



International Boundary Study

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Benin (*Dahomey*) – Burkina Faso (*Upper Volta*) Boundary

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I. BRIEF

The Dahomey - Upper Volta boundary is approximately 190 miles in length. It is demarcated by the Mekrou and Pendjari rivers for about 85 percent of the distance. Between the rivers, the boundary follows the Chaîne de L'Atacora for about 25 miles.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

French possessions in western Africa prior to 1845 were subordinate to the Governor of Senegal. In 1845 Les Rivières du Sud (Southern Rivers) and all French territories as far south as Gabon were made independent of Senegal and placed under the administration of a naval commander based on the Ile de Goree (adjacent to the site of present-day Dakar). During 1851 Admiral Bouet-Willaumez of Les Rivières du Sud concluded a treaty of friendship and commerce with King Gezo of Dahomey. On February 26, 1859, a French decree again put the Ile de Goree and Les Rivières du Sud under the Governor of Senegal.

In 1863 Porto Novo was established as the first of a number of French protectorates in Dahomey. A decree of February 4, 1879 placed the French settlements along the Bight of Benin under the administration of Gabon. In 1883 the French protectorates along the Bight of Benin were known as the Etablissements du Golfe de Guinée. On August 4, 1886, a decree placed the Etablissements du Golfe de Guinée, along with the Ivory Coast, under the Lieutenant Governor of Les Rivières du Sud. As of December 17, 1891, Les Rivières du Sud was declared independent of Senegal, and on March 10, 1893, the Etablissements du Golfe de Guinée was made a colony independent of Les Rivières du Sud. The new colony was named Benin until the title was changed to Dahomey on March 10, 1894. A decree included Dahomey in French West Africa on October 17, 1899.

Until 1880 the area east of the Faleme river, known as the Haut Fleuve (Upper River), was administered as an integral part of Senegal. On September 6, 1880, the territory of Haut Senegal (Upper Senegal) was created from the Haut Fleuve, and the new entity was placed under a military officer subordinate to the Governor of Senegal. On August 18, 1890, a decree changed the name of Haut Senegal to the Soudan Français (French Sudan), and administratively it came under the general direction of the Governor of Senegal. Two years later a decree gave French Sudan autonomy, directly under the French Government, and in 1893 civil administration replaced military. French West Africa was constituted on June 16, 1895 and French Sudan was included as a member administered by a lieutenant governor. At this time the French Sudanese administrative units of Bakel and part of Bombouk were transferred to Senegal and Faranah to French Guinea.

A decree of October 17, 1899 transferred additional administrative units from French Sudan to adjacent French territories. The following transfers of units were made: Beyla, Dinguiraye, Kankan, Kissidougou, Kouroussa, and Siguiri to French Guinea; Bouna, Kong, and Odienne to Ivory Coast; and Koala (Gourma) and Say (both re-transferred in 1900) to Dahomey. The remainder of French Sudan then was organized into the civil territory of Haut Senegal et Moyen Niger (Upper Senegal and Middle Niger) and initially two and later three (after December 20, 1900) military territories with headquarters at Tombouctou, Bobo Dioulasso, and Zinder. Haut Senegal et Moyen Niger was made a dependency of Senegal administered by the Governor of Senegal through a civil delegate residing at Kayes. Commanders in charge of the military territories were directly responsible to the Governor General of French West Africa on military matters, but on civil matters they dealt with his civil delegate. However, the Governor of Senegal drew up but a single budget for both the civil and military territories. A French decree of March 2, 1901 specified a boundary between the military territories and Dahomey.

On October 1, 1902, a decree ended the procedure of the Governor of Senegal also being the ipso facto Governor General of French West Africa. Haut Senegal et Moyen Niger was renamed Senegambie et Niger (Senegambia and Niger) and placed under a delegate of the Governor General resident at Kayes. The first and second military territories were also responsible to the delegate for civil affairs, but the third military territory with headquarters at Zinder was responsible directly to the Governor General for civil matters. A decree of October 18, 1904 changed the name of Senegambie et Niger to the colony of Haut Senegal and Niger and moved the capital to Bamako.

A decree of September 6, 1909 specified a boundary again between Dahomey and the military territories of the Haut Senegal and Niger to the north. In 1911 the third or Niger military territory was detached from the colony and the first and second military territories ceased to exist.

By decree on March 1, 1919, the colony of Upper Volta was constituted by detaching from Haut Senegal and Niger the following Cercles: Bobo Dioulasso, Dedougou, Fada, Gaoua, Ouahigouya, Ouagadougou, and Say. Haut Senegal et Niger was renamed French Sudan on December 4, 1920. A decree of September 5, 1932 abolished the colony of Upper Volta and divided it among the colonies of Ivory Coast, Niger and French Sudan. The cercles of Bobo Dioulasso, Gaoua, Kaya, the eastern part of Dedougou, Koudougou, Ouayadougou, and Tenkodogo were added to the Ivory Coast. On July 13, 1937, the cercles were grouped into a dependency of the Ivory Coast known as the Haute Cote d'Ivoire under a senior administrator. Headquarters were first at Ouagadougou and later at Bobo Dioulasso. Niger was enlarged by the cercles of Fada and most of Dori on the right bank of the Niger river. French Sudan gained the cercles of Ouahigouya, the western part of Dedougou (Tougan district), and a small part of Dori (including Aribinda).

In 1946 Dahomey was made an overseas territory and a member of the French Union. The Republic of Dahomey was established as an autonomous member of the French

Community on December 4, 1958. Dahomey was proclaimed independent on August 1, 1960.

On September 4, 1947, Upper Volta was reconstituted and became an overseas territory within the French Union. The territory and boundaries of the new state were the same as those of the colony of Upper Volta when abolished on September 5, 1932. It became a member of the French Community as the Volta Republic on December 11, 1958. The name of the Volta Republic was changed to the Republic of Upper Volta on March 2, 1959, and the state was declared independent on August 5, 1960.

III. ALIGNMENT

The alignment of the Dahomey - Upper Volta boundary was determined most recently by a French statute of October 27, 1938,¹ which gave the northern limit of Dahomey through a description of the then constituted cercles of Kandi and Natitingou, both of which are adjacent to the present area of Upper Volta. With the reconstitution of Upper Volta as a separate entity, a French law of September 4, 1947 re-established the boundary in accordance with the limits of the cercles given in the 1938 statute.

Parts of the northern limits of both the Kandi and Natitingou cercles must be included to complete the Dahomey - Upper Volta boundary. The Kandi cercle was delimited in the north as follows:

On the northwest, by the boundary between Dahomey and the colony of Niger,² from the Niger River to the junction of the Pendjari with the south Marigot [branch channel] at Kompongou,...³

The Natitingou cercle to the west of the Kandi cercle was delimited as follows:

"On the north, along the Pendjari to marker 109 on the Togo - Dahomey boundary,..."

Thus the Dahomey - Upper Volta boundary has the following alignment in accordance with French statutes and French maps⁴. From the tripoint with Niger at about 11° 54' 15" N. and about 2° 25' 10" E., the boundary follows the Mekrou⁵ upstream to about 11°40' 50" N. and about 2° 18' 45" E. It then extends southeastward along the drainage

¹ Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Occidentale Française, 1938, p. 1956.

² At this time Dahomey had a common boundary with the colony of Niger from Nigeria to Togo because the former Upper Voltan cercle of Fada had been added to Niger in 1932.

³ Prior French statutes had determined the Dahomey - Upper Volta boundary as extending from a point on the Mekrou upstream to the Chaîne de l'Atacora, following southeastward along the mountains, and thence to the Pendjari.

⁴ West Africa: scale 1:200,000; published by Institut Geographique National, Paris and Dakar; 1953 - 65; sheets NC-31-XXI (Kandi), NC-31-XX (Arli), and NC-21-XIX (Pama).

⁵ Available information does not indicate the exact location of the boundary relative to the Mekrou and Pendjari, but it is assumed that it follows either the median line or thalweg.

divide of the Chaine de L'Atacora to about 11° 25' 30" N. and about 2° 00' 15" E. From this point the boundary turns westward and utilizes a small stream to the Pendjari, follows the Pendjari upstream to about 11° 01' 25" N. and about 0° 56' 50" E., and then passes southeastward along a straight line to the Togo tripoint at 11° N. and about 0° 55' E.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Strategic and Functional Research, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

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