

Letter to John Washington, 5 November 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

(III)

River Zambesi, Shupanga,

5 Nov^r 1859

Captain Washington R. N.

Sir

In answer to the
letter of M^r Laird of 4th January 1859
a copy of which you enclosed I have
to remark that the statements of that
gentleman disagree in the most marked
manner with the promises [he] held forth
respecting the Steam Launch, and
which I possess in his own
hand writing, dated as follows,

"Hamilton Square

Birkenhead

Jany 16/58

"Dear Sir,

D^r Livingstone's Launch
will more probably exceed Ten knots
than fall below it - when kept in
proper trim - she appears admirably
adapted for what she was proposed
for, the upper Zambesi above "Tete"

[0002]

if she is heavily laden with stores
her speed will of course be diminished
as her draught of water is increased.
As they are putting the engine together
it is impossible to alter the power
"even if desirable - which it is not."

(Here follows an irrelevant sentence
about D^r Baikies expedition

"D^r Livingstone may calculate upon
one Ton for every inch Disp^t in
the Launch, and as in the river he
may safely load her to 2 feet from
ten to twelve Tons will be available
for stores and crew - as to space the
plan sent up shews accurately the
Room.

"On the Indian Rivers where light draught
is so essential - all the River steamers
are used as Tugs which is the best
application of the power and if my
advice is taken this Launch will always
"be kept light and any extra weight towed
I remain faithfully yours
Macgregor Laird
a true copy
David Livingstone
the above note was sent to the Admiralty

[0003]

in answer to my protest against an engine
of Ten horse power only.

The note which M^r Laird has been good
enough to print shews indisputably a
disposition on my part to be satisfied. It
was written while the Launch was still supplied
with coal by the Pearl, and it was only
when the coal was expended that I discovered
the imposition that had been practised
on the Expedition. It was somewhat
mortifying, now that we were away from
all the means of remedying the evil, to
hear the statement made publicly. "Well
these Liverpool people must have imposed
on me", and to find that at the "trial by
wood alone" "coal has seen to be
thrown in once and again" and other
things which though they can be proved
I forbear mentioning

At the trial trip in the Mersey
she drew 19 inches without anything
in her [but the weight equal to the house drew 25 inches] and since she came out here
and recieved her gear, she has never
drawn less than Two Feet One Inch
Her crew of twelve kroomen - no
provisions - no fuel brought her
down to two feet two inches

[0004]

While one days fuel (about a ton) and
as near as we could ascertain nearly
Four Tons brought her down to
Two feet six inches. M^r Laird
"designed her to carry when loaded"
to 2 feet Ten or Twelve Tons!"

I beg leave to submit the
particulars of our last trip in M^r
Lairds "Dispatch boat" up the Shire.

We had four barrels of salt meat
 and two bags of coffee, a medicine
 chest, boxes of instruments of no
 great weight & half a bale of calico
 the whole would not be a Ton in
 weight. [Fuel say another Ton] We had forty four Makololo
 all men of light weight and six
 Englishmen. M^r Laird "intended" her
 to draw 13 inches we found ourselves
 drawing about 30 - and with the
 steam between 50 & 60 lbs could not
 make three and a half knots. [We passed over ground therefore at the rate of less than one
 knot an hour & took
 nearly a month to go from Kongone Harbour to Chibisa's about 200 miles] the
 women carrying loads on their heads
 walked on to the next bend of the river
 then waited till we came up again;
 (~~against the 2 1/2 knot current of the~~
~~Shire~~) and to our disgust we saw a lame
 man walk away ahead of us altogether.

[0005]

But it will be said "She was overloaded
 Not at all we had taken the precaution
 of towing all the Makalolo except
 about a dozen to work the vessel
 in two whalers behind - and when
 doing so at a sudden bend the current
 rushing past caught her bow and
 one of the whalers when drawn across
 stream with her was swamped and
 to our sorrow one poor fellow
 was drowned.

Take another example of the per-
 formances of the Launch - In going
 down from Shupanga to the sea
 We were a good deal lighter than
 in the last trip having no cargo
 & not 1/2 a ton of ~~nails~~ [fuel] & with
 but 14 natives and four Englishmen.
 M^r Medlycott of the Lynx took
 charge, and was dumfounded
 to find that a stiff breeze held her
 paddles to a dead lock [with between 50 & 60 lbs steam] and obliged
 us to anchor. that was nothing
 wonderful to us, for wherever
 we have a 3 1/2 knot current
 we cannot stem it even with 60lbs of steam

[0006]

If M^r Laird will explain why at the

trial trip she ran with the tide only in one direction then waited till the tide turned and ran back with it in the other, the discrepancy of performances here and there may be accounted for. Her top speed in the Zambesi against the current * measured repeatedly by Patent and common log - has been 3 1/2 knots with between 50 & 60 lbs of steam. M^r Laird promised over "Ten knots"

Funnel - Furnace - Deck - and Bottom all become shaky simultaneously, after only Twelve months work - i.e £1200 for 12 months. Extras all paid for besides. It ought to be known to the Admiralty that do what we would we never could keep our cabin dry. We have had carpenters from men of war attempting to remedy this evil, but have been obliged to sleep on damp rotten cushions continuously notwithstanding all our efforts. Our botanist cannot take his collections to the sea without

* measured by anchoring in a part which we cannot stem while going at full speed

[0007]

eminent risk of their suffering the same fate as those of poor D^r Vogel of the great Niger Expedition. He mentions in his journal that his cabin was always in the same state as ours, and public blame was most unjustly attached to the Admiralty. I enclose a report in view of the bottom of this most unworkmanlike & flimsy vessel.

Copy

Report

1st August 1859. At Kongone harbour

Beached the vessel furnished by M^r Macgregor Laird to the Zambesi Expedition on the right bank of Kongone harbour and dug out the sand from the middle compartment in order to examine her bottom. Found the plates which were only one sixteenth of an inch at the beginning to be fairly worn & rusted through in several places, and the

whole so very thin that it is quite impossible
to patch them - bolts would have nothing
to hold on by. The rent would be
made worse by any mending welding
hammering - no other process such
as wedging or staying can be applied
We are therefore obliged to puddle the

[0008]

bottom with clay in canvas bags over the
holes (covered with India rubber) as the only
means in our power of keeping her
afloat to perform the service of taking us
out of the unhealthy Delta. The Funnel
is also full of holes

(signed)

David Livingstone

John Kirk M.D.

Charles Livingstone

A true copy

David Livingstone

In conclusion as every point advanced
respecting the engine - boiler & vessel for
the information of the Admiralty has been
the result of my own patient and minute
investigation, I am sorry to observe the
mean, ungenerous & totally unfounded
insinuation against our "Clyde Engineer"
who was not only recommended by Tod
& Macgregor of Glasgow (a firm in
every way superior to M^r Laird's) ~~but~~ as
the very best man in their employment,
and we have been thoroughly satisfied with
his skill, zeal, and trustworthiness, but
he has joined us at a considerable pecuniary
disadvantage to himself as he occupied a post
of chief engineer in the largest sea going
ships. We intend sending the engine &
boiler to a Museum in Glasgow.

David Livingstone