



# **International Boundary Study**

**No. 122 – May 12, 1972**

## **Botswana – South Africa Boundary**

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

**INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

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

**APPENDIX**

Documents.....	4
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## **BOTSWANA – SOUTH AFRICA BOUNDARY**

### **I. BOUNDARY BRIEF**

The Botswana–South Africa boundary is approximately 1,105 miles long and follows rivers for more than 90 percent of its length. It extends between the Southern Rhodesia tripoint at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashi and the South-West Africa tripoint at the intersection of the Nossob and the 20th meridian east. The principal rivers forming the boundary are the Limpopo, Molopo, and Nossob.

### **II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Cape of Good Hope Province in present-day South Africa was ceded by the Dutch to the United Kingdom in 1814. Beginning in 1836, to escape British political rule, Afrikaner farmers (Boers) made a number of northern migrations in a movement which became known as the Great Trek. The independence of the Transvaal Boers was recognized by the United Kingdom in a convention signed at Sand River in 1852, and the Transvaal territory became known as the South African Republic in 1858.

In disagreement with the internal administration of the South African 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. Also, the Pretoria convention established the boundary of the Transvaal State adjacent to present-day Botswana. The London convention of 1884 again authorized the use of the name of South African Republic and restated the boundary of the convention of 1881.

On May 3, 1884, and May 22, 1884, treaties were completed between representatives of the British Government and the Chiefs of the Batlapings and the Barolongs, respectively, by which power and jurisdiction in the Chiefs' lands were conferred on the United Kingdom. An Order in Council was issued providing for the exercise of British jurisdiction over Bechuanaland and the Kalahari on January 27, 1885. This order also enumerated the powers conferred on the United Kingdom by the treaties of the 3rd and 22nd of May, 1885.

On September 30, 1885, a proclamation was issued by the High Commissioner for South Africa constituting British Bechuanaland a Crown Colony as follows:

...the territory bounded on the east by the South African Republic, on the south by the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, on the west by the Molopo River to its junction with the Ramathlabana Spruit, and thence by the said Spruit to the frontier of the South African Republic, to be British territory under the name of British Bechuanaland.<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> Included in the area are the present South African towns of Kuruman, Mafeking, and Vryburg.

The proclamation of September 30, 1885, also declared the establishment of a British protectorate over the territory known as Bechuanaland and the Kalahari as follows:

...extending over the parts of South Africa situate west of the boundary of the South African Republic, north of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, east of the 20° meridian of east longitude, and south of the 22nd parallel of south latitude, and not within the jurisdiction of any civilized power.

The Governor of Cape Colony also became the Governor of British Bechuanaland as of July 1, 1891. By Order in Council of October 3, 1895, the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope was given authority to annex British Bechuanaland, and the territory was incorporated in Cape Colony on November 16, 1895.

During the Anglo–Boer War of 1899–1902, the United Kingdom annexed the South African Republic as the Transvaal Colony, but in 1907 internal self-government was extended to the colony. On May 31, 1910, the Union of South Africa was made a British dominion consisting of the provinces of Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Orange Free State, and Transvaal. In 1931 the Union achieved the status of a sovereign state under the Statute of Westminster, and following a nationwide referendum, South Africa became a republic on May 31, 1961.

The Bechuanaland Protectorate was administered as a High Commission Territory from 1891 until the dissolution of the Commission on August 1, 1964. The Protectorate became self-governing on March 1, 1965, and independent as the Republic of Botswana on September 30, 1966.

### **III. ALIGNMENT**

Adjacent to the Transvaal Province on the South African side, the eastern sector of the Botswana–South Africa boundary between the Southern Rhodesia tripoint and the Ratmatlhabama was established initially by the Pretoria convention of August 3, 1881, and was restated in the London convention of February 27, 1884, as follows:

...thence up the course of the Limpopo River [from the Southern Rhodesia tripoint]<sup>[2]</sup> to the point where the Marique [Marico] River falls into it. Thence up the course of the Marique River to 'Derde Poort', where it passes through a low range of hills, called Sikwane, a beacon (No. 10) being erected on the spur of said range near to, and westward of, the banks of the river; thence in a straight line, through this beacon to a beacon (No. 9), erected on the top of the range, about 1,700 yards distant from beacon No. 10; thence in a straight line to a beacon (No. 8) erected on the highest

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<sup>[2]</sup> The Southern Rhodesia Order in Council of October 20, 1898, stated that Southern Rhodesia was bounded "by the South African Republic (Transvaal) to a point opposite the mouth of the River Shashi."

point on an isolated hill, called Dikgagong [Dikgogone], or 'Wildebeest Kop' [Wildebeeskop], situated south-eastward of, and about 3-1/3 miles distant from a high hill, called Moripe [Modipe]; thence, in a straight line, to a beacon (No. 7) erected on the summit of an isolated hill or 'koppie' forming the eastern extremity of the range of hills called Moshweu, situated to the northward of, and about two miles distant from, a large isolated hill, called Chukudu-Chockwa [Tshukudutshojwe]; thence, in a straight line, to a beacon (No. 6) erected on the summit of a hill forming part of the same range, Moshweu; thence, in a straight line, to a beacon (No. 5) erected on the summit of a pointed hill in the same range; thence, in a straight line, to a beacon (No. 4) erected on the summit of the western extremity of the same range; thence, in a straight line, to a beacon (No. 3) erected on the summit of the northern extremity of a low, bushy hill, or 'koppie', near to and eastward of the Notwane [Notwani] River; thence, in a straight line, to the junction of the stream called Metsi-Mashwane [Metsemashwane] with the Notwane River (No. 2); thence, up the course of the Notwane River to Sengoma, being the Poort where the river passes through the Dwarsberg range; thence, as described in the award given by Lieutenant-Governor Keate, dated October 17, 1871, by Pitlanganyane (narrow place), Deboaganka or Schaapkuil, Sibatoul [Sebataole] (bare place), Maclase [Matlhase], to Ramatlabama [Ramatlabama], a pool on a spruit north of the Molopo River....

Adjacent to the Cape of Good Hope Province on the South African side, the western sector of the boundary between the South-West Africa tripoint and the Ratmatlabama was established by a British Order in Council of October 3, 1895, as follows:

...to the point where that meridian [20th]<sup>[3]</sup> intersects the Nosop [Nossob] or Oup River, and on the north by that river to its junction with the Molopo River, thence by that river to its junction with the Ramathlabana [Ramatlabama] Spruit, and thence by that river to the frontier of the South African Republic.

### **Documents**

1. Notes on the Cape of Good Hope. 1652–1908. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 vols., 3d Edition (London; Harrison and Sons, 1909). Vol. 1, pp. 163–79.
2. Notes on the Transvaal. 1852–1908. Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 222–49.

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<sup>[3]</sup> An agreement between Germany and the United Kingdom on July 1, 1890, stated that the eastern limit of the German sphere of the influence in South-West Africa was the 20th meridian between the Orange river and the 22nd parallel.

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