



Otto Peetoom

Victoria Falls



A Victoria Falls Display

Introduction

This display is not a collection or an exhibit. It is an accumulation of material which has been assembled with the aim to entertain those present. The talk is supplemented by a power point display...I hope you enjoy it.

The River and the Falls

The Zambesi is one of the four large rivers of the African continent and has a perennial flow of over 1,700 miles. The river rises at an altitude of 5,000 feet, in Latitude 11° 21'S Longitude 24° 3'E and from its source to the Victoria Falls, is a distance of 800 miles, it is navigable in reaches of varying lengths, these stretches are determined by rapids and small falls; it enters Northern Rhodesia after flowing 70 miles.

At one time the Zambesi delivered its waters, not eastwards, as at present, but southwards into a depression known as the Kalahari Desert, which afterwards became filled up with sediment and necessitating a change of direction.

The flood time of the Falls occurs after the rainy season is over, and continues well in to the dry season. This phenomenon is due to the existence of swamp and marshes along its own banks and those of its tributary streams west of Kazungula, some sixty miles west of the Falls. These swamps or 'sponge areas' take the first four months of the rainy season to become soaked and full and they do not commence to yield their waters until towards and in the dry season.

The Discovery of the Victoria Falls

Although attributed to Dr Livingstone in 1855, the earliest people to depict the Victoria Falls are believed to be the Bushmen. They left at least six paintings in their rock caves and shelters in Southern Rhodesia. These representations are in oxides of red and yellow ochre's, and are probably a thousand years old, possibly more. They show the line of the falls, or some section of it, and one portrays the columns of white vapour above the Falls uniting in a cloud.

Livingstone's description of the Falls

Livingstone described them in the following terms...*Of these falls we had often heard since we came into this country. It was called by the natives Mosi-oo-tunya ('Smoke sounder there')* or more evidently 'Shongwe', which may mean a seething cauldron or 'boiling water in a pot.' Nowadays *'the smoke that thunders'*.

...After twenty minutes' sail in a canoe from Kalai we came in sight, for the first time, of the columns of vapour, appropriately called 'smoke,' rising, at a distance of five or six miles, exactly as when large tracts of grass are burned in Africa...It had never been seen before by European eyes; but scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight. The only want felt is that of mountains in the background. The Falls are bounded on three sides by ridges 300 or 400 feet in height, which are covered with forest, with the red soil appearing among the trees...

Early Paintings of the Victoria Falls

The first modern painter (circa 1862) was Thomas Baines, the well-known African explorer (1820 - 1875) and he showed his pictures to Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort. Some of these paintings are in the Port Elizabeth Library and others in the Cape Town Library, while some are housed in Durban.

Dimensions - The Victoria Falls are nearly two-and-a-half times as high as the Niagara Falls and approximately twice as wide.

The measurements of the two are - Height of the Victoria Falls 420 feet and Niagara Falls 158 feet. Width of Victoria Falls, approximately one mile and Niagara, half a mile.

How and when to see the Victoria Falls

The best months for visiting the Falls is July and August. The Falls change their appearances and moods according to season and each season possesses a special attractiveness. From January to May the river is in flood; it is lowest from October to December. The greatest volume of water is falling in April, and the water level in the gorge is then some 50 feet higher than in November; but at this season the spray is densest and consequently the beauties of the cataracts are apt to be hidden from view. On the other hand, when the spray clouds are comparatively light, say in November, the volume of falling water is not nearly so great as in the flood season, with the result that the waters appear to hug the cliffs in their descent, instead of leaping boldly forward and plunging into the abyss clear of the precipice, as at flood times. At any season, however, they constitute one of the wonders of the world. Light effects are always of the most gorgeous description. Rainbows are to be seen along the chasm and over it at any hour of daylight, and lunar rainbows can be observed at full moon, when the general view is both charming and romantic. Sunrise effects are also magnificent.

By Rail to the Victoria Falls

The original route North from Bulawayo was intended to cross the Zambesi in the Mafungabusi District (about Longitude 29° East) but after the discovery of extensive coal deposits in the Wankie area the route North was to be via Wankie to the Victoria Falls. The Railway reached Wankie in September 1903 and was completed to the Victoria Falls on 25 April 1904.

From the early days the journey to the Falls could be made from various Ports in the South by rail. The Mail and Tourists arriving in Cape Town went North on the *Zambezi Express* via Bulawayo and onto the Victoria Falls. The Rail journey from the Cape to Bulawayo is 1362 miles and 1642 to the Victoria Falls. Circa 1914 the journey to Bulawayo was 58 hours plus another 16 hours to the Falls.

Construction of the Victoria Falls Bridge 1904 - 1905

The 650 foot bridge was constructed in England by the Cleveland Bridge & Engineering Company in Darlington and shipped to Beira and transported by rail to its location.

Georges Imbault, a French engineer working with *The Cleveland Bridge Company*, was appointed Chief Construction Engineer. Along with Stephen Townsend, the Resident Engineer for *Rhodesia Railways* and Charles Beresford Fox, representing the bridge designers, they visited the site to survey the proposed location for the bridge. On 2 September 1903 the final location of the bridge was chosen over the second gorge close to the boiling pot. The choice of the site was governed by the natural formation of the rock walls of the gorge, advantage being taken of the minimum distance to be spanned, combined with the soundest foundations obtainable.

Construction began in April 1904 and took 14 months to complete. The main arch spans 514 feet at a height of 420 feet above the lower watermark of the river. In Northern Rhodesia the line of rail from Livingstone to Kalomo was laid prior to the completion of the bridge and a locomotive was conveyed in pieces across the gorge and re-assembled on the north bank.

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Construction of the Bridge continued

A series of cables stretched across the Gorge and thicker cables were added as the construction took place from both sides, a system used for a cantilever bridge. Materials and support services came by rail from Bulawayo and a construction yard with a large 'A' frame was established 'On-site'.

After completion an accommodation block for the workers was redeveloped as the *Victoria Falls Hotel*.

The cable system allowed the transportation of girders and rail to be transported across the gorge. The cableway across the gorge was nicknamed 'Blondin' after the famous French tightrope walker. Born Jean-François Gravelet (1824 - 1897) and known as 'The Great Blondin'.

Work on the concrete foundations for the bridge was started in May and complete in October 1904. At the same time the anchorages for the main span during its cantilever stage were prepared and the assembly of the main bridge structure started on 21 October. The two side spans of the bridge are supported on the abutments and anchored to the rock behind by steel cables and was completed in late December 1904. The building of the bridge progressed smoothly and on Saturday 1 April 1905 the main arch was linked. The closing was a triumphant event and took place without a hitch and Sir Douglas Fox and Partners announced to the world that the great bridge over the gorge at the Victoria Falls was linked up at 6AM on Saturday.

September 1905 - Official Opening of the Falls Bridge

This event took place on 12 September 1905 and coincided with the British Association Visit of 1905. Overseas members arrived from 8 - 15 August at Cape Town and their itinerary took them to the Victoria Falls. Special trains arrived at Bulawayo on Saturday morning 9 September and 330 members proceeded to the falls on Monday 11 September, they arrived the following morning and attended the formal opening of the Bridge by Professor Frances Darwin and Sir Charles Metcalfe represented the British South Africa Company. The visitors left the Victoria Falls on Wednesday afternoon 13 September for Bulawayo.

The Victoria Falls Display

The period up to the completion of the bridge is illustrated by postcards and photographs. In May 1905 the postal authorities issued a set of 12 pictorial 1d postal stationery cards depicting the Falls (H&G 11a). They were only available at Bulawayo, the Victoria Falls and Livingstone. A second delivery of the cards arrived in August/September 1908.

1905 Victoria Falls Commemoratives - This was Rhodesia's first commemorative set, issued on 13 July 1905. The display includes a unique publicity poster, die proofs, rare specimens, Waterlow Sample Specimens followed by a plating study of the three low values.

The Victoria Falls Hotel - Postcards, envelopes and a label, during the 1929 railway strike hotel guests and mail were flown from the Falls to Bulawayo. One of these exceptional rare flown envelopes is in the display.

South Africa's proposed Rhodesian Stamp Issue - Victoria Falls Designs - One page is devoted to this subject and was the basis of an article in *The South African Philatelist* (Dec 2013)

Southern Rhodesia 1931 - 1953 Definitive stamps depicting the Victoria Falls plus a 1940 'Bridge' commemorative.

Southern Rhodesia (continued) - 1932 3d major perforation varieties SG 30a & b, a reconstruction of the 30a sheet plus a block of four of SG 30b, only six examples possible. 1935 Silver Jubilee includes a Press Publicity Die Proof (one of three). 1937 Coronation and the 1940 4d BSAC. Waterlow sample specimens are included.

Postal stationery includes a 1931 1½d postcard and the 1941 - 44 Military Aerogrammes. Finally the 1953 4½d QEII definitive.

Victoria Falls Tourist Souvenirs - Publicity labels plus pictorial lettercards (two printings). Percy Clark photographs for Tourists in bound books or envelopes.

Northern Rhodesia - 1953 Birth Centenary of Rhodes. The 1d value Mkushi Typewritten Postage due, two out of the five known covers, which includes the only example with a multiple franking.

Rhodesia & Nyasaland - The 1955 Victoria Falls Centenary, 1959 6d definitive plus the Slogan Machine cancel 'SEE THE VICTORIA FALLS'.

Rhodesia (UDI) 1970 - 1978 8c (1970) & 7½c (1973) definitive plus a Pictorial Victoria Falls cancellation. 1977 Landscape Paintings 24c value. 1978 last definitive \$2 top value including its commercial use. 1978 Powered Flight 17c value with the Falls as a backdrop including photographs and artwork.

1975 Constitutional Conference on a train on the V.F. bridge.

Zimbabwe - Stamps depicting the Falls (1) 1980 \$2 Definitive SG 590 (2) 1986 26c 8th Non-Aligned Summit SG 698 (3) 1991 65c Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting SG 820.

Zambia - 1964 3d Independence Commemorative plus 1973 Livingstone Death Centenary with an array of different cancellations. (SG 91 & 192). **2006** 150th Anniversary of the Falls Discovery (SG 1009 & 1010). Finally 2014 2k 50 value depicting the Victoria Falls (SG 1152) being part of a set of six. 2013 - A miniature sheet, Birth Bicentenary of Livingstone depicts a map of Zambia indicating the position of the Falls, not included in the display, but shown on power point.

Bibliography

Guide to Rhodesia by B. & M. & R. Railways, 1914 & 1924

An Essay on the 1905 Victoria Falls issue of the BSAC (1987) Cordes

The Rhodesian Philatelist - Numerous articles relating to the Victoria Falls - No 2 (Nov 1993) First Day on 1905 Falls

No 4 (May 1994) Southern Rhodesia Sample Specimens

No 5 (Aug 1994) Mkushi Postage Dues, an update in No 6

No 9 (Sep 1995) 1929 Emergency Airmail from Victoria Falls

No 12 (Oct 1996) 1932 3d Imperforated between SG 30b

No 13 (Feb 1997) 1932 3d Imperforated horizontally SG 30a

No 23 (Oct 2003) 1905 1/- Falls Imperforate between varieties and Victoria Falls B&M&R Railway Letter cards

No 24 (Jan 2005) Mail flown by the AOC during the 1929 strike

No 25 (Jan 2006) S. Rhodesia 1937 Coronation Issue and 3d Imperforate to top margin

No 30 (Jan 2011) Rhodesia & Nyasaland 1955 Aerogrammes

No 32 (April 2013) A Review of the 12 pictorial 1d postal stationery cards (H&G 11a) plus S. Rhodesia 1935 Silver Jubilee Part I

No 33 (July 2013) S. Rhodesia 1935 Silver Jubilee Part II plus Pictorial & Postal Souvenirs and Labels of the Victoria Falls

No 34 (April 2014) S. Rhodesia 1935 Silver Jubilee Part III plus

1905 Victoria Falls Publicity Poster

No 35 (Aug 2014) Waterlow sample stamps plus S. Rhodesia 1932 3d Large

Falls Imperforate between varieties & 1905 perforated Specimen

No 37 (Nov 2015) S. Rhodesia 1931 Definitives (2d & 3d Falls)

No 38 (July 2016) S. Rhodesia 1935 1d Silver Jubilee variety

