

## Letter to George Grey, 4, [8 or 9] April 1861

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org)), 2017

[0001]

Mohilla Island - near Comoro

4 April 1861.

My Dear Sir George

You will probably have

heard ere this reaches you that we went

to the Rovuma in February and made

an attempt to ascend that river in March.

Our progress was arrested when only some

thirty miles from the mouth by observing

that the water was falling at the rate of seven

inches a day; we had come over some

parts not more than five or six feet deep

and our vessel was drawing four & a half

feet so we had to make up our minds

whether to proceed further and remain among

a people whom we do not know till next

flood, or come back and work on our

old "spoor" up the Shire - The detention

would have been such a waste of time

for those who remained at Johanna, &

would not have advanced the objects

of those who had come to Rovuma more

effectually than by spending the same

period up the Shire = For the general

good therefore we returned and were

favoured by a rise in the river of

three or four feet - this last is said

to be the last flood of the year, And

[0002]

made us fully alive to the fact that

from one cause or another we were

quite two months too late for successful

exploration.

From the little that we saw we are

disposed to think favourably of the river

as an entrance into Eastern Africa - It

has a sandy bottom ^ three quarters of a mile broad and partakes much

of the character of the Zambesi - Unlike

that river with its abominable bars,

it flows into a magnificent bay - and  
the only danger in its mile wide mouth  
is a sort of "bore" formed by the  
water of the river of a few fathoms  
meeting the ocean tide of nineteen fathoms.  
At full tide it is all smooth - By keeping  
near the shore it is quite safe at all  
periods of the tide - We have a very  
short delta and the land rises up from  
the banks in a gentle slope to 300 or 400  
feet - It is well wooded the ebony  
attaining a much larger size than it  
does anywhere on the Zambesi - The  
country is very beautiful but there is  
something wrong among the people -  
Food seemed scarce in a soil where  
everything could grow - Half caste Arabs  
appear to lord it over the general population  
and they were inclined to do the same  
with us. When my brother took the Makololo  
on shore to cut wood some of them came  
and assumed the airs we read of in

[0003]

in countries further North. They demanded  
payment for the wood and he offered to  
give it provided that they should cut it.  
But no, they would seize that already cut,  
the Makololo were unarmed but made  
a rush to their arms - "They would not  
let their white men be imposed on" the  
bastards made a rush the other way,  
and could scarcely be prevailed on to  
come back and take up the vegetables  
they had left behind - But for this little  
shew of pluck we should have had the  
company of these half castes at every  
village - fines levied on every possible  
pretext - and the word passed on beyond  
their beat, that we were a herd of she asses  
to be milked for the public benefit - It is  
of the utmost importance here, as in Europe  
for the people to feel that you are not dependant  
on them - If they see that you can get on  
without them they are much more obliging  
You could not have done a wiser deed  
than give my friend Captain Speke the  
Hottentot gaurd - If they ^ continue stead fast and escape fever,  
which is rather doubtful as people of colour

are as liable to it as whites, his opinion of the general population will be raised about 300 per cent - I have always found that the presence of a trusty band of Makololo - though useless for ship work, was invaluable on land - It was not without considerable regret

[0004]

that we gave up the project of a land journey with them up the Rovuma. It was the worst season for travelling - rain, and heavy dews would have cut us up. In fact the same reasons that prevailed for the postponement of the landing of the Mission still continued in force - By the time we reach the Shire we shall be in the healthier season, and a beginning will be made of the general labours from the other end of Nyassa to that which we looked on by the Rovuma - It is curious that all the people declare that Ny<sup>assa</sup> comes out of Nyassa - This, according to a curious idea that has come over the geographical mind in England, must mean that Nyassa comes out ^ of Rovuma I wish our good friends would only tell us all about it beforehand - It would save us a great deal of trouble - and deliver us from the perplexity of guessing and - grumbling - We see for instance Shire never discolours in flood - but is always of a dark mossy hue = carries a great deal of mica, has a muddy bottom and never rises or falls more than a few feet - Rovuma rises some five or six feet - is very brown & muddy, but has a sandy bottom - water carries little or no mica - and tastes of rain rather than moss. Now anything positive if given beforehand will be thankfully recieved though it comes from the Archives of Prester John

[0005]

P.S. Johanna, at W<sup>m</sup> Sunley's  
H. M. Consul, Comoro Islands -

We require two well trained strong  
mules fit for and used to either

harness or the saddle - and two  
good strong Scotch carts with  
harness &c complete to transport  
goods past Murchison's Cataracts.  
And I have to beg you to place  
the matter in proper hands  
paying what may ^ reasonably be necessary  
on account of the Expedition.  
M<sup>r</sup> Frederick Rutherfoord  
might be a proper person  
but I dont know whether  
he undertakes these sort of  
matters - there is plenty of time  
as we expect them to meet  
us by a man of war which  
we beg may be sent to meet  
us at Kongone on the 1<sup>st</sup>  
January 1862 - We shall not,  
indeed cannot return to the  
sea till then -

If a small steamer we  
expect comes before that

[0006]

and the bishops sisters should  
wish to come by that opportunity  
I shall be glad if you instruct  
the person in charge to afford  
every facility to any one con-  
nected with the mission in his  
power - either by coming up  
to the Pioneer at Chibisa's  
or Dakanamoio island and  
offloading, then returning for  
all their luggage or acting in  
anyway that may seem most  
serviceable to the general interests -  
I should like now to see my own  
wife appear on the scene but  
we have a tough bit of work  
in getting up a boat and examining  
Nyassa - and Rovuma as the  
Anatomical lecturers say "from above  
downwards and from before  
backwards" - What do you say 3 to 1 for Rovuma out of Tanganyika against &c &c

About the mules I sometimes  
think a horse & mare for breeding

purposes might be preferable but  
we might stumble into tsetse and then  
everybody will say "why we knew that"  
"I told you so."

[0007]

I propose to submit a spot near  
the village marked "Chizunze's" not  
far from the bottom of Zomba  
for the bishop's inspection - the  
headman called Chibaba is a  
fat frank jolly fellow - the  
elevation some 3000 or 4000  
feet above the sea, cool in the  
hottest part of the season, and  
well watered. This will be a  
sanatarium - and there stands  
Zomba's top a day's journey up -  
inhabited - and a fine rivulet -  
If they become sick there they had  
better make their wills at once  
and not bother the doctors - some  
work will be required to find a  
good sloping kloof up to the  
first Plateau. All have had  
fever except one. Indeed but two  
of the entire Expedition have escaped yet nothing serious  
occurred -

You remember when every Cape  
Paper contained the great Word  
"Mazzepa" - From flaring in print  
she has come down to carrying

[0008]

slaves. We found her here with sixty  
on board bought at Kilwa (Quiloa) on  
the East Coast at 22 dollars per head  
then - the owner gave 250 dollars to  
a chief on Comoro island to furnish  
him with certificate that the slaves  
were his own people lent as free  
emigrants - It is here scarcely thought  
necessary to conceal the nature of these  
transactions - there is constant intercourse  
between the islands & the chief is rather  
admired for the amount he extracted,  
but the French Government Official

is on board and it is illegal to  
touch her - What did the Emperor  
mean when he said that he would  
not have the slave trade at any  
price?

I am &c

David Livingstone