



International Boundary Study

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Cameroon – Gabon Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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CAMEROON – GABON BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Cameroon–Gabon boundary is about 185 miles in length. It follows the thalwegs or median lines of the Kye, Ntem, Kom, and Ayina rivers for almost 90 percent of the distance. The remainder of the boundary consists of a straight-line segment of slightly more than a mile eastward from the Equatorial Guinea tripoint to the Kye, and a line of approximately 19 miles through an area subject to inundation between the Kom and Ayina.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Portuguese naval captains followed by traders reached the coast of Gabon during the 15th century. In the 16th century, French, Dutch, and British merchants followed the lead of the Portuguese in establishing trade relations with Gabon, and missionaries were active along the coast.

Beginning in 1839 French authority was gradually extended over most of the coastal area by concluding treaties with local rulers who ceded their kingdoms to France in return for protection. Prior to 1845 French possessions in western Africa were subordinate to the Governor of Senegal. Les Rivières du Sud (Southern Rivers) was organized in 1845, which consisted of all French settlements south of Senegal to, and for a short time including, Gabon under the admiral in command of the Naval Station on the Ile de Goree. Libreville was founded in 1849, and shortly thereafter a number of expeditions penetrated into the interior of Gabon utilizing the courses of such streams as the Como, Ogooue, and Nyanga.

In a series of expeditions between 1875 and 1882, the explorer, Pierre Savagnon de Brazza, explored the territory of the upper Ogooue and founded Franceville. In 1881 the administration of Gabon was entrusted to a senior naval officer with the title of "Commandant supérieur des établissements françaises du Golfe de Guinée." De Brazza was appointed "Commissaire de la République Française dans l'Ouest Afrique" in 1883, and at the same time the French "établissements" were divided into two entities: (1) Gabon administered by its own commandant and having Cotonou and Porto Novo as dependencies, and (2) Grand Bassam and Assinie on the Ivory Coast.

On April 27, 1886 a French decree afforded Gabon a lieutenant governor under the general authority of De Brazza as commissioner. Then a decree of June 29th of the same year appointed De Brazza the "Commissaire Général du Gouvernement," and it also gave him authority over the colonies of French Congo and Gabon, each with their separate government organization. A decree of December 11, 1888, united French Congo and Gabon into a single administrative entity which lasted until 1903, meanwhile, a decree of April 30, 1891, gave the whole the title of French Congo.

On December 29, 1903, a decree placed the French possessions under the authority of a commissaire general. The French possessions consisted of the colonies of Gabon and Middle Congo (Moyen Congo) the territory of Ubangi–Shari, and the military territory of Chad. Two years later the territory of Ubangi–Shari and the military territory of Chad were merged into a single territory. The colony of Ubangi–Shari–Chad was formed in 1906 with Chad under a regional commander at Fort-Lamy subordinate to Ubangi–Shari. The commissioner general of French Congo was raised to the status of a governor generalship in 1908; and by a decree of January 15, 1910, the name of French Equatorial Africa was given to a federation of the three colonies (Gabon, Middle Congo, and Ubangi–Shari–Chad), each of which had its own lieutenant governor. In 1914 Chad was detached from the colony of Ubangi–Shari and made a separate territory; full colonial status was conferred on Chad in 1920.

In the meantime Germany proclaimed a protectorate over Cameroon (Kamerun) in July 1884. On December 24th of the following year, a Franco–German protocol established a boundary between their respective territories inland from the Bight of Biafra along the Campo river to the 10th meridian, and thence from the point of intersection, the parallel of latitude¹ to the 15th meridian.

A Franco–German convention of April 18, 1908, redelimited the boundary between Cameroon and the French territories from Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea) to Lake Chad. The 1908 line affords the alignment of the present Cameroon–Congo (Brazzaville) boundary.

Immediately prior to World War I, a Franco–German convention of November 4, 1911, again redelimited the boundary between French Equatorial Africa and Cameroon except for the sector north of the confluence of the Logone and Chari. The Cameroon boundary with Gabon was located considerably south of the present line. In the settlement following World War I, French territory ceded to Germany by the 1911 convention was restored to French Equatorial Africa.

The League of Nations on July 22, 1922, conferred Cameroonian mandates on France and the United Kingdom. The French mandate consisted of the major part of the former German possession with the remainder adjacent to Nigeria under British mandate administered as two entities known as the Northern Cameroons and Southern Cameroons.

The Cameroon mandates were made trusteeships by the United Nations on December 14, 1946. The following year France established the autonomous State of Cameroun. After termination of the U.N. trusteeship, the State of Cameroun was proclaimed independent on January 1, 1960, and it became the Republic of Cameroun on the following March 4th. The Southern Cameroons voted in a plebiscite on February 11, 1961, for union with the

¹ A Franco–German boundary commission of 1900–1903 adopted the latitude of 2°10'20" N. for this parallel which was commonly referred to as the Campo parallel.

Republic of Cameroun which was accomplished the following October 1st. The newly unified state was named the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Following World War II, Gabon became an overseas territory in the French Union. In 1958 Gabon elected to join the French Community as an autonomous republic. After agreements of transfer of power and cooperation were signed in Paris on July 12, 1960, the Gabon Republic proclaimed its independence on August 17, 1960.

III. ALIGNMENT

The alignment of the Cameroon–Gabon boundary is determined by the Franco–German convention of April 9, 1908. It is delimited eastward from the Equatorial Guinea (Rio Muni) tripoint at 2°10'20" N. and 11°20'E.² to the Congo (Brazzaville) tripoint at the intersection of the Ayina and the parallel of 2°10'20" N.

Article I (a). The boundary between the French Congo [Gabon] and the Cameroons, beginning with Spanish Guinea (El Muni) [Equatorial Guinea tripoint] (meridian 9° east Paris, 11°20' Greenwich), follows:³

The Kye (Kje) River, from its confluence with the Mvezeu (Mwese) [Mvezeu] River to its confluence with the Ntem (Campo) River.

The Ntem River, from its confluence with the Kye River to its confluence with the Kom River.

The Kom River, from its confluence with the Ntem River to the confluence with the left affluent of the Kom nearest to the Aina (Ayem, Jvindo) [Ayina] basin, cutting across parallel 2°15' N. or situated in its vicinity.

The course of that affluent, from its confluence with the Kom River to its intersection with parallel 2°15' N.⁴

Parallel 2°15' N. from its intersection with the above-mentioned affluent of the Kom River to its intersection with the left affluent of the Aina River nearest to the Kom basin, cutting across parallel 2°15' N. or situated in its vicinity.

² The meridian of 11°20' E. forming the eastern boundary of Equatorial Guinea with Gabon was established by a Franco–Spanish convention of June 27, 1900.

³ Although considered traditionally to be a straight line segment, the Franco–German convention of April 19, 1908, did not specify a boundary between the Equatorial Guinea tripoint and the confluence of the Kye and Mvezeu.

⁴ With a possible exception in the vicinity of the meridian of 12°15'E., the Kom is situated to the north of the parallel of 2°15' N. Eastward from the Kom to the Ayina, the boundary usually is shown as a line dissecting a large area subject to inundation.

The course of that Affluent, from parallel 2°15' N. to its confluence with the Aina River.

The course of the Aina River to its eastern intersection with parallel 2°10'20" N. [Congo (Brazzaville) tripoint], near Marker No. 13.⁵

APPENDIX

I. DOCUMENTS

1. Protocol relating to the German and French Possessions on the West African Coast. Signed at Berlin, December 24, 1885 [Ratifications exchanged at Berlin, July 28, 1886]. Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, 3 vols. 3rd Edition (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909). (Vol. 2, p. 653–4).
2. Protocol between the French and German Delegates for the Settlement of the Questions pending between the two countries in the Region comprised between the colonies of the Cameroons and French Congo; and to fix the Line of Demarcation of their Respective spheres of Influence in the Region of Lake Tchad. Berlin, February 4, 1894. *Ibid*, Vol. 2, pp. 657–60 (French)
3. Convention between the French Republic and Germany for the Delimitation of the Colony of the French Congo and the Colony of Kamerun and the French and German Spheres of Influence in the Lake Chad Region. Signed at Berlin on March 15, 1894 [Ratifications exchanged at Paris on August 10, 1894]. *British and Foreign State Papers (BFSP)*, Vol. 86 (1893–4) pp. 974–8 (French).
4. Convention between France and Spain for the Delimitation of the French and Spanish Possessions on the Sahara Coast and the Gulf of Guinea Coast. Signed at Paris, June 27, 1900 [Ratifications exchanged at Paris on March 22, 1901]. *BFSP*, Vol. 92 (1899–1900) pp. 1014–7.
5. Convention between France and Germany confirming the Protocol and its Annex of April 9, 1908, defining the Boundary between the Colonies of the French Congo and the Cameroons. Signed at Berlin, April 18, 1908 [Ratifications exchanged at Berlin, July 28, 1908]. *BFSP*, Vol. 101 (1907–8), pp. 1003–11 (French).
6. Cottes, Capitaine A., *La Mission Cottes au Sud–Cameroun (1905–1908)*; Ernest LeRoux, Editeur; Paris, 1911; pp. 10, 11, and 106.

⁵ Article I (a) of the 1908 convention also states that islands in the Kye, Ntem, and Kom shall belong to Germany and islands in the Ayina to France.

7. Convention between France and Germany relating to their Possessions in Equatorial Africa. Signed at Berlin, November 4, 1911 [Ratifications exchanged at Paris, March 12, 1912]. BFSP, Vol. 104 (1911), pp. 956–64 (French).

II. MAPS

1. Institute Geographique National – Paris (Centre de Yaounde): scale 1:200,000; 1958-67; sheets NA-32, XVIII (Ebolowa), NA-33-XIII (Djoum), and NA-33-XIV (Mintom).

2. Institut Geographique National – Paris (Centre de Yaounde): scale 1:500,000; 1963-9; sheets NA-32-N.E. (Yaounde) and NA-33-N.O. (Abong Mbang).

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