

Title.

Abstract

Compiled by troops who travelled mainly on horseback along the postal and other main routes, these guides reveal much about the landforms, vegetation and particularly settlement. Liebenberg has described the series at the scale of 1:148,752 at the ICA meeting in Budapest in 2012. She points out that these maps lack much of the information of value to troops on the move as they were compiled from farm surveys by the British Army's Field Intelligence Department, and only later revised in the field. The detail contained in the description of main routes is complementary to Major Jackson's series maps. Indeed each route listed refers to the specific sheet(s) over which the route passes. The information was intended for official purposes only, as were the maps, but has remained undiscovered until recently.

This paper examines the information in a sample of route guides along side the appropriate sheets of Major Jackson's maps. Reference to more modern South African mapping will permit a more precise impression of the changing landscape. From each route described can be built up an picture of a semi-wild terrain owned for the most part by people of European descent, with scattered farms, stores, mines and farm boundaries. Names of natural and human features enable one to relate the routes described to later maps which are based on geodetic and air surveys with more accurate positions and heights. This study provides an introduction to a new source of first-hand description of an important British colony recovering from the damage and dislocation of war (1899-1902).

Text of Paper

British garrisons remained after the peace settlement at the end of the second Anglo-Boer War. Although the environs of these were surveyed and mapped by the Royal Engineers, there remained a large part of the new Transvaal Colony unmapped apart from a series compiled by Major Jackson in 1901-02 at a scale of 1:148,752 or about 2.35 miles to one inch. These were based on maps published for Fred Jeppe in 1899 and some local revisions by the Intelligence Division. In the first decade of the 20th century the only real threat to British power came from the German protectorate of South West Africa. Mapping the area of British South Africa was vital in order to defend it as well as to develop its resources sensibly. The economy of Transvaal immediately after the war was depressed as gold mining had not regained full production and the platteland [countryside] had been devastated by the war and farming had almost ceased. Anxious to know more about the territory which had only recently come under British control the Intelligence Division set about compiling information on all aspects of its characteristics. It seems possible that the two volume report on Transvaal prepared for the War Office in London was to provide evidence for an inter-colonial conference on the defence of South Africa in 1907. Two volumes were printed for official use only: the first was a general account of Transvaal. the second was devoted to communications and embraced railways, roads, postal routes, telegraphs and telephones. The latter was accompanied by a set of maps, one of which had been found in the Royal Geographical Society several years ago. The chance discovery of this volume recently in Cape Town led to its discovery in The National Archives at Kew in England.

What is significant about the second volume titled Communications is the extent to which the British military forces undertook not only some basic mapping of the colony, but updated the original mapping in the field. This was achieved by officers usually on horseback following routes commonly used to reach the important places in the parts of the colony settled by white farmers or by mining companies looking for gold and other precious minerals. In the main those parts inhabited by local African peoples who had been pacified by the previous republican government were not surveyed. Routes surveyed were those useful for the military to reach main towns and villages. These sometimes, but not always coincided with postal routes which collected and delivered mail and were contracted to carriers under specific conditions set by the Postal Department. The diagrammatic map of the military routes is the key to the descriptions which were usually related to detail on particular sheets of Major Jackson's series of maps.

This paper will demonstrate with two examples how it is possible to trace the routes described a century ago, with the aid of Major Jackson's maps and modern maps which show the original farm boundaries superimposed on a base map occasionally benefitting from geodesic and trigonometrical survey in-filled with detail probably by plane-table. Armed with a route description, a Major Jackson map and a recent topo-cadastral map from, say, the 1950s, a surveyor today could observe the extent of change in the landscape. The descriptions themselves reveal what the countryside looked like only a few years after the end of the war when areas had not always been fully resettled. The report on communications contains the following maps in a pocket at the end.

1. Key map of Transvaal and Orange River Colony. Degree Sheet Series (black) and of the first Transvaal Series* (in blue). Published sheets outlined in red. No stated scale or imprint. *Known as Major Jackson's Series.
2. TRANSVAAL (Provisional Issue) 1:1,000,000 T.S.G.S. 2187. War Office August 1906. Helio-zincographed at the Ordnance Survey, Southampton, 1907.
3. Sketch map of the Transvaal Postal Telegraphs T.S.G.S. No. 2168(c) War Office 1906
4. Transvaal Route Diagram 1 inch to 40 miles. War Office 1905. T.S.G.S. 2168(b).
5. Map of the Transvaal Colony showing Post Office, Agencies and Mail Routes. T.S.G.S. 2168(a)

The last of these is effectively a graphic index to the route reports, the subject of this paper. It indicates that the southern part of the Colony had a good network of routes, but north of Pretoria there is a skeletal coverage in the eastern bushveld and Escarpment. It would seem that the large thinly settled areas of the north west, bordering Bechuanaland, were not of much interest to the military. The low veld including the Kruger Park in the north and the Swazi territory in the south were similarly devoid of routes. Of routes to the Portuguese border, thence to Lourenço Marques the more important ones came through Barberton aiming at Komati Poort, the way through the Lebombo mountains. The railway line newly pushed through the deep and winding Elands-Crocodile river valley was the main artery of communication, attracting several surveyed routes.

Meanwhile we should draw attention to another official map, not mentioned in the list above. It was issued by the British Association for its Johannesburg meeting in 1905. It was produced by the Surveyor General Transvaal and carries Jackson's signature and was compiled in 1902 and revised in 1904. At the scale of 30 miles to one inch it is sufficiently large to record railways, main roads and boundaries of districts and wards in red with places

and names in black including the smallest postal agency and some places planned but never built. It appears to be on a plat carree projection and could serve as an index to the degree sheet series. Folded into an envelope to accompany the Guide to the Transvaal, it may well disguise inaccuracies. It does not show minor rivers and relief, which are features of map no. 5 above.

The Main Part of the Report

For the most part there is a standard format, not always followed to the letter. Following a chapter on railways, telegraphs and telephones, the Colony was divided into five areas: South-eastern; Eastern; Northern; Western; Central. Each is then described in broad terms. Taking the Eastern Transvaal as an example, region B begins with a description “for military purposes” and identifies the three main natural divisions: high veld, mountainous area and low veld. Acknowledging the dominance of the Drakensberg among mountain ranges, four major passes leading from the high veld in the west to the low veld in the east. One taken by the railway, two by roads and the last along the Olifants river gorge suitable only for pack animals. Other regions such as the Luluberg range include numerous “natural fortresses” formed of extensive fertile plateaux and secluded valleys “where large herds of cattle could be concealed, and deep caves offer secure places of concealment to the natives in time of need. These allowed Sekhukuni and his predecessors to offer protracted resistance to various intruders. No roads suitable for wheeled vehicles crossed Luluberg - one pass could with slight improvement be fit for artillery Typically the country is an intricate complex of steep cliffs facing east and thickly wooded western slopes. Rivers are seen in the main as obstacles to movement, noting that they flood in summer. Iron bridges receive special mention as most river crossings were by drifts (fords). Vegetation is summarised as treeless high veld, bush-covered middle veld or thorn bush in the drier low veld. Travel by rail was limited to the main line between Pretoria and Lourenço Marques and the branch to Barberton. Otherwise travellers went by generally poor roads occasionally by post carts. Problems of moving through the low veld derive from the sameness of the thorn bush with few vantage points to aid navigation. In addition, despite cooler weather in winter, fever and horse sickness become prevalent in the summer months. It was not safe to travel at night, as draught animals were at risk of marauding lions necessitating fire ringed kraals. Diseases borne by tsetse fly were common affecting transport and stock farming. Draught animals featured donkeys in the low veld, mules and horses in the higher country and their usual prices live and salted were quoted. Agriculture appears to have been essentially at a subsistence level, with a little trading by settler farmers with natives who had had two poor years of failed crops of maize and sorghum. Mining of gold and coal was the only other significant exploitation of natural resources. A short section on the main towns and villages stresses water supplies, trading and administration and defence in the shape of garrisons. It appears that with a few hundred European inhabitants a town or village was viable. Only where there were coal mines as at Belfast and Middelburg was there any prospect of industry. Most of the features physical and man-made referred to appear on the general map of the Transvaal at one in a million, so that senior officers and administrators could appreciate the geography of the colony in general terms.

The next section is titled Road Reports numbering them consecutively from B1 to B23 relating them to the Degree sheet series or others such as Major Jackson's. On either of these one can follow each route reading the observations made by those officers verifying and updating the maps. Such accumulation of knowledge of the country had not been

possible before the war and was an essential supplement to the maps which were based on pre-war cadastral maps compiled by the Surveyor General. Even at this date there frequently appear blank, or unsurveyed areas. I have chosen Route B2 from Barberton to Montrose, then B7 to HlomHlom continued as A27 to Carolina, which were part of an old postal route from the high veld to Barberton and the nearby goldfields. Each route starts with a summary of its main features. It is followed by the Itinerary whose details are quoted verbatim in order to appreciate the economical notes, the use of military expressions and the selection of topics that would help or hinder the movement of troops.

Route No. B.2.

BARBERTON TO MONTROSE

Maps:- Jackson's series, No. 8.

Authority and date:- Capt. H.H. Harrison, 2nd Lincoln Regiment. December 1903. There are general remarks on distance and time to cover the journey of 15½ miles followed by five notes covering the road, supplies, water, tactical and signalling. Although only 12 miles in length Harrison considered that in all weather it could be tackled in two stages or days outwards and one for the easier return journey.

1. The road goes across identified farms allowing us to trace it on the map, viz. Brommer's 1005 Ameide 1002, Montrose 36. The road was fair for the first three miles in undulating country fit for wheeled transport. The remainder through very hilly country was fit only for pack transport.

6. All supplies must be carried because three small stores were geared to serving the local mines. Wood was plentiful all the way.

7. Water was plentiful both in summer and winter.

8. The first three miles were commanded by high hills to the south and would have to be secured before the ascent to the ridge. Indeed throughout its length the hills would have to be secured first. In places the road climbs up the side of a steep slope risking disaster if a stampede of pack animals occurred.

9. From Alpine Mine at 9½ miles both Barberton and Montrose could be seen enabling a signal station to be located there.

The Itinerary, gives miles for each section and cumulative distances. Reference points are named or given a feature type. These are specific buildings, such as stores, farmhouses or mines tied to owners or occupiers. Some of the information for places measured in miles from Barberton will illustrate both the variety, relevance and value of the itineraries.

Mile 2. Concession Creek Camp

Always water in creek fit for animals of an infantry brigade, but polluted by cyanide from mines. Drinking water obtainable from water hole about 100 yards west of drift. Space unlimited west of stream. Drift very easy [to cross]. Good camping ground. Wood abundant. Hills on south would have to be held to ensure safety of camp. Road so far good. Horse sickness deadly October to May.

Mile 3. Ascent of Hill

Cart road ends. Stiff gradient for about 500 yards after leaving the plain.

Mile 6. Store. Kept by Mr. Sievewright. Reliable authority on district generally. Small store no to be counted on for supplies in any quantity. Road crosses spruit, easy crossing. Road fair, commanded on both sides. [overlooked and in the sights of an enemy]

Mile 7½. Pioneer Mine.

Mine in disuse. Several iron buildings in good repair. On hills above house stands Mr. Turton's house, Mr, Turton is the manager of Moodie's Concession. A resident of long standing, and reliable, probably the best authority on this district.

Mile 9½. Alpine Mine Camp.

Road ascends to mine by very trying zig-zag path. Path in bad repair and likely to be frequently washed away during rains. Path traverses precipitous face of hill in places, and pack animals require careful handling. Mine disused. several iron buildings in good repair. Good ground for camping on cricket ground and nek [col] close above the Alpine Hotel. There is ample accommodation, but the ground is, as a rule, on a slight slope. Good water to be obtained in ample quantity from the spruit running near the Alpine Hotel or from water race just above. Signalling station. Road leading to Ivy Mine branches off here.

Mile 12½. Brighton Ridge Camp.

Road continues bad, descends into a valley, passing near to a plantation of blue gum trees, and the past the disused Brighton Mine. There is one cottage in good repair, and a few iron sheds. The road then ascends to Brighton Ridge. Good ground for camping space unlimited. Water good and abundant, to be obtained from the spruit near the blue gum plantation. Signalling post. Should this ground be used for camping, the hills must be held. At top of ridge Montrose is seen lying in the valley below.

Mile 15½. Montrose, Camp

Montrose Mine. Mine working; small store, post of South African Constabulary post of 3 men. Good ground for camping, space unlimited. Water good and abundant from spruit. Plenty of wood. The hills around command the camping ground and would have to be held."

[Extract from pages 164-166, Volume II.]

From this short example can be seen what detail was regarded as important and the impression it gives of the terrain. Once related to the map in question and its more modern counterparts we can envisage what the landscape looked like. Only occasionally can the memoirs of hunters offer such rich insights. The continuation of the route towards HlomHlom and Carolina on the high veld will be summarised rather than quoted verbatim.

From Montrose Route B7 takes us westwards to Hlom Hlom Its authority is the same Captain Harrison and sheet 8 of Jackson's series is required and the date given is January 1904. Much of this bad road is usable only by pack animals. It was little used and unlikely to be repaired. The terrain was rugged and gradients heavy. Harrison found Jackson's map "very deceptive" largely because the road went through several farms most of which were unoccupied. He did not complain that its depiction of terrain was at fault. Modern maps still carry the traces of those farms and enable us to work out where the route goes. We can speculate on why the farms were unoccupied, but the fact remains. Harrison lists Sassenheim 1001, Estada 1179, Montrose 35, Weltevreden 157 and 1059, Cortinia Block, 1159, Belmont, Doornhoek 134, Friesland 136, Vygeboom 137.

The SAC post lay on Sassenheim. Two spruits are crossed in 5½ miles. Downstream on the second, larger one lay a farmstead occupied by a man called Steinberg. In another two miles in a valley the route runs NNW much of it along the eastern slopes of a ridge before turning West ascending to join the road from Zwartkop where there is a Police Post 4 miles to the North. A mile and a half further west after ascending over a nek passing a ruined farmhouse Nelshoogte. A steep descent of some 700 feet on this very bad road where wagon wheels

need to be locked, the route turns to run WSW, crossing two more spruits and a drift over the rather larger Glade river by an easy drift, river 16 yards wide, 18 inches deep in winter, but 30 inches deep in summer. 2½ miles further on the ruined store of Hlom Hlom lies some half a mile east of the Komati river. See Route A 27 - reminds the reader to look at another section for its continuation.

The description above between Nelshoogte and the Glade River covering 6½ miles when measured on the map itself the direct traverse as the crow flies comes to 8 miles. If Harrison had followed the road clearly marked swinging to the north-west before turning south the distance would have been even greater, say 11 or 12 miles. Remember that the itinerary says that the route crosses Doornhoek and Friesland farms, which lay on the direct and shorter path. We must assume that Harrison saw some sort of road going west-south-west and followed it. As sheet 8 was compiled in 1900 and revised as late as June 1902 a newer road may well have been made. Harrison would have seen that the road marked on his map was longer than the direct path and chose to follow the latter. Doubtless he would have reported the existence of the newer road to his superiors. It cannot be assumed that the failure to mark a road is evidence that no road existed.

In sum descriptions of vegetation are suppressed by the attention given to the hills and the state of the road. Hlom Hlom had a postal agency during the 1890s, but its *raison d'être* had disappeared probably when an alternative route was found. The ruined store stood in a plantation of gum trees according to the itinerary A27 which took Major S Fitz G Cox of the Lincolnshire Regiment the 37 miles to Carolina. Several ruined houses were nearby and the drift over the Komati river was a bad one, the depth of water known to rise to 9 feet but impassable at a third of that with a strong current and large boulders on the river bed. A good camping ground existed west of the drift but overlooked by hills to the north-west.

Major Cox does not cite any particular map but Jackson's map sheet 7 (Ermelo Carolina) would probably have been used allowing us to identify the course of the road from the farms through which it passed. Farms crossed after HlomHlom were Kees zyn Doorns 28, Badplaats 29, Kopje Alleen 23, Ida 8, Boschhoek 117, Zilverkop 31, Goedwervacht 32, Rietfontein 70, Victoriapoort 69, Barnsveld 231, Nooitgedacht 51, Paardeplants (sic for Paardeplaats) 187, Greenville (mistranscribed from Groenvallei) 193. As usual the guide to the landscape was provided by the rivers and formlines, the route runs along one marked on the map. This road, although in bad repair until the high country is reached, is better than all branch roads. In the margin of the map it led to Barberton and was thus the main road. It is substantially followed by the modern road. On the lower ground there were few white people in contrast with the high veld to the west.

Leaving the Komati valley behind, the route climbs across higher ground shown on map 15, descending to the Buffelspruit, one of the major affluents of the Komati. After crossing two spruits the Buffelspruit is reached where a good drift existed across the 20 yard stream. The bottom was hard but approaches needed repair. Two miles further on the itinerary lists Warmbad, apparently the name of a ruined farm, which has a spring of natural mineral water (aperient). This is the nucleus of a modern settlement called Badplas after the official farm name. Note that warm springs there were noted on Jeppe's map of 1877. The route

climbs south away from the Buffelspruit to the interfluve and after the striking lone kopje is “greatly improved”. From this point a branch road goes south towards Chrissie’s Meer passing after a mile a South African Constabulary post at the foot of Ida’s Hoogte. Here was a camping ground with a spring a site to be held in times of trouble. Two miles further along the main road the itinerary reaches the valley of the Buffelspruit again for another 4 miles, crossing many small spruits. At the junction with the main road to Chrissies Meer is located Zilverkop store where a few implements for repairing wagons were available. Our route crosses a small spruit then crosses the Buffelspruit at a drift classed “fair” with approaches which needed repairs. Nearby was a camping ground albeit commanded by surrounding hills. From this point the route ascends along the interfluve some four miles to the edge of the high veld, leaving behind a summit suitable for signalling. From this point the entire route from the Komati behind can be seen. Westward the route crosses “open and undulating grassland, with nothing to impede the normal rate of marching. “Several farms can be seen within 5 miles of the road”, offering the chance of supplies and indicating water supplies, otherwise scarce. Another six miles takes us to a crossroads where there is a SAC camp and 2½ further on Van der Merwe’s farm Nooitgedacht where there are cultivation, trees and homesteads, but water from a spruit. Finally two miles from Carolina the road gently reaches a summit with a view of the town. “Post office. Telegraph office. Hotels.” Having ridden 27 miles and taken notes at stops Major Cox must have dreamed of the relative luxury awaiting him.

The general notes mention numerous farms on the high veld with cattle and sheep. Water was scarce there and there were no dams near the road. Below in the valleys good running water was plentiful, but the dissected nature of the country made lateral movement difficult with the added problem of being within rifle fire. The high veld was tactically easy to negotiate. No mention of firewood in the valley section probably indicates that it was available.

In a contemporary publication *A Guide to the Transvaal* issued in 1905 for the British Association meeting in Johannesburg, Carolina is described as a small picturesque town. The district had two places of interest, one of which was Warmbaths, a natural basin of hot water 12 by 50 feet. The cold spring was used to mitigate the temperature of the hot springs, Residents of Carolina frequented the warmbaths in winter despite the five-hour journey there. One assumes that Major Cox was not aware of their potential temptations, thus emphasising the objective assessment of the countryside.

Each region of the colony included a section on towns and villages. Barberton is described as a small town of 1,200 European inhabitants and the centre of De Kaap goldfields. At the foot of high mountains, its reputation as very unhealthy was recently being dispelled. An administrative centre for the district, there was half a battalion of infantry garrisoned in cantonments outside the town itself. The view of the town from the hills to the north-east is from a post card (Figure 1)

The value of Major Jackson’s series as a resource for landscape history.

This small example has demonstrated that the military report on the Transvaal because it was based primarily on Jackson’s series and the degree sheet series (second revised series) officially produced by the Surveyor General in three colours when available. Despite their cluttered appearance in black only Jackson’s series they were known to have been used in

some road reports and occasionally were corrected by the user. In some cases the officer notes that a feature appears on the later series but is omitted on Jackson's. It is the pattern of original farm boundaries and names/numbers which are present on Jackson's, the degree sheet series and the topo-cadastral series which furnish the local framework enabling us to relate the route reports to the ground. When route descriptions are traced on contemporary maps, and subsequently re-located with reference to modern mapping the scientist has a fairly reliable base for studies of landscape change over the last century.

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