SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES ON CHARLES JOHN ANDERSSON'S JOURNEY TO THE OKAVANGO RIVER

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Recently in this journal (Wilmsen 2003:360-375), I delineated Charles John Andersson's route to the Okavango River based on entries in his diaries and an overlooked map of the route published by Thomas Baines in 1866. I noted there that, while the place, Okambombo, where Andersson first stood on the banks of the Okavango was correctly plotted on Baines' map, its geographical coordinates were given only approximately. I also noted that Andersson did not bring along his astronomical instruments on his first excursion to the river, and assumed therefore that no coordinates for the place were obtained. However, in the course of my preparation of Andersson's papers for publication, I have since worked through the 116 unnumbered pages of geographical calculations recorded in volume 10 of the papers and found latitude observations for several points along the route, including Ombongo and Okambombo; his calculations for these latter two places are shown in Figure 1.

Andersson left the river on 29 March 1859 and returned to it on 29 April (CJAP-3.3:169); on 4 May the correct latitude, 17°46'08"S, was determined by astronomical observation. About this, Andersson (CJAP-3.3:172) wrote, "[o]btained a latitude. Between Ombongo & this place (Okambombo) I am only out a mile in latitude."[1] The latitude for Ombongo was obtained just before this, on 16 April on his way back to the river (CJAP-3.3:165). On Baines' map this latitude is given as 17°37'53"S, but as can be seen, this is just one of Andersson's interim reckonings before the "True Latd 17°39'38"" is calculated (figure 1). Baines (1866:217) gave approximate coordinates for Okambombo in his text, writing "17°30'S. lat. and longitude about 19°E," but the correct

[1]In the text, Okambombo is in parentheses as shown.

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coordinates (17°46'08"S about 18°55'E) are plotted on the map. Both discrepancies are due to the fact that the published map was redrawn by Royal Geographical Society cartographers, who copied one that Andersson made in Cape Town at Galton's urging (GP-UCL 1866) based on "upwards of three thousand prismatic compass triangulations and astronomical observations of latitudes" (found in volume 10), while Baines copied from the letter Andersson wrote from Okambombo to Dr. Norton Shaw, secretary of the Society.[2]

Although the existence of this letter has long been recognized, it has been known only from a partial copy Andersson made in his diary (CJAP-3.3:158). The original, however, did arrive in London, on 24 January 1860, and is now in the archive of the Society (RGS 1860). It contains significant details not found in the diary copy; among these are two in the heading, where Andersson gave his position as he perceived it: "[t]he Interior of South Western Africa / On the river Okovango / Lat. 17°30' / Long. 19° — approximately / March 26th. 1859." This is the only place where Andersson gave an estimate of his location on the Okavango. Neither in the diary copy nor in his book *The Okavango River* (Andersson 1861) did he give any indication of precise location. Nor did he anywhere mention his astronomical observation of latitude at Okambombo—and hundreds of other places—except as quoted above. Baines thus obtained the coordinates he reported from Andersson's letter on file at the Royal Geographical Society. This map went largely unnoticed, and subsequent authors, relying mainly on limited references to peoples and places found in Andersson's book and that of his biographer (Wallis 1936), put Andersson on the river far from where he actually arrived (Wilmsen 2003:362).

With the latitude of Okambombo now fixed at 17°46'08"S, the entire route of Andersson's journey to the Okavango is securely traced, the final stages of which are shown in figure 2. An important consequence of this is that my hypothesis concerning the people and place Andersson visited "near 40 miles" downstream from Okambombo is confirmed. We can now be certain that the town of Bundja was the place, and the Mbundza, not the Kwangali as previously thought, were the people he visited.

The other thing to note in the heading of Andersson's letter is that at the time of its writing, 26 March 1859, Andersson called the river the Okovango (i.e., Oko not Oka). This seems to be his spelling of how he heard Cubango, the name by which the river was, and is actually, known to natives at the point where he intercepted it, with the prefix "O" added.

[2]The volume numbers are not Andersson's but were assigned by the archivist J.H. Davies when the papers were catalogued while on loan to the Transvaal Archives, Pretoria; Vol. 10 is a record book in which Andersson made entries for many years.

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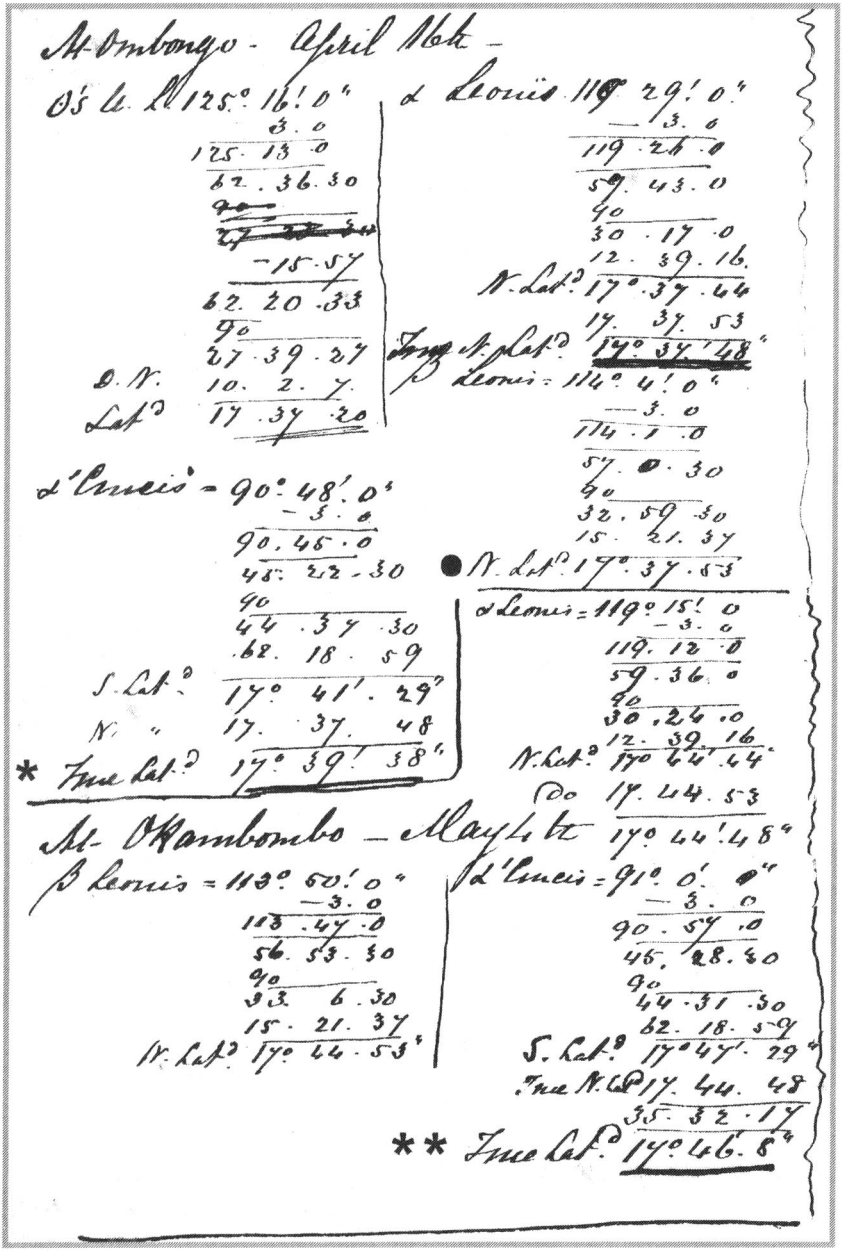


Figure 1. Section of a page in volume 10 of Andersson's papers showing his calculations of latitudes for Ombongo and Okambombo. At the top is written At Ombongo April 16th; N.Lat.17°37'53"S is at center-right (marked with black dot) and on the left just above a dividing line True Latd 17°39'38" is given for this place (marked *). Immediately below this line is written At Okambombo May 4th and True Latd 17°46'08" is given for this place at the bottom-right of the figure (marked **).

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It was not until early September 1859, when the Ondonga chief Shikongo told Andersson that he was "the brother of Chikongo on the river Okavango" (CJAP-3.3:216) that Andersson wrote Okavango, the form in which he introduced the river to the world (cf. Fisch 1987:16-25). This seems to have been simply an error, a typo so to say. He had not written the word in his diary for nearly five months, during which time he was often half-delirious with malaria, sometimes so weak he could "scarcely hold the pen" (CJAP-3.3:187).

On reflection, it seems clear that kuvanja (with prefix 'Mu'), in Mukuru Mukuvanja, the name of the "Great River" recorded by Andersson and Galton at Ondonga in 1851, is also a rendering of Cubango. hence the Mukuvanja they were told about was not another branch of the Cunene, as they thought, but the river flowing eastward that Andersson was to name Okavango.[3] Nevertheless, both men seem to have been inflamed by the thought of a large perennial river to the north that, in his published account, Galton (1853:133) did not name, but wrote only that it ran from east to west and was frequented by Portuguese (mainly Mambari) traders, as well as their Ovambo and Herero counterparts. A clear picture of their dreams is found in letters Galton wrote to his mother on his way home. The first from Walfish Bay (GP-UCL 1851):

> I have thoroughly identified the river that runs to the north of the Ovampo with one that runs out of the West corner of the Lake [Ngami] & which very likely will before long prove a highway to the interior. Andersson will go to the Lake next April. A posse of missionaries will go to the north about the same time.

A second from onboard ship en route to St. Helena (GP-UCL 1852):

> Andersson I have left behind as trader & set him up with my remaining provisions &c on condition that he make a good try straightaway to reach the lake – in this he will have I believe but little difficulty as we have already so fully explored the more difficult parts of the roads there ... & now I am trying to find out where the river [illegible] the sea & if I can arrange affairs so as to get a cruiser to take me there, which I do not think improbable, I will make a fortnight excursion of it & then return home ... I have traced a water communication from a Great Lake if not the Great Lake to the westward & so if I can only find out its mouth a great step will be taken towards opening a road to the interior.

[3]Andersson had begun to wonder if this were the case; on 17th February he wrote "[w]here can the river be that I am in quest of ... can the water possibly run *eastward* instead of westward" (CJAP-3.3:136).

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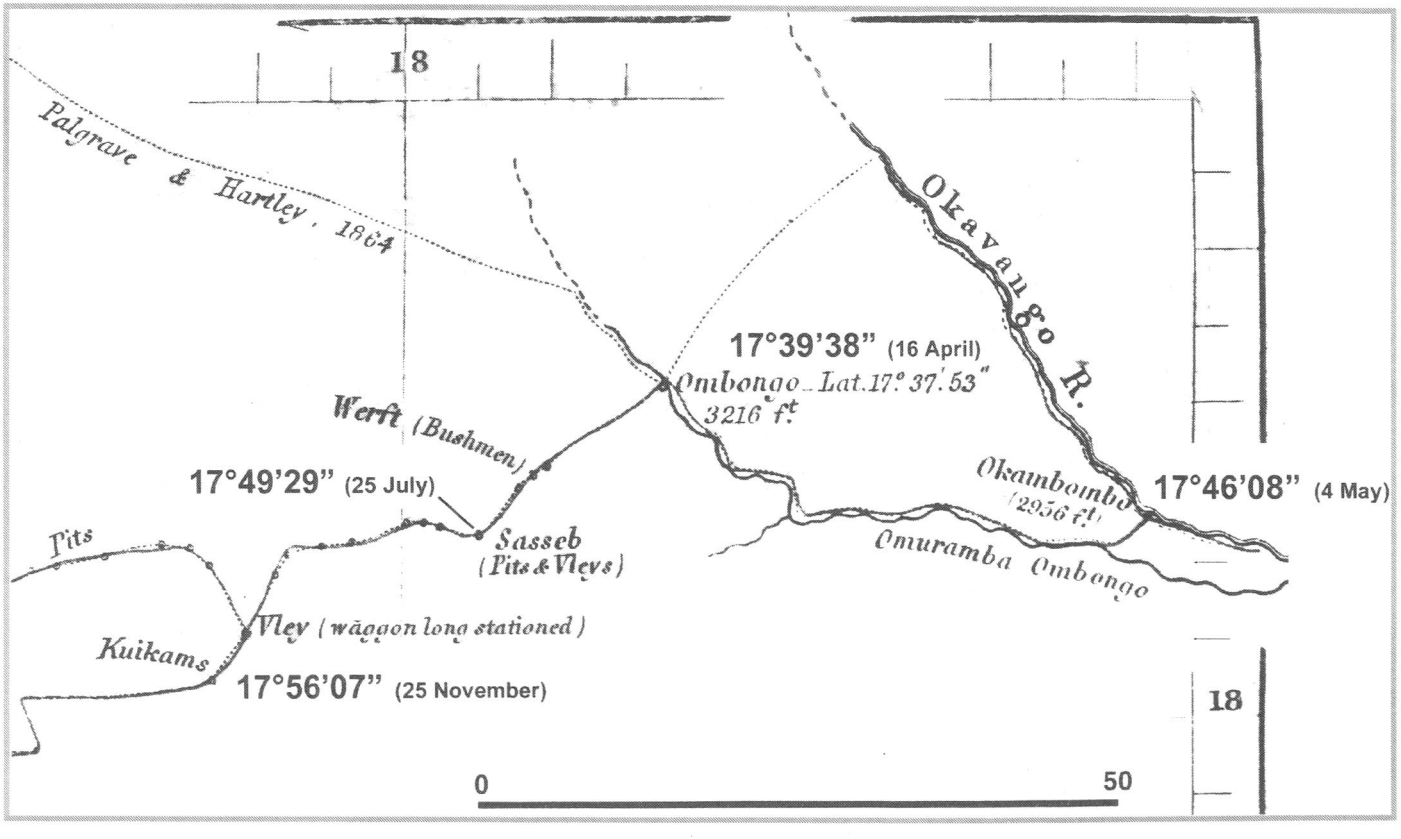


Figure 2. Figure 10 in Wilmsen (2003), the northeast corner of Baines' (1866) map of Andersson's journey to the Okavango, modified for this discussion. Latitudes obtained after the river had been reached and the dates when they were obtained are shown at the points where they were taken.

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The inspiration for these dreams was a map drawn by Carl Hugo Hahn in 1846 or 1847, found in Cape Town by Galton (GP-UCL n.d.). On this map a very large body of water labeled "Dêmboa Sea" is shown roughly in the vicinity of actual Lake Ngami; an unnamed river runs northwestward out of this and joins another, labeled "Cunene River" (figure 3).[4] As Hahn had not traveled far into the interior at that time, and had not been to either Lake Ngami or the Cunene, we must assume that he sited these features from geographical information received from natives. Nevertheless, Galton (GP-UCL 1850) wrote to his brother, Darwin Galton, just before leaving Cape Town:

> In an hour more I shall be off ... There is this large reported lake–Lake Dembôa, only 200 miles from the furthest missionary station. It will be my first object to reach this, & trace the river that flows out of it, and which is said to be a branch of the Cunene, to the sea, & if the river be as large, and the country as fertile and healthy, as it is declared by the natives to be, it will most assuredly rise soon to great importance.

But when Andersson reported that the Okavango flowed to the east, away from the mainstream of commerce, interest in it evaporated. Norton Shaw did not even bother to answer his letter. Andersson complained to Galton when he sent his map from Cape Town, "I heard that my letter sent via Benguela was duly recd but the Society vouchsafed me no answer" (GP-UCL 1866). About that map, indeed, Baines wrote to Andersson that the RGS Secretary "did not think such a Country (Damaraland etc) was worthy of a map." (GP-UCL 1866). Nevertheless, the map was published to the Society's usual high standard, but with the barest of texts by Baines.[5] Andersson died the following year during a trip to the Cunene, which he continued to hope would be the Great River to the west. With him died all further thought of a waterway to the interior.

A final observation is in order. In May 1855 Hahn asked Andersson to copy and send to him a notice which appeared in the Lisbon paper *Diario*

[4]Another entry on the map is of even greater interest: the town of Caconda in Angola is marked at about its present position southeast of Benguela; from it a dashed line labeled "Route from Caconda to Tete" extends eastward. Tete, on the Zambezi not far from its entry into the Indian Ocean, had long been a major trading entrepôt; so here we have further strong evidence for longstanding, long-distance native trading paths. Westbeech (Tabler 1963:49; Wilmsen 1989:88), in 1886, noted the intracontinental span of these networks, remarking that Serpa Pinto and Livingstone merely followed these paths in their celebrated transects of the continent. Again, Hahn received this information hundreds of miles to the south, another example of the extensive geographical knowledge of natives.

[5]Baines's handwritten manuscript is in the RGS archive (RGS n.d.[1866]); at least three-quarters of it has been lined-out by someone else, presumably an editor, and was not published.

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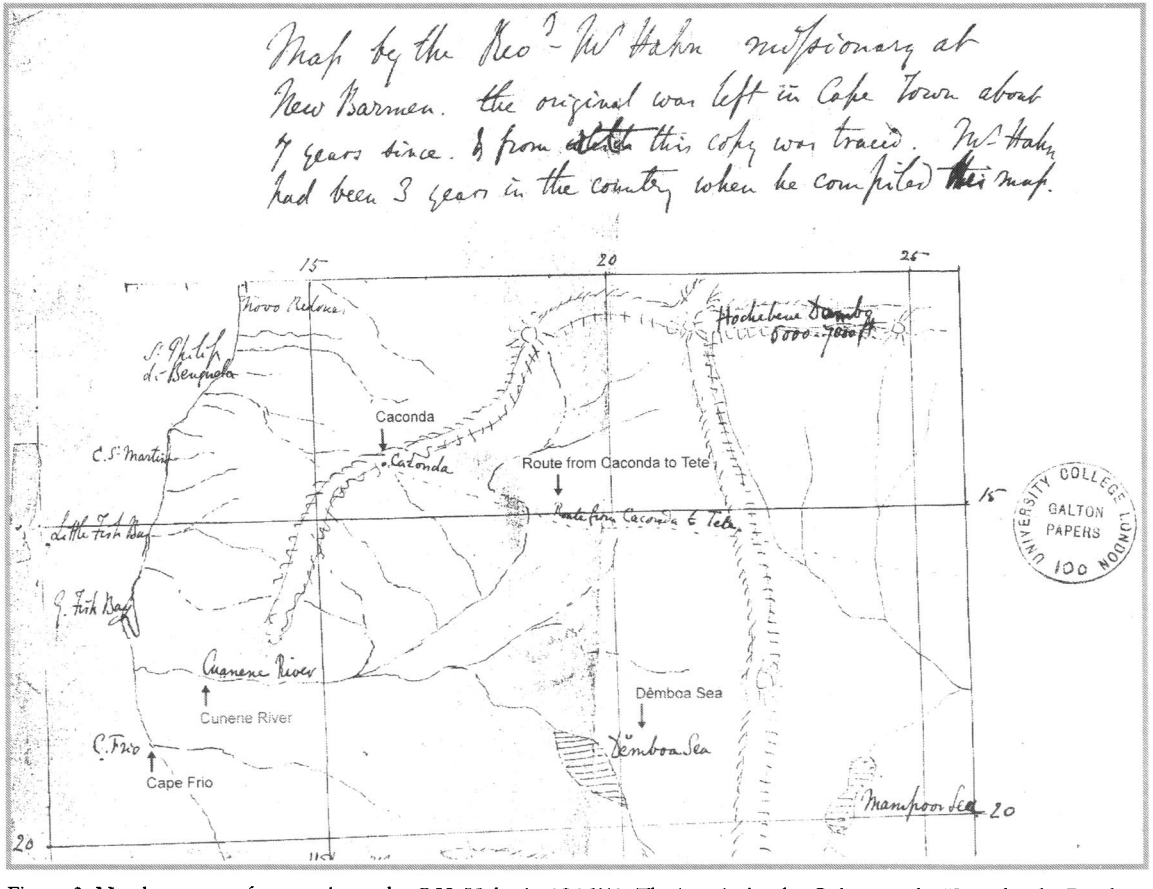


Figure 3. Northern part of a map drawn by C.H. Hahn in 1846/47. The inscription by Galton reads: "Map by the Revd Mr Hahn missionary at New Barman. The original was left in Cape Town about 7 years since & from it this copy was traced. Mr Hahn had been 3 years in the country when he compiled this map."

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do Governo regarding an exploration of the lower reaches of the Cunene made by Portuguese in November of the previous year (CJAP 1855a). Hahn was keenly interested in this because the Rhenish Missionary Society was considering sending him to establish a mission among the Ovambo and at the time the Cunene was thought to be an easy avenue of approach to those people. The account of the Portuguese exploration proved it otherwise, as Hahn summarized to Andersson (CJAP 1855b):

> Very much obliged I am for the copy of the Portuguese accounts. The particulars of it are as follows. The Governor of Mossamedes was anxious to ascertain whether the accounts of the Cunene were true and whether it was navigable . . . He went with a schooner to Gt Fischbay, a most desolate place . . . Along the beach the [*sic*] traveled on foot and reached after two days march the Cunene . . . The mouth of the River is entirely barred by sand . . . Three days they went up and describe the Stream as narrow and full of cataracts.

To Hahn this meant "a considerable alteration in our arrangements . . . [now] . . . We will most likely try to establish ourselves at Cape Frio [see figure 3] and from there go to the Ovambo." But Hahn did not establish a post at Cape Frio from which to reach the Ovambo; instead, he chose an interior route in the company of Frederick Green (Wilmsen 2003). This did not, however, deflate Andersson's hopes of finding a navigable river flowing to the sea, which he sought to the very end of his days.

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