



International Boundary Study

No. 147 – November 27, 1974

Malawi – Zambia Boundary

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MALAWI – ZAMBIA BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Malawi–Zambia boundary is approximately 520 miles long. Except for short segments, it follows drainage divides southward from the Tanzania tripoint on Nankungulu to the Mozambique tripoint at the 14th parallel south. To the east of the boundary, the rivers flow into Lake Nyasa, and to the west they are tributaries of the Zambezi.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1888 the territory which was later known as Northern Rhodesia was proclaimed to be in the British sphere of influence. The following year a British protectorate was declared to the east, over the Makololo, Yao, and Machinga lands of the Lake Nyasa area. The operations of the British South Africa Company were extended north of the Zambezi by a Foreign Office paper of February 13, 1891, from which Nyasaland was excluded specifically by a definite western limit. On May 14, 1891, a second Foreign Office paper declared a British protectorate over the Nyasaland Districts and again delimited similarly the western limit of the entity, which is the present-day Malawi–Zambia boundary. Nyasaland was renamed the British Central African Protectorate in 1893.

An Order in Council of July 6, 1907, changed the name of the Central African Protectorate to the Nyasaland Protectorate. West of Nyasaland, the territory under the administration of the British South Africa Company was organized as Northern Rhodesia in 1911. The administration of Northern Rhodesia was transferred to the British Colonial Office in 1924.

Between August 1, 1953, and December 31, 1963, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, along with Southern Rhodesia, were members of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. On July 6, 1964, Nyasaland became independent and adopted the name of Malawi for the state. Northern Rhodesia achieved independence as the Republic of Zambia on October 24, 1964.

III. ALIGNMENT

The present-day boundary between Malawi and Zambia was delimited in a British Foreign Office notification of May 14, 1891, titled British Protectorate over Nyasaland Districts. The notification defined the territory of the protectorate and delimited the boundary between Nyasaland and the entity later to be known as Northern Rhodesia as follows:

The British Protectorate of the Nyasaland Districts comprises the territories bounded on the east and south by the Portuguese Dominions; and to the west by a frontier which, starting on the south by Portuguese Dominions; and to the west by a frontier which, starting on the south from the point where the boundary of the

Portuguese Dominions is intersected by the boundary of the Conventional Free Trade Zone defined in the 1st Article of the Berlin Act,¹ follows that line northwards to the point where it meets the line of the geographical Congo Basin, defined in the same Article,² and thence follows the latter line to the point where it touches the boundary between the British and German spheres, defined in the 2nd paragraph of the 1st Article of the Agreement of the 1st July, 1890.

A boundary commission has never surveyed the entire length of the Malawi–Zambia boundary. In a delimitation of the North Concession in 1927, the boundary was surveyed for 130 miles,³ and the alignment apparently coincides with the Zambian interpretation. However, the alignment of the survey has never been ratified, and the de facto line is shown as the drainage divide on maps. At the extreme northern end of the boundary, the Tanganyika Estate Survey of 1934–5 erected several pillars along the line.⁴

The Malawi–Tanzania–Zambia tripoint is located on Nankungulu hill. In delimiting the boundary between Lake Nyasa and Lake Tanganyika, an Anglo–German protocol of November 11, 1898, agreed that Nankungulu was located on the watershed of the Congo basin in accordance with the terms of the agreement of July 1, 1890. Thus the western limit of Nyasaland, defined in the British notification of May 14, 1891, as meeting the line of the geographical Congo basin, terminated at Nankungulu. In the demarcation of the Anglo–German boundary from the Katenda river to Lake Tanganyika, an agreement of February 23, 1901, stated that Nankungulu was marked by pillar No. 2. A number of maps now show the tripoint marked by pillar No. 588 of a more recent demarcation.

The tripoint with Mozambique is located on the Lake Nyasa–Zambezi drainage divide where it is intersected by the 14th parallel south at 33°14'22" east. Signed on June 11, 1891, a treaty between the United Kingdom and Portugal terminated the northward extension of the boundary between their respective possessions along the Lake Nyasa–Zambezi drainage divide at the 14th parallel. The boundary then continued southwestward to the point where the 15th parallel met the Luangwa river. In 1904 an Anglo–Portuguese commission demarcated the sector from the Luangwa to the 14th parallel. The intersection of the Lake Nyasa–Zambezi drainage divide with the 14th parallel was marked by pillar No. 38, which is the site of the present-day Malawi–Mozambique–Zambia tripoint. The 1904 demarcation was approved by an Anglo–Portuguese agreement of October 21–November 20, 1911.

¹ Paragraph 3, Article 1, of the Berlin Act of 1885 defined the boundary of the Conventional Free Trade Zone in this area as following "the watershed between the affluents of Lakes Nyassa and those of the Zambesi, till at last it reaches the watershed between the waters of the Zambesi and the Congo."

² Paragraph 1 of the same article defined the Congo Basin adjacent to Nyasaland as "by the eastern watershed line of the affluents of Lake Tanganyika on the east; and by the watersheds of the Zambesi and the Loge on the south."

³ Annual Report of Colonial Survey, 1928, page 17.

⁴ Tanganyika Estate Survey of 1934–35, Plan GP 202A.

DOCUMENTATION

1. General Act of the Conference of Berlin, relative to the Development of Trade and Civilization in Africa; the free Navigation of the Rivers Congo, Niger, &c; the Suppression of the Slave Trade by Sea and Land; the occupation of Territory on the African Coasts; &c. Signed at Berlin, February 26, 1885. Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, 3 vols., 3rd edition (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909). Vol. 2, pp. 468–86.
2. Agreement between the British and German Governments, respecting Africa and Heligoland. Berlin, July 1, 1890. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 899–906.
3. Conditions on extending the Field of the Operations of the British South Africa Company to the North of the Zambezi. February 13, 1891. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 277–9.
4. British Protectorate over Nyasaland Districts. Foreign Office, May 14, 1891. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 286.
5. Treaty between Her Britannic Majesty and His Majesty the King of Portugal, defining their respective Spheres of Influence in Africa. Lisbon, June 11, 1891. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 1016–26.
6. Protocol containing the decisions of the Commissioners appointed to delimit the Nyasa–Tanganyika Boundary. Signed at Ikawa, November 11, 1898. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 916–9.
7. Agreement between Great Britain and Germany relative to the Boundary of the British and German Spheres of Interest between Lake Nyasa and Tanganyika. Signed at Berlin, February 23, 1901. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 925–6.
8. Agreement between the United Kingdom and Portugal respecting the Boundary between British and Portuguese Possessions north and south of the Zambezi. London, October 21–November 20, 1911 [with map]. *Great Britain Treaty Series* No. 16 (1912), cd. 6265.

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

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