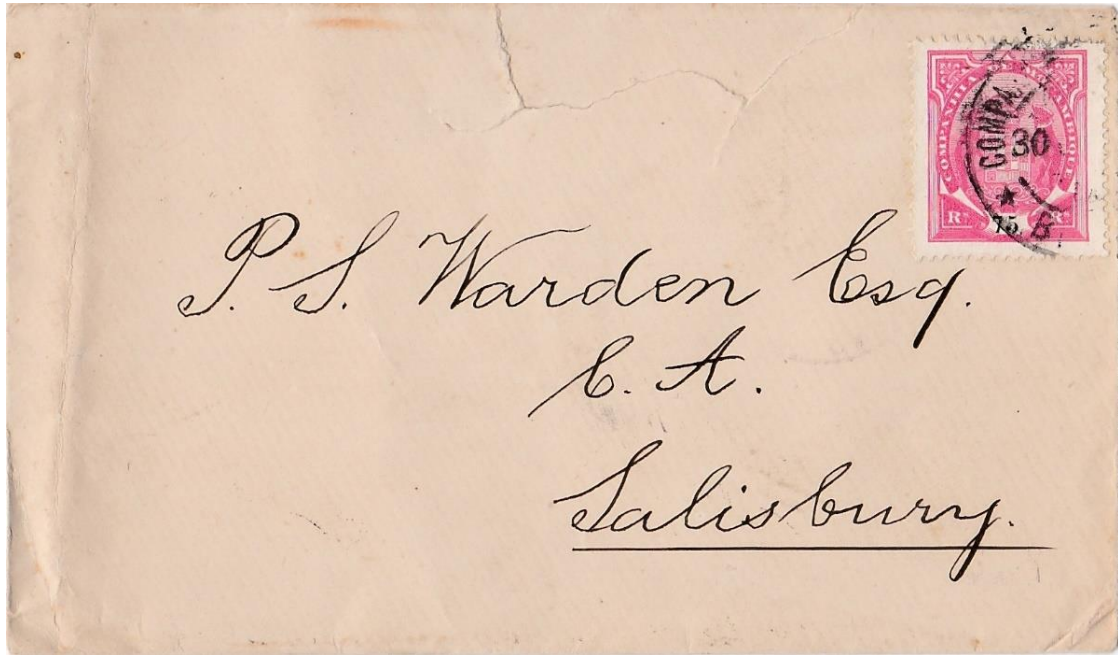
The inevitable difficulties resulting from the difference in gauges followed as the volume of goods between Rhodesia and the coast continued to grow. The line between Umtali and Beira was therefore re-laid to the 3 ft. 6 in. gauge in a record time of about six months at a cost of approximately £800 000 for the 204 miles, the conversion being completed on 1 August 1900. The new alignment shortened the length by about 12 miles, without taking the track away from the settlements that had sprung up along the route.

Apart from a short period in 1892 and a fairly busy period during the 1896 Rebellions this route had been of little use for the carriage of external mails. In his report for the year to 31 March, 1899 the Postmaster-General commented that owing to the absence of any regular weekly service of steamships between Beira and southern ports or between Beira and north-east African ports, the East Coast route was practically useless for international mails to and from Rhodesia.

However, during the Siege of Mafeking in the Anglo-Boer War when the postal route to the south was blocked from 12 October 1899 until 31 May 1900, this became the only route by which international mails could reach Rhodesia and Bechuanaland.

From 1st April 1904, arrangements were made for all mail destined for India and the far East to be sent via Umtali and Beira by which time the main mail routes in the country had assumed the pattern they were to retain until the advent of airmails.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED



Front of cover



Reverse side of cover

A letter posted in Beira on 30 (JAN 1899) using a Royal Hotel Beira envelope addressed to Salisbury. Received in Salisbury on 8 FEB 1899, a transit time of 9 days. It would have been transported on the Beira-Umtali 2ft gauge railway between Beira and New Umtali but from there probably went most of the way by mail coach, the through line only being opened a few months later on 23rd May 1899.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

George Pauling 1854-1919

George was born in India, where his father Richard was Resident Engineer on the Delhi Railways. In 1875 he and his brother emigrated to South Africa, where a great-uncle, Henry Pauling, was the resident engineer on a railway construction. His first big contract was to complete the rail line from the Orange River to Kimberley which was completed in November 1885 amidst great celebrations, followed in 1890 by the section from Kimberley to Vryburg for the BSACo. Pauling was then earmarked by Rhodes to build the line between Mafeking and Bulawayo. Here he appointed his cousin Harold as agent to carry out the construction work. Thereafter Pauling was in Rhodes's first team. In September 1894 Rhodes invited George Pauling to become a member of the First Rhodesian Council and to take charge of the Department of Mines and Public Works under Dr Jameson, the Administrator in Salisbury. He accepted the offer and his appointment as Commissioner of Public Works was gazetted. In this role he was responsible for all roads, public buildings and the railways. The following April the Department of Mines was placed under his control and later he took over the Postmaster General's Department. In consequence he resigned as a Director of Pauling & Company Ltd. serving the BSACo for two and a half years – at the time the Mafeking to Bulawayo railway was being constructed by his cousin Harold Pauling.



George and Harold Pauling

By this time the Pauling Company had gained a world-wide reputation and there were ventures in Palestine, Borneo, India, China, Argentina, Greece, and a substantial amount of work in England. Relatively minor contracts in South Africa were followed by his final major work - the fearsome Benguela Railway between the Copperbelt in N. Rhodesia and the Atlantic. In 1915 he retired to his mansion in Effingham, Surrey where he built a church and where he and his wife are buried.

HOW RHODESIA'S MAIL ROUTES EVOLVED

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