



International Boundary Study

No. 117– October 29, 1971

South Africa – Zimbabwe (*Southern Rhodesia*) Boundary

(Country Codes: SF-ZI)

**The Geographer
Office of the Geographer
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

No. 117 - October 29, 1971

SOUTH AFRICA – ZIMBABWE (SOUTHERN RHODESIA) BOUNDARY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Boundary Brief.....	2
II. Historical Background.....	2
III. Alignment	3

APPENDIX

Documents.....	4
----------------	---

SOUTH AFRICA – ZIMBABWE (SOUTHERN RHODESIA) BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

Approximately 140 miles in length, the South Africa–Southern Rhodesia boundary follows the median line of the Limpopo river for the entire distance. The boundary extends between the confluences of the Limpopo with the Shasi at the Botswana tripoint and with the Luvuvhurivier at the Mozambique tripoint. Utilized for both road and railroad traffic at Beitbridge, a single bridge spans the Limpopo river boundary.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Primarily because of the work of Prince Henry the Navigator, Portuguese mariners continued to explore southward along the West African coast until in 1488 Bartholomew Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Ten years later Vasco da Gama reached India by utilizing the Cape route, and by the latter part of the 16th century Dutch and British vessels also had started to trade with Asia via the Cape route. Intended as a way station for the Dutch East India Company, the first settlement on the Cape was made at the site of Cape Town in 1652 by the Dutch under the command of Jan van Riebeeck. In subsequent decades French Huguenots, Germans, and additional Dutch settled in the Cape area, forming the basic Afrikaner element of the present population of South Africa.

Cape Province was taken from the Dutch by British troops in 1795, returned to the Batavian Republic in 1802, captured by the British in 1806, and ceded to the United Kingdom in 1814. British immigration followed and sizeable settlements were made at the sites of Port Elizabeth in 1820 and at Durban in 1824. Beginning in 1836, to escape British political rule, Afrikaner farmers made a number of northern migrations in a movement which became known as the Great Trek. The voortrekkers (pioneers) settled in the present provinces of the Orange Free State, Transvaal, and western Natal.

Natal was annexed by the British in 1843, was made a part of the Cape of Good Hope Colony the following year, and became a separate colony in 1856. Meanwhile, the independence of the Transvaal Boers was recognized by the United Kingdom in a convention signed at Sand River in 1852. The Transvaal territory became known as the South African Republic in 1858. Although the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope declared British sovereignty over the territories to the north of the Orange river in 1848, a separate government was established under the name of the Orange River Territory in 1851. In a convention concluded between the United Kingdom and the Orange River Territory during 1854, the latter entity was recognized as an independent Boer republic with its name changed to the Orange Free State.

In disagreement with the internal administration of the South Africa Republic relative to the convention of 1852, the United Kingdom annexed the republic in 1877. Subject to British suzerainty, self-government was restored by the Pretoria convention of 1881, but the name

of the entity was changed to the Transvaal State. The London Convention of 1884 again authorized the use of the name of the South African Republic.

A great influx of uitlanders, or foreigners, including many British, and large investments of overseas capital to exploit the recently discovered gold deposits of the Witwatersand alarmed the Transvaal Boers, who thought their political control was threatened, and led directly to the South African War or

Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Linked by a defensive alliance, the Orange Free State came to the assistance of the South African Republic in the war. In 1900 the British annexed the Orange Free State as the Orange River Colony and the South African Republic as the Transvaal Colony, but internal self-government was extended to the two colonies in 1907.

A national convention with representatives from all four colonies met at Durban in 1908 and drafted a constitution for a new state, which then was endorsed by the separate colonies and enacted by the British Parliament in 1909. On May 31, 1910, the Union of South Africa came into existence as a dominion of the British Empire. The Union consisted of the four provinces of the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Orange Free State, and Transvaal. The constitution also provided for the future accession of Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, Basutoland, and Swaziland to the Union of South Africa. In 1931 the Union achieved the status of a sovereign state under the Statute of Westminster. Following a nationwide referendum, South Africa became a republic on May 31, 1961, and later withdrew its application for continued membership in the Commonwealth.

Except for a limited number of explorers, most of the penetration of the present-day territory of Southern Rhodesia by Europeans occurred after the mid-19th century. In 1888 Cecil Rhodes, a financial power in the diamond industry of South Africa and later Prime Minister of the Cape of Good Hope Colony, obtained a mining concession from a local chief in the territory. During the same year, the entire tract later to become Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia was proclaimed a British sphere of influence. In 1889 Rhodes was granted a royal charter for the British South Africa Company which was to operate in a somewhat vaguely defined area south of the Zambezi.

In 1891 the administration of the British South Africa Company was extended north of the Zambezi but excluded Nyasaland (Malawi). On October 20, 1898, an Order in Council was passed which delimited the entity of Southern Rhodesia.

After the charter of the British South Africa Company was abrogated in 1923, Southern Rhodesia was given the choice of being incorporated into the Union of South Africa or of becoming a separate political entity within the British Empire. Southern Rhodesia rejected incorporation into the Union and was formally annexed by the United Kingdom as a self-governing colony. The administration of Northern Rhodesia was transferred to the British Colonial Office as a protectorate in 1924.

Between August 1, 1953, and December 31, 1963, Southern Rhodesia, along with Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, was a member of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. On November 11, 1965, Southern Rhodesia made a unilateral declaration of independence from the United Kingdom, which the British Government considered to have no legal validity.

III. ALIGNMENT

The Limpopo river as the present-day South Africa–Southern Rhodesia boundary was established by the Pretoria convention concluded between the United Kingdom and the Transvaal on August 3, 1881. Westward from the confluence of the Luvuvhurivier (Pafuri) and Limpopo at the Mozambique tripoint, the convention stated that the latter river formed the boundary between Transvaal and Matabeleland, which included the present state of Southern Rhodesia. The same Limpopo boundary was restated in the London convention on February 27, 1884, between the British High Commissioner in South Africa and Governor of the Cape of Good Hope and delegates from Transvaal.

In effect, the Southern Rhodesia Order in Council of October 20, 1898, established the Botswana (Bechuanaland) tripoint at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashi by delimiting its boundary with the South African Republic (Transvaal) "to a point opposite the mouth of the River Shashi."

In an exchange of notes of November 11, 1957, and March 11, 1958, between the British High Commissioner for the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and the Secretary for External Affairs of the Union of South Africa, it was agreed that their common boundary was the median line of the Limpopo.¹

¹ The Anglo–Portuguese agreement of October 29, 1950, relative to the Mozambique–Southern Rhodesia boundary places the South Africa tripoint at the place where the prolongation of the straight line from beacon No. 2 to beacon No. 1 strikes the thalweg of the Limpopo. The Anglo-Portuguese exchange of notes of October 6, 1927, relative to the Mozambique–South Africa boundary indicates the Southern Rhodesia tripoint is located at the junction of the thalwegs of the Luvuvhurivier (Pafuri) and Limpopo.

APPENDIX

Documents

1. Notes on the Transvaal. 1852–1908. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 Vols. 3d Edition (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909). Vol. 1, pp. 222–45.
2. Notes on Rhodesia, being the territory administered by the British South Africa Company. 1889–1908. Ibid, Vol. 1, pp. 265–71.
3. Convention between Her Majesty's Royal commissioners and the Representatives of the Transvaal Burghers, for the Settlement of the Transvaal Territory. Signed at Pretoria, August 3, 1881. British and Foreign State Papers (BFSP), Vol. 72 (1880–1), pp. 900–911.
4. Convention between Great Britain and the South African Republic, in substitution of the Convention of the 3rd August, 1881, for the Settlement of the Transvaal Territory. Signed at London, February 27, 1884. BFSP, Vol. 75 (1883–4), pp. 5–13.

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

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Geographer, Room 8744, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520 (Telephone: 63-22021 or 63-22022).