

THE SABI WEST GAME FENCE

With reference to minute 6(b) of Trypanosomiasis Control Committee held on June 4th, 1959 this report has been prepared, in consultation with the Director of Veterinary Services and the Game Officer, as a basis for further discussion.

(i) PRESENT LOCATION

This fence, which is about 80 miles long, runs from the West Bank of the Sabi River at Dotts Drift in a roughly S.S.W. direction to the Mkwesine River, parallel to and five miles distant from the western border of the Sangwe Reserve. Not far South of the Mkwesine River it turns, at Manyoka Hill, to a S.S.E. direction and crosses the N.E. extremity of the Lone Star Ranch, continuing to a point at the top of the Chuhanja Escarpment. On this section it follows a course 5 miles to the West of the Ndanga East Reserve. From the top of the Escarpment it again changes direction and runs roughly West of South to the neighbourhood of Fishan's on the South Bank of the Lundi. From here it turns South East and ends on a steep escarpment after crossing the Ramasikana River.

From a point at the foot of the Chuhanja Escarpment, a subsidiary game fence runs E.N.E. roughly along the line of the Murondozi River as far as the Sabi River. This fence forms the northern border of the Sabi West shooting area, the southern part of the main fence forming its western border. The East and southern borders are formed by the Sabi and Lundi Rivers respectively. North of this shooting area, the game fence, as noted, follows a course about 5 miles West of the Ndanga East and Sangwe Reserves. The western boundary of these Reserves is also fenced by a standard barbed wire cattle fence.

(ii) HISTORY OF THE SABI WEST SHOOTING SCHEME

These fence systems were built in 1956 and 1957 and in April of the latter year shooting began inside the fences of the Sabi West shooting area. In January, 1956, when the surveys for the fence system were begun, tsetse (G. morsitans and G. pallidipes) were only found within about 5 miles of the Sabi River, but it did not prove possible to exterminate the game with sufficient rapidity to affect the westward movement of the tsetse. The fly must have reached at least as far as the western edge of the Chuhanja Escarpment by the middle of 1958. This was indicated by the appearance of trypanosomiasis in Lone Star cattle in July of that year and finally confirmed by the capture of both local species of Glossina near the Lundi/Chiredzi junction in May, 1959, half way across the Basalt zone.

There is now no point in continuing shooting in the Sabi West area as a defence measure to prevent westbound movement of tsetse. The latter are obviously well established on the wrong side of the line and within the shooting zone are still present in easily measurable density. Further shooting in Sabi West would be for reclamation only. The game fence from the North face of the Chuhanja Escarpment southward now serves no purpose and consideration must be given to its future.

(iii) THE FIVE-MILE WIDE ZONE AND THE RESERVES

The northern portion of the game fence, forming the western boundary of what was intended to become a five mile wide game-free-cattle-free zone bounding the Native Reserves of Sangwe and Ndanga East

may be considered separately. The picture here was very much obscured in September 1957 when several hundred head of game died along the western side of the fence, apparently as a result of the fence impeding their concentration on the lower Mkwesine River.

It has never been possible, because of an insufficient hunter force, to implement the policy of creating the game and cattle free zone West of the Reserves. It is in any case the opinion of the Department's professional officers that a zone only 5 miles wide would not stop any tsetse movement if this occurred. There is so far, no indication of any movement of tsetse into or through the Reserves, except into the Bandai hills at the South of the Ndanga East Reserve, a movement which appears to have been satisfactorily dealt with by bush clearing. The most dangerous potential line of advance westwards is via the Mkwesine River, on which extensive clearing has recently been undertaken.

There is no doubt that the ends of tsetse defence in this area would best be served by a concentration of effort directed towards improved land usage in the reserves.

(iv) COSTS

The cost of the game fence was approximately £6,000, materials (wire and staples) costing about £40 per mile and contractor's erection costs, also £40 per mile. Its upkeep cost is high. £1,275 per annum provides for continuous patrolling and for 50 labourers for 2 months for firebreaks etc., This amount could be reduced. Daily patrolling does not prevent breakages but only ensure more rapid repair. A monthly Land Rover patrol would be cheaper and perhaps just as effective.

(v) RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) The fence should be realigned to provide the maximum advantage to cattle disease control, including trypanosomiasis, ranch management in relation to unalienated Crown Lands and game control programmes.

(2) It is possible that conflicts between these various interests are only a matter of timing.

(3) From the viewpoint of disease control a fence running roughly West to East linking the Lone Star boundary to the Murondozi Fence and thence across the Sabi River to the Portuguese border at about the level of beacon 105A would seem to be the most desirable.

(4) The Game Officer plans an operation to control elephant, buffalo and zebra in the Mkwesine basin. To assist in this it would suit him if the northern portion of the fence (from the Mkwesine northwards) were to be realigned along the actual boundary of the Sangwe Reserve.

29th June, 1959