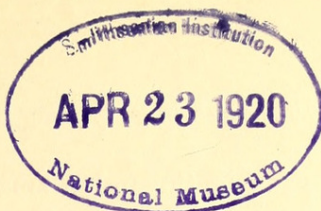


(87)



SOME NOTES ON A VISIT TO LAKE FUNDUSI IN THE
ZOUTPANSBERG DISTRICT OF THE TRANSVAAL, PAID
IN AUGUST, 1917.

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Communicated by DR. A. W. ROGERS.

(With Plate III.)

Though pans are common throughout South Africa, so far as the writer is aware Fundusi is the only sheet of natural water, south of the Zambesi, which can be described as a lake in the European sense, and as it lies in a most inaccessible position in a native territory and has been visited by very few white men, the following description may be of interest.

Some fifty miles south of the Limpopo a range of mountains called the Zoutpansberg runs parallel to the northern boundary of the Transvaal from the Magalagwin River almost to the Portuguese border—a distance of some 160 miles.

The western extremity of this range is known as Blaauwberg, and is separated from the main range by a wide gap, but from the eastern side of this gap at the Salt Pan the mountains are continuous for 100 miles till they die away near the Portuguese border.

The actual width of the mountain chain is never more than twenty miles. It is formed of Waterberg sandstones, lying often nearly horizontally, but generally with a dip towards the north of 10° – 20° . On both sides the mountains make an abrupt escarpment, rising to a general height of about 2000 ft. above the country at their foot. From an external view one would imagine the mountain top to be a wide plateau, and perhaps once it was, but at the present time it is deeply eroded into a series of longitudinal valleys of great depth, with very precipitous sides, and it is in one of these valleys that Lake Fundusi is situated.

To get to the lake it is necessary to ride or walk at least twenty miles from the nearest road, but as these miles are of the roughest description they may be said to make a good day's journey.

The writer, accompanied by Sir Robert Kotze, left the Native Commissioner's camp at Sibasa, on the southern foothills of the range, in the morning. The altitude of the camp is 2700 ft.; the path passes the Chief Sibasa's kraal just under the top of the mountain, about 1000 ft. above the

camp, and passing through a small belt of mist forest, emerges on an open down-like plateau, with scattered *Protea* trees and close-growing grass, which might be taken for a portion of the Transvaal high veld, though the actual altitude is under 4000 ft.

From here the path continues along the south edge of the mountain for some nine miles. At one point it passes an artificial circle of upright stones, with one larger dolmen on the east side, which immediately calls to mind the stone circles of Europe, and undoubtedly it has a similar origin, for our guide informed us that it was a sacred place of the Bavenda, who rest their dead there on their last journey to the Sacred Lake.

About three miles before reaching the lake the path begins to descend rapidly, and falls from an altitude of 4100 ft. at the summit to 3100 ft. at the high-water mark of the lake.

In the maps the lake is marked as a triangle. In fact, it fills a portion of a long valley and is probably 3000 yds. in length from the high-water mark at each end, with a subsidiary valley joining it on the south about two-thirds of the way up, the maximum breadth being about 500 yds. The river coming down the main valley is called the Motali, that coming in from the south the Fundusi.

All around the lake, the shores of which, except at the heads of the valleys, are either precipitous or else very steeply inclined, the vegetation stops abruptly at a well-defined high-water mark. About 40 ft. below this high-water mark there is in the southern valley a very pronounced terrace, which again was some 20 ft. above the water level at the time of our visit. As this terrace was covered with grass it is presumable that the water does not often rise above it.

From the junction of the southern valley to the lower end of the lake is an extremely rough scramble over scree and talus, just lying at its angle of rest, and slipping into the water on the slightest provocation.

When one comes in sight of the end of the lake the cause of its origin is obvious. The mountain to the north rises to a height of some 1800 ft. abruptly above a place where the original valley was narrowed by a ridge of rock, which projected into it from the south. In this mountain there is the scar of a huge landslide, which appears to have been about 300 yds. long and to have stretched about 100 yds. back into the top of the hill.

This mass has evidently slipped down and completely blocked the valley with a barrage of loose rock.

The scar is overgrown with vegetation, as is the barrage, and though the fall must have been recent, geologically speaking, it may be historically ancient.

On visiting the barrage it was found to be so rough that one could only climb about on it with great difficulty. Judging by the vegetation the water never overflows, but only gets to within some 20 ft. of the top, the

extra inflow of a rainy season being balanced by the extra leakage that each additional foot of water in the lake obtains through the barrage.

To the foot of the barrage, where the water comes out, is probably about 1200 yds. This is a most beautiful spot, as the water gushes out in dozens of "eyes" all surrounded by a natural grove of plantains.

The level of these "eyes" was, by aneroid observation, 2900 ft., or 170 ft. below the water level of the lake above.

The quantity of water escaping was not closely estimated, but it appeared to be about 10 cu. secs.

Along the shores of the lake the scenery is not particularly beautiful, and the footing is so rough as to be almost impracticable, but coming back from Mandoga, where the water emerges from the barrage, we found a high level path which was reasonably good walking and from which the view of the lake was lovely.

Apart from its interest as the only lake in the Union, Fundusi and the native tribe which inhabits the surrounding mountains should have a very great interest to ethnologists, for the Bavenda are entirely different to the ordinary Batu tribes of South Africa, and have different customs and language. To deal with these customs is out of the scope of this paper, nor is the author qualified to do so, but the following points about this tribe are noted here in the hopes that some interest may be aroused in them amongst ethnologists.

(1) The Bavenda at one time inhabited the Zimbabwe region and brought sacred stones from there to Zoutpansberg when they migrated.

(2) Amongst the Bavenda are certain "orthodox" families called "Malembi" who carry on many customs usually associated with the semitic races.

(3) The former Bavenda made quite considerable irrigation works, some of which are still in existence.

(4) Some of the Bavenda tribes still burn their dead, others throw their dead into sacred waters.

(5) Sacred stones and stone circles such as the one described on the path from Sibasa's to Fundusi are respected, if not erected by the tribe.

From the point of view of beauty Fundusi does not compare favourably with the majority of mountain lakes of Europe, but on the other hand the wildness of the surroundings, the peculiar nature of its origin, and the interest attaching to the tribe inhabiting the district, make it well worth a visit. In time to come, if the Motalie valley is inhabited by white men, the lake will become of immense practical value for irrigation purposes, as the barrage stores the surplus run-off of the rainy season and regulates the out-flow in a manner that could hardly be surpassed by an artificial dam with regulated sluice-gates.



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