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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1927)**

Heft 289

PDF erstellt am: **21.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687545>

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FROM KINSHASA TO BANGUI*

By A. J. LUNGH.

(Conclusion. This first part of this Article appeared in our issue No. 287.)

There is one great disadvantage in tying up in the bush, and that is the swarms of insects that are attracted by the boat's lights. On sitting down to table that evening I found the table-cloth to be swarming with insect life, and eating was a difficult operation as I had to keep one hand free in order to protect my food and person from the invaders, and try to eat with the other. Needless to say, we did not linger over this meal. There was one interesting insect which alighted on our table which, on having its back tickled gently for some time allowed itself to be turned over on its back and apparently went to sleep. This trick was shown us by the telegraphist. However, the insect did not appear to appreciate its back being tickled by me, as it squeaked loudly every time I touched it!

The first night on board was most unpleasant and I slept but little. So low was the mosquito net over the bunk that it was impossible for me to sit up, but on the other hand it allowed plenty of mosquitos and other insects to get inside and worry me with their attentions. The cabin was very poorly ventilated, and the only way to allow some fresh air to enter was to raise a flap next to the door. The desire for privacy soon gave place to a desire for comfort, and not only did I raise the flap but I opened the door as well. The chatter of the boys on the barge below also annoyed me until late into the night. The only advantage to a passenger in being tied up to the bush over being tied up at a wood-post is that one is not kept awake by the noise of the 'boys' loading wood.

The next night we tied up at a wood-post. It was already dark when we arrived opposite it, and in reply to a signal from the ship's siren natives at the wood-post showed us the way by lighting huge torches of dried grass, making a very picturesque sight. I went ashore, but soon returned on board as there was nothing to see, except rows of wood marked off in brasses, and a pipe (mud) hut belonging to the "capita" in charge of the post. It is always necessary for the Captain to examine the "brasses" in order to see that they are not being given short measure. The loading of the wood for the next day's run takes two or three hours, a gang of 'boys' being employed for this work, and long after one has retired for the night the chatter of these boys and the noise of logs being thrown down on the metal decks of the barges makes sleep most difficult. The steamer invariably leaves the wood-post at daybreak.

Sometimes a boat arrives at a wood-post only to find there is no fuel, and that another steamer has been there first. The Captain gives vent to his wrath, and perhaps—if there is another wood-post fairly near—he will steam off again. Sometimes this continues for two or three days, the unfortunate Captain always finding that the boat ahead has carried off most of the fuel. Indeed, sometimes he has to send a gang of boys ashore to cut wood, a very unsatisfactory procedure as much valuable time is wasted and the wood is too green to burn well. Fortunately this is now very rarely necessary.

Having a bath was quite a ticklish operation, as when pulled out from under the lower bunk it filled up all the spare space in the cabin. I would wait outside whilst my boy filled it with river water, and then go in and sit on the side of the lower bunker to undress. There being no window or opening in the cabin apart from the door and the flap already mentioned I had to have my bath and then dress in the dark, and the latter operation was no easy thing as it had to be done in a hunched up position, sitting on the lower bunk with my feet inside the bath!

After the first day or two the journey became very monotonous. The scenery is always the same, nothing but an unbroken line of jungle on either bank, except when we arrived at a native village, where the jungle had been cleared for some little distance on either side of the post. Whenever we stopped at a village we would go ashore, though there was generally little enough to see, except for the mud huts of the natives, hemmed in by the jungle, through which ran small bush tracks. The negro passengers always rush ashore and trade with the inhabitants of the village, buying dried fish, fruit and "chickwanga." The latter is made from manioc flour. In appearance it resembles a most indigestible suet pudding. It is wrapped in leaves, tied and boiled in a pot. The first native woman I saw selling it was doing a splendid trade. Grouped round her were eager buyers, whilst she squatted by her pot, and fished out coil after coil of chickwanga with her hands.

It was at this village that we obtained a supply of grape fruit by the simple means of knocking them off the trees. This fruit made a welcome addition to our "breakfast," which consisted of a cup of black coffee and some bread

*The above article has been sent by a young member of the Colony who recently took up a position in the Belgian Congo.

and butter. Food on board a steamer off the main river becomes very monotonous, the only meat being either goat meat or pork. A goat or a pig is bought at a village by the Captain, and early next morning it is killed on board, and forms the *pièce de résistance* for that day's "chop."

Navigation on the main river is a fairly simple affair, as the Captain is helped by signs consisting of boards nailed to trees along the banks of the river, there always being one in sight astern and one ahead, and from these signs the Captain knows what course to steer in order to avoid sandbanks. Even on the main river, however, steamers frequently run on to a sandbank. Each Captain has a chart of the river, showing the position of the better known sandbanks, but as the charts are nearly all obsolete, owing to the fact that sandbanks shift and alter their position, they are not of much use, and the Captain relies more upon the sound knowledge of the river possessed by his native wheelmen rather than upon charts based upon soundings made as long as fifteen years ago.

Off the main river, on the various tributaries of the Congo, the Captain relies completely on his wheelmen, as there are no signs whatsoever to guide him. Thus when we left the main river at Liranga and turned up the river Ubangui no more guiding marks were to be seen, and the wheelman had to rely on his knowledge of the river. To a trained eye there is little difficulty in locating a sandbank, which is betrayed by a ripple on the surface of the water above it. Incidentally I may mention that sandbanks are very clearly seen from an aeroplane.

One of the worst places at which the steamer called was Mossaka, where the River Sangha enters the Congo. We arrived there at about three o'clock one afternoon, and I was immediately struck by the fatigued and unhealthy appearance of the two or three white men who met us on the shore. All were wearing mosquito boots, which are usually only necessary at night. The natives also appeared sickly and of poor physique.

Mossaka is a very unhealthy spot. It is a fairly large centre of native population, and there are several white men living there. The whole place has a most unkempt and dreary appearance, and owing to the lack of drainage and to frequent inundations it is a veritable breeding ground for mosquitos and tse-tse flies. Sleeping sickness has undermined the constitution of the natives in this area. When I spoke to the native postmaster—who is also the village schoolmaster—he informed me that the Doctor had arrived that morning by canoe and had discovered six fresh cases of sleeping sickness. I was very glad to see the last of Mossaka!

After we left Liranga we turned away from the main river, and proceeded up the River Ubangui. The scenery never changed—nothing but endless forest on either side. We saw very little sign of animal life, apart from a few monkeys in the tree-tops. Most of the larger game has retreated inland. Whilst in the Ubangui I occasionally saw crocodiles sunning themselves on the sandbanks, and once or twice I saw the snout of a hippo rising above the water, heading away from the boat.

Formerly it used to be possible to shoot elephants from the deck of the steamers, but this is very rare indeed nowadays. Most of the passengers had shotguns, and I was very amused one evening when we had stopped at a small village to come across four of them round a tree, armed with their shotguns, waiting for a very small bird to come out and be shot. They would wait for about five minutes and just when they were off their guard the bird would come out and flit to another tree. They returned on board empty handed, though several shots had been fired!

The most interesting sight I saw on the whole trip was perhaps at one village where I came across a primitive blacksmith's shop on the water's edge. It consisted merely of several posts fixed in the ground and supporting a thatched roof. Under this shelter sat the native blacksmith and his assistants, with a small crowd of idlers gattered round about. In the middle was a charcoal fire, and a row of small bellows. The bellows consisted of the lungs of sheep sewn together, and by continually depressing these lungs the fire was kept up. With this primitive plant the blacksmith plied his trade, making short daggers, spear and arrow heads. It would probably take a whole day to beat out a single spear-head, owing to the long time it took to heat the iron to a sufficient temperature. Then the blacksmith would beat it on an anvil, consisting of a large stone, but owing to the poor heat generated by his primitive furnace he could only beat it for about half a minute and then he was obliged to replace it in the fire.

As in the more secluded villages in Europe the "smithy" appeared to be the meeting place for the local gossips, who squatted around the shed exchanging views on the news of the day.

When we got to Mongoumba we learned that, owing to the lowness of the water higher up, the boat could only proceed to Zinga, about two hours further up-river. At Mongoumba several passengers disembarked, proceeding to Bangui by road.

We arrived at Zinga at about seven in the evening, when it was already dark, and there we

found the little steamer that was to take us to Bangui. We had a wearisome time at Zinga, supervising the unloading of our baggage in the pitch darkness, with the aid of a few hurricane lamps. The baggage was dumped down on the shore. Then we had dinner on board the *Dolisie*, after which we supervised the loading of our luggage on to the smaller steamer. At about ten I returned to the *Dolisie* and turned in for the night.

Next morning I had to get up just as dawn was breaking. It was very cold, and when we got on board the small steamer we sat huddled up on deck. Somebody found a little coffee, so we managed to have some kind of a hot drink—if I remember rightly the water was boiled in a bucket by some boys on the beach.

We left at 5.30 a.m., and had a most uncomfortable day's travelling. The morning was very cold, but by ten o'clock the sun became unbearable. We had to keep our sun-helmets on as we only had a corrugated iron roof over us, and there were no cabins to shelter in. We only stopped at one village, where the natives, clad in banana leaves, ran down to the beach to meet us.

It was dusk before we came in sight of Bangui, and the first thing we saw was a huge serpent of fire which seemed to climb up into the sky. We found out later that it was a ring of fire run up the side of the high hill behind Bangui by a hunter in order to shut off the retreat of the animals he was hunting.

We stopped at Bangui at about 8 p.m., and I was very glad to turn in that night, in spite of the fact that I found my camp bed had no mattress or bolster. The trip, though very interesting, had by no means been a comfortable one.

MISS VIOLETTE BROWNE.

Our musical readers will learn with pleasure that Miss Violette Browne is giving a Song Recital at Wigmore Hall on the 16th March, especially those who heard this gifted soprano last year. The critics have been unanimous in their warm praise of Miss Browne's voice, her skill in technique and interpretation, and the magnetic charm of her personality.

The programme for this recital, further particulars of which will be found in our advertisement columns, is an attractive one. It will be recalled that Miss Brown is a daughter of a respected member of our Colony, Mr. A. Brauen.

SWISS GYMNASIUM SOCIETY.

(Communicated.)

A Display will take place on Sunday afternoon, March 27th, 1927, at the Union Helvetia Club, 1, Gerrard Place, W.1, at which both the active members and the Junior Section will take part. The programme will be composed of work on the Horizontal Bar (individual), Parallel Bars (simultaneous), Pommel Horse (simultaneous), Juniors and Seniors: Wand Drill, Indian Club Swinging, Pyramids, Boxing, Wrestling Exhibition, and a Comic Ballet, intermingled with musical items and songs. In the evening the customary Dance will take place.

A Dance for the benefit of the Swiss Poor in London will be held on Bank Holiday, Easter Monday, 18th April, 1927, by kind permission of the Union Helvetia Club, Gerrard Place, W.1, intermingled with Pyramids and a Tombola. It is hoped that in view of the urgent need of this good cause, the Swiss Colony in London will see to it that the receipts will be a record. Every penny taken will be handed over to the Swiss Benevolent Society. Price of admission, 1/6 each.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The March Cinderella Dance took place on Saturday last, the 5th inst., and was held as usual at the Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras. About 120 were present.

Much dancing was enjoyed until 9 p.m., not forgetting a very gay "Paul Jones," which enabled everybody to make new friends. Supper was then served in the Restaurant below. However, all had managed to satisfy the pangs of hunger by 10 o'clock, when dancing again continued, right until "throwing out time."

The next and last dance of the season takes place at the above address on Saturday, the 2nd April. O.J.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

In connection with the scholastic programme the following lectures were given by the students during last week:—

Miss Mary Kuhn, Zurich: "Belgian and Flemish Painting from the 15th-19th Century." Mr. Paul Stöcklin, Schaffhausen: "Buddhism." Mr. Yves Jéquier, Neuchâtel: "Quick and Well." Miss Claire Dröllinger, Frutigen: "Bern." Miss H. Hodel, Lucerne: "Something about Free Will." Miss A. Leuthold, Brunnen: "The Art of Dressing." Mr. Willi Suter, Zofingen: "How to Prepare a Conference." Mr. Arthur Antenen, Thun: "The Study of the Language of the Hand" (Part II). Miss Emmy Pauli, Gossau/St. Gall: "The Spring is Coming." Miss Marta Siegen-