

Up the River to the Lake - A pictorial review from the African Lakes Corporation Archives

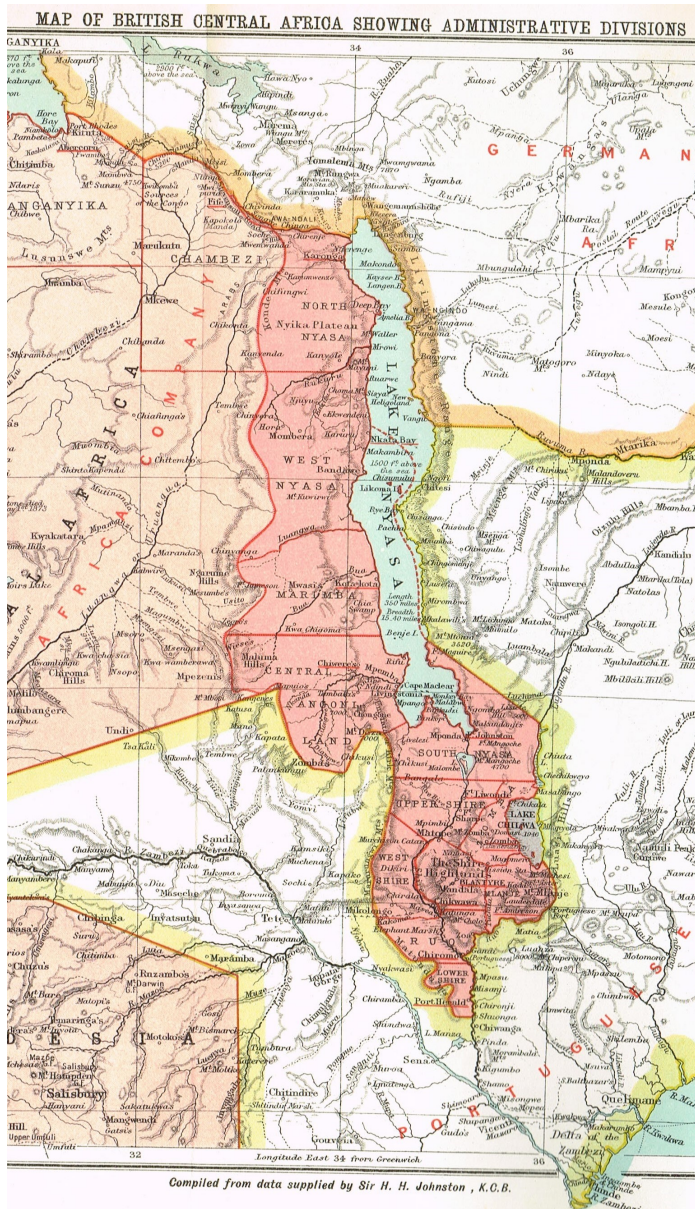
Stuart Ross

African Lakes Corporation (ALC) owned a number of vessels that plied the route inland to the Lower Shire from Chinde and to certain staging ports along the way. This would depend on the level of the river as to the distance they could travel. The cargo or passengers were taken overland to the Upper Shire and from there to Lake Nyasa.

Sternwheel Steamers plied the Zambesi and Shire Rivers. Several vessels had been built in earlier years and so the method of building had been successfully proven. The ships were built in the shipyard, in Britain. They were launched and after their trials they were dismantled for shipment and marked for re-erection. One of the stipulations was that no part should be more than 32kg, as all parts for the vessels that were going to Lake Nyasa would have to be carried by porter over the non-navigable sections of the river system.

“Lady Nyassa II was ordered in 1877 by the Church of Scotland, who named her in honour of the original vessel that was bought by David Livingstone in 1861 for his Zambesi Expedition. The ownership of this vessel was transferred to the Livingstonia Central Africa Company. The prefabricated parts arrived at Quelimane in September 1878 together with four engineers to assemble and maintain the vessel and the brothers John and Frederick Moir who would manage the enterprise. “Lady Nyassa” II first reached Katunga’s, the last station of navigation on the Lower Shire River in May, 1879.

This vessel was involved in several incidents with the local Chiefs. In April 1881 it sank in the Shire river near Morambula. On raising the wreck, the hull was badly corroded. It was sheathed in wood and returned to service in October 1881. In 1884, it was captured by Chief Chipatula villagers after the Chief had been killed by a drunken trader called Fenwick near the confluence of the Ruo and Shire rivers. Captain Gouk was saved by Chief Mlauri after the vessel was sunk after another incident with villagers. It was resurrected again and finally sank at Chinde in 1897.



Below are 2 Riverboat Hulls which have been assembled in a shipyard prior to disassembly and shipment to Chinde.



In 1887 ALC purchased a stern Wheeled Steamer from Zambezi Industrial Mission and renamed it "John Stephen". ALC also hired a small paddle steamer "Henry Henderson" from the Blantyre Mission, buying the vessel outright in 1900. The photo below shows the vessels below with a mission barge in Concession Creek in Chinde.

"EMPRESS"

"CHIPANDE"

"DUCHESS"



"PRINCESS"



A CLOSER VIEW OF THE "EMPRESS"

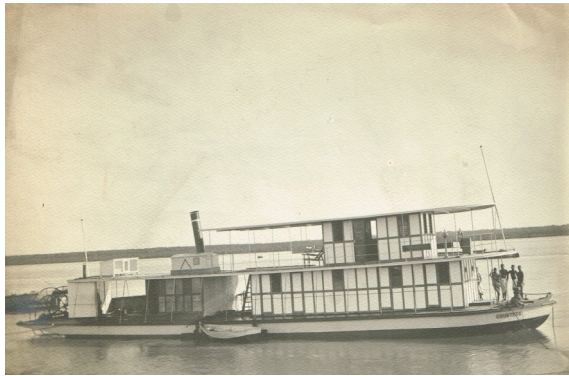


"DUCHESS"
MOORED



The "Princess" was assembled and launched in 1898 at Chinde. In February 1907, this vessel carried 52 tons of cargo from Chiromo to Katunga's in just 17 hours. The "Chipande" was purchased from the British Central Africa Company in 1902.

The “Empress” and “Duchess” were assembled in 1899 from prefabricated parts sent out from a Clyde shipyard. Empress plied the Zambezi and Lower Shire Rivers until 1921 when she was purchased or given to the National Museum. She was moored downstream of the railway bridge at Chiromo. An inspection by the Ministry of Works found her to be in good condition and capable of being brought back into service. Plans were made to transfer ownership from the Museum of Malawi to the newly established Department of Antiquities and to relocate the vessel to Chikwawa, where it was hoped that she would become a major tourist attraction illustrating the history of the river transport. However, before this could happen the Empress sank at her moorings when the river rose rapidly after very heavy rains upstream.



“COUNTESS”



“EMPRESS”



“PRINCESS”



The above photo shows the “Princess” on the lower Shire. These photos were used in the Postcard Series that was issued by ALC around about 1914.

SW MONTEITH on the Upper Shire with more shade cloth added on the photo on the right. This ship was named after Low Monteith Fotheringham of ALC who played a distinguished part in the war against the slave trader, Mlozi. He was a manager of ALC and died in 1895. the ship was a Stern Wheel Paddler and after assembly at Matope, began operating between there and Fort Johnston in December, 1896. She was still in service in 1922 and was broken up around 1940, with her hull being used as a ferry.

“Empress off-loading at Port Herald the first one showing Custom House



One of the cataracts at Murchison Falls on the Shire River



NSANJE DRY PORT –THE PRESENT

The Nsanje port project, devised by the late Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika, failed after the Mozambican government demanded a comprehensive environmental impact assessment prior to implementation.

Without agreement with the Mozambican side, Bingu wa Mutharika inaugurated the port on 23 October 2010, the terminal of the ambitious Shire-Zambezi waterway, which connects Malawi to the Port of Chinde in Mozambique.

The waterway was expected to reduce transportation costs and the estimated annual Import bill for Malawi, estimated at about US \$ 175 million, according to a 2005 study. While holding a political rally Nsanje on 8 September, President Peter Mutharika told the gathering that Malawi was in talks with the neighbouring country over the port, and that he is awaiting the endorsement of the Government of Mozambique to resume the construction project of the port.

“As soon as we get the permit, my government will immediately resume building the missing infrastructure,” Mutharika told the gathering.

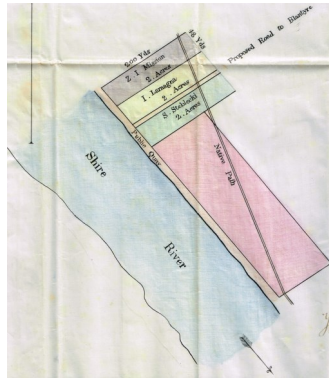
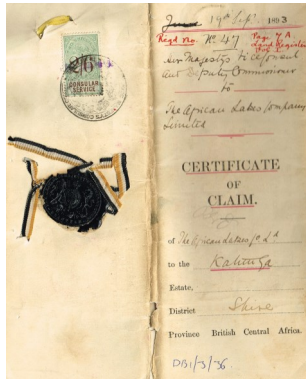
But according to Jornal Noticias, the Head of the Department of Bilateral Cooperation at the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Horácio Parquinio, said yesterday that Mozambique is not in talks and has nothing further to talk to Malawi about the port of Nsanje.

The online publication reports that Parquinio recalled that, in the recent past, in-depth environmental feasibility studies have been carried out which did not recommend the navigability of the Zambezi River. The transport saving is marginal and the waterway would not be reliable.



Interestingly, despite the large infrastructure that had been employed to facilitate inland movement of people and cargo from Chinde, all of this fell away when the railway bridge was built over the Zambezi at Tete.

KATUNGA STATION



African Lakes Corporation had a number of properties in Katunga which was the last port of call before the cargo and passengers had to disembark and travel by foot to the Upper Shire.

Chief Katunga is shown above as well as a view of the Katunga Port. The photo on the left shows the "block and tackle" system used. It does show the simple but effective methods used.

The photo on the right is the ALC house.



Survey Party on a track. The man in the photo is thought to be Captain Sclater on the Katunga's road to Blantyre. He started the realignment of the track in 1891 and this was completed in 1896. Most of the goods would have been carried by porters and the heavier equipment pulled by oxen.

SS ILALA

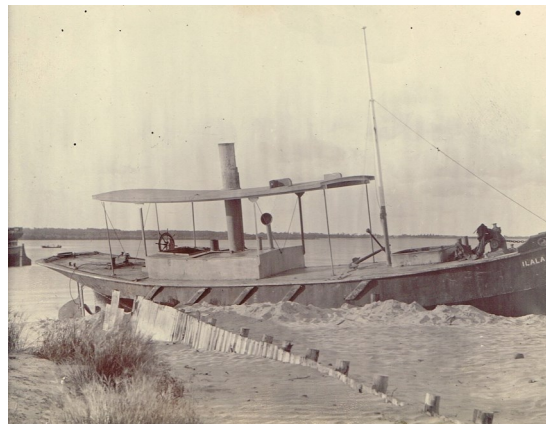
The “Ilala” was named after the district where Livingstone died and was the first steamer to sail on Lake Nyasa. Built by Yarrow and Headley of Millwall, it was bought out by the first members of the Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland. It reached Lake Nyasa on 12th October, 1875. She was taken over by ALC in 1882 and continued service on the lake until 1903 when she was sold to African International Flotilla Company . She was transferred to Chinde and worked as a lighter transferring goods from the ocean liners to the river steamers.



The sepia photos above show the original “ILALA” at work for ALC at Matope on the Upper Shire.

The Black and White photos are of the “ILALA” after it was sold to the “Flotilla” company as their flag is flying.

The photographer was Mr. Aitcheson and the picture was taken on 1 October, 1908.



SS LIVINGSTONE

As the depth of the Upper Shire river only allowed navigation by deep draft steamers only at certain times of the year, ALC bought this smaller screw steamer in 1894, to operate on the river between Matope and Fort Johnston.

The following year she was loaned to the BCA administration during an emergency and patrolled the stretch of river past Fort Johnston armed with a mounted gun taken from the “Pioneer”.

The “Livingstone” was dismantled in 1895.

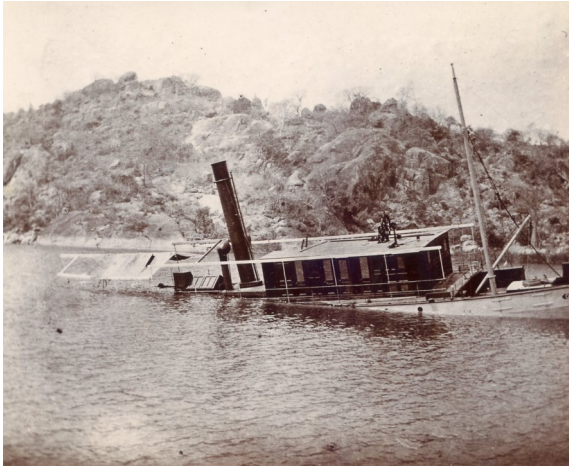
SS QUEEN VICTORIA

Built in 1896 by Ritchie, Graham and Milne of Glasgow for ALC. It was sent out the following year and was assembled at Matope and completed at Fort Johnston by the end of 1898. During World War 1 she was taken over for Military use.

Images show the ship and crew.



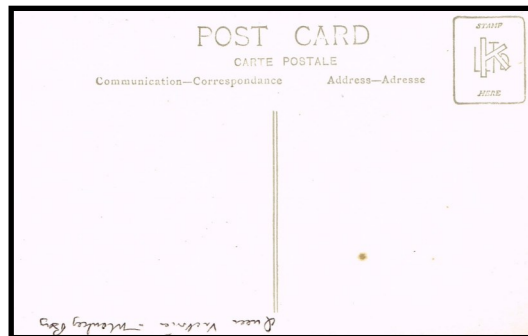
REPORT OF COURT (NO. 7814) BRITISH CENTRAL AFRICA PROTECTORATE SHIPPING ORDINANCE NO.1 OF 1902 ON THE SINKING OF THE SS QUEEN VICTORIA



“We find that the “Queen Victoria”, a screw steamer of 195 tons gross, registered at Fort Johnston on 1.3.1900, No.8, the loss of which forms the subject matter of this enquiry, was wrecked by running on a charted reef of rocks off Cape Ngombo, south of Makanjira Point, on the East shore of Lake Nyasa, in latitude 13.48 S, longitude 34.52 E. She ran onto the rocks at 1.20am on Tuesday, 27th May, 1924. She was at the time in charge of Captain Daniel Ross, a servant of the owners, the African Lakes Corporation Limited.”

The Court found “that the ship was lost through a default of Captain Ross. He was steering, as he states, a course which he had often steered before in this part of the Lake, but he had neglected to take into account circumstances which in our opinion made that course unsafe. Chief of these circumstances was insufficient allowance (which he admits) for the effect of magnetism acquired by the ship during recent alterations and of the presence of one of the magnets which he had adjusted to the compass in compensation.

The court reached a unanimous concluded that “it would be sufficient punishment if Captain Ross’s certificate is suspended for 6 months.”



UNPUBLISHED SERIES OF POSTCARDS

These postcards depict the Queen Victoria in several different locations on Lake Nyasa, Monkey Bay, Nkata Bay and Ruarwe. The Guendolen is also shown at the mouth of the Shire River in Fort Johnston. The location is imprinted at the bottom. They appear to be samples for presentation purposes as they are not of a very high standard.

