

Livingstone conference 2013 April 2013 , Livingstone, Zambia

Ben de Ponti

Into the heart of Nyassaland

An exploration on foot and by boat of David Livingstone's 1861 and 1863 expeditions into Nyassaland.

The reason

Around 2002 media announces about Africa were mostly negative.

All we could read about Africa was about famine, war and genocide, corruption and millions of people infected with HIV aids.

Since 1976 my love Cobi and I have been involved with people of Malawi.

First we worked in a mission hospital in Mzuzu, Malawi (1976-1979) and set up a basic dental health care in Northern Malawi. Later when we were back in The Netherlands we started Foundation Friends of St John's and our core business was support of St. John's Hospital in Mzuzu and in 2001 we were asked to start and support the Sonda Youth and Community Development Centre in Mzuzu. A program to give vulnerable children a future.

Everybody knows that you cannot blame a peaceful country like Malawi in Central East Africa for what has happened in Rwanda in 1994. But still people at home think in terms of tribes that are willing to fight each other more than population groups living in a peaceful coexistence. Besides that, war has been part of the world (and for sure in western Europe) since homo sapiens started to leave the beautiful African Rift valley.

The biggest mistake is to generalize, personally it is my opinion that every inhabitant in Africa is an individual and shouldn't be blamed for things happening far or even near his home he or she is not responsible for.

Christmas 2002. Cobi gives me a first very fragile print of David Livingstone's "Last journals" (American edition) I started to read again about the man who opened up Southern Africa and with whom I got first in contact via Oliver Ramsfords' beautifully written Livingstone's Lake. When I arrived at page 512, there in that hut in Chitambo's village, where he died in 1873, and again read about the decision and the expedition of his "faithful servants" as Murray calls them, to bring him back home. At that moment something happened to me. It was as if in a dream, that I felt the sorrows of DL and the people with him and the extraordinary courage of these people to prepare him for his last travels and to withstand all the difficulties to carry his dead body (he who so much liked to walk during his life) to Bagomoyo.

All what Chuma, Mr. Wainwright, Susi, Matthew and the others then did was in contradiction with what the average opinion was about Africa in the beginning of this century. A small group of African individuals did something so extraordinary that we cannot even guess how difficult it was. From that moment my brain divided in two. My daily brain that had been functioning throughout my life and brought me where I stood then and there was that small special part in my brain somewhere left upper middle, under the temporal bone that was like a hidden cave that I knew I could enter any moment I liked and where thoughts were formed that surfaced on expected and later on unexpected moments. I had to do something with DL and his "faithful servants" story and the plan came up to study one of his expeditions, walk it in his footsteps and to find out what has changed since DL walked there.

Also, and as important I wanted to meet individuals to discover positive things and how people cope with HIV Aids .

During DL's last travels and during his Zambezi expedition the slave trade was a continuous horror from Katanga as far as the slave markets at the Indian Ocean. During his Zambezi expedition, every day there were dead bodies, villages left behind, crops not harvested or burned down, all because of the slave trade.

Children were separated from their parents and taken to the coast of the Indian Ocean or left behind. There must have been thousands and thousands of orphaned children during DL's Zambezi expedition in the Nyassaland region. From 1985 HIV-aids has taken many victims in Malawi and orphaned so many children that there is a similarity with DL's days if you think about all those vulnerable children.

Okay there is something in your mind that is floating in a kind of pool. It is floating just under the surface and after a while sinking into the deep waters of that pool just to wait for some time before it can rise again and then you realize that it's on the surface and floats around for days and weeks. There is one more push you need and I got that push when Cobi, my love, asked me after she had been looking at me with that special glance in her eyes. You're so much into yourself, what keeps you so busy.....ohhh I said, it's that Livingstone thing.. you know She stood up, put her arms around my neck and said: "Ben if you really want to do that ... you have to do it, .. you have my blessings". And then I started to realize my Livingstone expedition.

The preparation

At first I wanted to do DL's first part of his last travels to start from Mikindani along the Rovuma and then down to Lake Nyassa/ Lake Malawi. I studied this route in extension. I wanted to put DL's route back on the map. One of the important parts of my walk should be to interpret the changes that took place since DL walked there in 1866. Besides I wanted to get as much information as possible about how people were dealing with HIV in the villages and how they were taking care of their orphans.

And of course I was looking for the individual and positive things that happened along my way and trying to understand how people in Africa have to live.

I would dedicate my walk to the children of Malawi.

A great deal of the Rovuma expedition would go through the Niassa game reserve in Mozambique. There would be no people to meet, because since it is a game reserve people have moved to other places. The language would be a problem since I don't speak Portuguese and above all I realized, I am a man from Malawi, I dedicate the expedition to the children of Malawi so why to walk in Tanzania and Mozambique.

The Zambezi expedition so much written about, so much trouble for DL and his fellow travellers, so many negative ideas about this expedition blaming DL a lot. There is something in my character when people are blaming or judging somebody I always start to look for the opposite side of the story, why did it happen what were the circumstances and how easy conclusions are drawn and repeated again and again.

1861 The exploration of the western shores of lake Malawi (many Saturdays, when we lived in Malawi, we drove down the escarpment from Mzuzu to Nkhata Bay and spend the weekend at the shores of the Lake of Stars) and 1863 his walk deep into the heart of Nyassaland. Not much was written in all the biographies of DL about these two specific voyages deep into the heart of Nyassaland after the book he wrote with his brother Charles about the Zambezi expedition. As far as I could find out nobody had travelled these expeditions in his footsteps afterwards. It would bring me into the real heart of Malawi where people are living, I could talk to and ask questions instead-of talking to trees and animals in Mozambique. I could find out if people were aware about the old slave routes, what they knew about DL, if there still was any knowledge about the slave trade and I maybe could find places I could be sure of that DL had walked or had spent the night.

As a person who wants to discover things himself you often start with the first information you have at hand. I reread O R 's Livingstone's Lake, started to look on the internet for copies of David and Charles Livingstone's Zambezi expedition and got via EBay a first print of the Zambezi book just for the mailing costs because the chap who send it was so impressed about what I wanted to do and especially why I wanted to do it that t he said "this is my contribution to your expedition, just pay for the postage". Then you enter an undiscovered area of information, but think about it is now 11 years after I started. Internet didn't have the info it has now. It was a help to make a framework of books, articles and letters I wanted to read but than there is still the problem how to get or reach them.

Cobi and I decided to visit some of the spots where DL was himself during his travels through Africa and as real Africa lovers we added to our holidays a search for DL.

Into Zambia, South Africa and Botswana we went, we canoed the Zambezi river for days with our children knowing that DL walked on its shores not far from where we were paddling and maybe we were sleeping on one of the islands he slept. Of course we ended up in the Livingstone museum in Livingstone and were allowed to look into the original letters of the Livingstone brothers. There we had one of these great moments when Dr. Mufuzi gave me Dr. Clendennens' Shire journal thesis. Dr. Friday Mufuzi was looking at us in amazement when we expressed so much excitement when looking into it. After a few minutes he asked, "would you like to meet Dr Clendennen"? Of course, we said and he looked at us in a special way. "But he is in the next room", he said with a smile around his mouth. I could have kissed him. Gary Clendennen came all the way from Japan to spend 4 days in Livingstone to study Charles Livingstone's letters. What a coincidence and from that day G C helped me a lot to find out which info was important for me to do the DL expedition as accurate as possible.

We made two trips to Scotland. One to Blantyre, Glasgow where we got access to DL's last travels journal and notebooks. It was a very special moment when Cobi said; " Ben look at this" and she showed me the notebook with DL's last written words . We felt silent for some moments, hold each others hand and felt emotional . The last visit was to Edinburgh where we stayed a few days in the National library. We looked at microfilm, read original letters and copies of which one stroke me deeply, the letter DL wrote to Mary's mother, Mrs Moffat, to announce the death of his wife there in Shupanga. In spite of what biographers write about DL as being coldhearted and impersonal it was a very warm personal letter and again I was moved.

Also there was the original map DL drew in 1863 after his travels into the heart of Nyassaland.

I got two plotted copies. One for me and one to be send to my friend Gary Clendennen in Japan who helped me so much. He send me f.e his study about the most northern point DL reached in 1861 exploring the western shores of Lake Nyassa.

In Edinburgh we met twice Dr Andrew Ross and Dr Jack Thompson. Andrew Ross who wrote a biography about DL in 2002 and when I asked him; "why another biography"? He said that he wanted to shine another light on DL's character and why he had that stubborn mind when he had set a goal to reach that goal. White people around him weren't that happy when they had to accompany him in difficult circumstances and where he went on where everybody would have stopped. Was he a hero? I asked him. He answered: "For all what he did, for his perseverance, his way of solving problems in hostile country, his efforts to make the horrors of the African slave trade known in Europe , his humanity and his own human way to work together with Africans. But maybe the biggest achievement is and that's why he already is worth the qualification of hero, is for all what he wrote down about the

people and their cultures, the languages, the geography and geology, the flora and fauna .

There was not much time to prepare for the physical part so I decided to walk to my dental clinic, a 7,5 km walk up and down with a rucksack with 10 kg, twice a week for the 2 months before I should leave. It should be enough to strengthen my muscles and to be fit for this long journey.

I studied DL's Zambezi book, Gary Clendennens' Shire journal, read Thornton and Stewart's diaries and everything else I could find. Looked for long times at DL's 1863 map and compared the map with present coordinates and discovered that DL was about 20 minutes off in the longitude on geographical steady points like Kasungu hill, Wangombe Rumen, Benji island and Nkhota Kota. As I read somewhere, one of the expedition members dropped his chronometer. But I'm not sure if that really happened.

People warned me all the time. Ben this is too dangerous. The Shire valley is full of mosquito's, crocodiles, hippo's, there is no food to get and it is very hot. I had never been there. People can rob you etc... Please let somebody who knows the area help you, that's what people asked me and I obeyed and found a safari man in Malawi who was very enthusiastic to give me a good start for the first part of this expedition till the Kolombidzo falls near Matope.

The expedition

I say goodbye to my beloved ones and leave for Malawi on the 6th of June 2007 with an excess of 32 kg hand luggage that I get through the check-in desk with a lot of smiles and with a little bit of that 'please help me look' that opens doors everywhere in the world.

In Lilongwe there is that man who has a safari business who had told me to help me to organize the start of the expedition, because he really wanted to help and the costs would be just to the amount that he had to spend. He collects me from the airport and I stay in his rest house. He tells me that he wants 480 dollar a day. Bad start. By no ways I can afford this amount. I can bring the price down but still it is a lot. He would take care for the transport, maps, tents and gives me a man who knows the area very well and can direct me, as he had promised me when I was still in Holland. He only has maps till Ntcheu, I discover when I arrive in Lilongwe. So first thing I have to do is to find maps. It takes me one day to find the office and 2 hours to persuade the responsible persons to print the maps overnight for a reasonable price, still 22 dollar a piece . I ordered all the necessary 1:50.000 maps from Ntcheu till Usisya (350 dollar.) I wait the next day and wait.... The printchaps arrive late

evening at 9.30 pm with all the maps. I am delighted because without these maps I would have been lost and couldn't have done what I did. I meet a man working as a plumber in the garden of the safari man. Mr Christofer Botha. I like him immediately. Coming from the North he speaks Chitumbuka, Chichewa and also ChiTonga is familiar to him. I ask him; "do you like to join me on this long trip as my translator"? . "Yes" he says simply. In about 2 minutes we arrange how much I will pay him and after everything is settled I promise him a kind of pension for 5 years after we have successfully finished this "Big Walk" as Christofer calls it.

I leave by bus to Blantyre and visit the Dutch honorary consul . Good to know that an official knows that you're walking around somewhere in Malawi I think.

Two days later my expedition team of three people arrives. They are one day late. The safari man hadn't arranged his things properly.

We, mr K. a white man from Zimbabwe, the one who knows the country, mr Sam Shaba, mr Christofer Botha and myself leave for Nsanje down in the Lower Shire valley. We put up camp at the Montfort catholic mission where I meet Fr. Francis, a hard working Malawian priest who is fighting against HIV-aids and when I ask him if there are any results he says "since two years I have less funerals". Positive thing! K. who is supposed to know the area had never been there, he didn't bring the maps I was promised, there is no boat to sail the Shire as the safari man had promised and he weighs over 230 pounds, has worn out knees and can only walk about 4-5 km and needs more than 2 hours for that. I am not happy but want to start. I had been working on this for two years. So I start on my old forbidden 1: 250.000 maps that I brought from home. My neighbor, a major in the Nato had given them to me to prepare my expedition, but there is secret information on it he told me, so be very careful with them, don't take them to Malawi because it can bring you into troubles. I'm happy that I took them with me.

The part till Ntcheu will be easier to follow because it follows the Shire and the Rivi Rive River. And as far as Chikwawa (Chibisa) I am supposed to go by boat.

I go around in Nsanje and find the only motorized boat from where the Shire enters Malawi till Chikwawa, a police boat. Owing to lack of petrol it hasn't been used for more than a year. I will buy the petrol and give the police some allowance and they will sail me to Chiromo the start of the Elephant marsh. It strikes me that in DL's days when he sailed up the Shire for the first time there also was only one motor vessel, his MaRobert or the Astmatic.

It is a glorious journey. Where the crew of the MaRobert saw dead bodies floating down the Shire River and on its banks people struck by hunger and fright because of the ongoing slave trade, we see waterhyacints as tiny green freckles decorating the blue water of the Shire, hundreds of silver-and goliath herons, openbilled storks, numerous coloured kingfishers, African skimmers in large flocks, fish eagles quietly waiting in a tree till a nice fish is surfacing to give the days catch. Numerous people are waving on the banks of the river, calling us to come ashore and visit them. As if

the Pope is passing. And I see in this dry season vast areas with healthy looking maize. Agriculture has become important again in Malawi and water pumps and fertilizer are distributed to the people and so they can harvest twice a year and look happy .

Of course we visit Tedzani, a little busy town with a daily market full of colors and smiling people, however, don't contact us immediately because of the two boat policemen that escort us. They think we must be criminals picked up by the police. I check with an old man all the names in DL's book if they are still familiar. The man knows that DL has been on the river several times but can't give me any extra information or stories I don't know yet.

We sleep on the open banks of the Shire, no trees, no bushes just a wide plain with the sun setting behind a dark blue cloud. Fishermen are throwing their nets in a wide arch and their laughs reach us across the water in the silence of a beautiful evening. We cook our food over the open fire enjoy the setting sun and in my euphoria I even love the countless mosquitoes of the Shire valley.

No boat to go through the Elephant marsh so I walk around the marshes and only in 2009 when I go back to Malawi I was able to sail with Cobi through this hot, beautiful little Okavango and where DL got stuck for weeks at an end we only run a ground twice. We were able to find new channels in between the reeds that were deep enough to let us sail through.

At Katchipiri, the rapids that stopped DL to follow the Shire River up north, we put up our camp and there we find on a misty morning the baobab where Richard Thornton is buried. I stand at his grave and there I have my first, almost personal meeting with DL himself. I see him standing within one or two yards from me, his consular cap in one hand and in the other the bible, reading the prayers of death for the young Richard Thornton lying down in the earth in his grave . Another man had lost his life in his quest for God's Highway; Thornton was on his way to his God. It is an emotional moment to feel so close.

In the meantime some problems have arisen between K. and Christofer and Sam. It worries me a lot. The mzungu is of no help except for the transport and this whole thing is far too expensive so I decide to sent everybody home and to start all over again. I go to Blantyre to a big Game store, buy tents, sleeping bags, a poikie to cook in and the necessary cutlery and some plates . My Malawian men contact me and ask if they can join me again. Okay I say but no more troubles. And I know it is going to work. Follow your own idea that's where you are best at. Think for yourself and of course listen to other people but not too much. And it works. Sam finds an old car and we are a new team of three.

When climbing the rocks during wet weather to have a better look at the Kapichiri cataracts that DL stopped, I fall down. Somebody suddenly opens he doors of the electric power plant and I see the water coming down the big rocks in front of the

electric plant. I run away jumping from one to another wet rock. People had warned me; don't go on the rocks they are too slippery", but 'a little bit explorer is not afraid' I decide and of course I take my chance and climb from rock to rock to have a better view of the cataracts. My foot gets stuck in between the two black wet boulders and in a flash I see the faces of my beloveds ones. The water is rising quickly. "Please doctor come" Christofer is shouting, with a terrible fear on his face. There is only little time to get free. I don't want to leave my shoe behind because I still have to go a long way to Mwangina Bay, DL's most Northern point. Just before I decide to offer the shoe to the river I give it an extra strong pull, something cracks in my foot and I'm free and able to reach the bank of the river before the water will drown me. Luckily they had opened only three doors instead of six. The rest of the day I sit down with my foot high up and enough painkillers to help me through the day.

The next morning I take again my painkillers tape my foot as good as possible, push it into my shoe and start of to walk along the Shire towards as far as the Mukurumadzi River. We are inside the Majete National park now. There are no rangers for escort. I take the risk to walk unarmed through this miombe woodland, intensely listening for the soft footsteps of elephants that can pass my path any moment. Of course I am not allowed to walk there alone but with no rangers around nobody will find out.

There is no way to pas the high voltage electric fence at the end of the park. So we drive around and go as far as the Mpatamanga gorges to walk from there south along the Shire River. My foot still hurts, but as my father used to say, as long as it is not broken just walk on. He had a little bit of that Livingstone character. If you feel sick just do some hard work and you will sweat it out.

On a stretch of about 15 km I only find one family living here at the Shire at the Maziti rapids.

When I ask the man why he lives here far away from any village or town, he says; "because of God and my cattle". I think, maybe that's enough reason to live so far away from everything. He doesn't know anything about DL. The landscape is still the same as during DL's walk up when he started his 1863 expedition.

Old baobabs must have been seen by DL when passing here. Even in the dry season it is a beautiful open bush land with tall straight white trees, which have a kind of holy status in Malawi. Along this river in this deserted land where things haven't changed for hundreds maybe thousands of years it is that unique feeling of being a simple human being who is privileged to be able (even with a soar foot) to walk here in that unchanged landscape.

We try to follow the river as much as possible. There is a main path, often more then a kilometer from the river. Every four- till five hundred yards a small track is

leading to the river. Once in a while we walk down these tracks to have a look at the Shire.

At the Tedzani falls there is another electric power station and for a long distance we are not allowed to go near the river. The surroundings are busy and filthy. Villages, one after another, are not nice and friendly as in other parts of Malawi. A few lousy bars, girls far too young to offer their services, drunken men who come too near and shout too loud "we want your money". We go on quickly. I hold my wooden stick to keep dogs away strongly in my hand to use it when necessary and decide not to put up our tents here in this inhospitable area. The good thing is that we have network here and can call Sam in the car and ask him to collect us just outside Tedzani .

We are happy when we meet him, giving the drunken folks a big smile when driving off. The only thing the drunks harm are their hands when they, shouting loudly, "give us money", hit the hood of the car. Up we go into the hills and arrive just before dark in a small village where we meet the headmaster Mr Gulo. He gives us a clean hut to sleep in because as he says; people will be very afraid and suspicious if they suddenly see three tents in this village. A few minutes later children bring us firewood and water and we cook our meal in the poikie. A friendly lady brings us a plate of nsima and my Malawian men are thrilled, the only good food is nsima as they tell me.

After that good meal we wash ourselves, standing naked behind the tents in the first chills of the evening and we are in our sleeping bags before 8 pm.

I try to read in the Zambezi book where we have to go the following day but fall asleep after a few sentences. That night I dream about my three daughters. They have frightened faces, questioning me about what prostitutes do and I dream about waterfalls that take away all our belongings. Around two I wake up sweating. Not far away hyenas threw their high laughter into the cold night. I turn around, go a little deeper in my sleeping bag and fall asleep again with thoughts about tomorrow, up to the last rapids where DL's big canoe was lost because a few Zambezi man wanted to show off to the Makololos how good paddlers they were and their canoe turned over and disappeared down river losing all DL's stocks for the expedition up north.

Here it is that I meet the only female chief on my big walk. DL mentioned he met a few female chiefs here in Maravi country.

We go up and further until we reach the confluence of the Rivi Rivi River with the Shire.

To follow RRR is quite difficult. It is only the first 35-40 miles that there are villages. Further up stream it is uninhabited and there is no path following the river. We try to find our way through the bush, but only make about a mile an hour and after a few hours give up. DL was travelling fast in this area so there must have been a path, maybe much further away from the river. The few people we meet are very poor and already have a very little stock of maize even only a few months after

harvesting. They show me old metal traps to catch game like small antelopes, but as I and see how they look, the traps aren't very successful.

DL followed the RRR until he reached Mnt Mvai. We put up our tents on the banks of the RRR at the village of an old very friendly Yao chief. On our way the Yao and Angoni chiefs are the most friendly. The former slave raiders have changed a lot I think. I go around Mnt Mvai to find the source of the RRR on a misty drizzling day. We find the place and again you have the feeling you did a kind of discovery, knowing of course it has been there for a long time and everybody living there knows about this tiny little stream finding it's way towards the Shire. People are well off here. It is potato and cabbage country. And they are good sellers. It is difficult to get a guide and as Christofer says, these people are too rich to do something for somebody else. At the end we find a young mother with a child on her back to show us the way. The next cold day we experience what DL wrote when arriving in that high up potato land. He wrote that it was very cold because of the fierce winds and his men weren't able to cope with that and felt horrible and sick.

Through the Goa valley, indeed a beautiful valley, along the Kirk's range with Mnt Chirobwe as the highest mountain. These are pleasant days to walk with friendly people in neat villages. Of course we lose our way and walk far too many miles. It always happens if you want to find a special place DL has written about and people give you directions only with the reason to please you not knowing exactly what you are talking about. But it was good walking there in Goa valley.

Down to the lake to Mtakataka after passing a long stretch of forest reserve that hasn't changed since DL walked there. The Lake gives us that good feeling of having big chambo fish on the fire in the evening and enjoying the beauty of Lake Nyassa. Here I meet the very old man, over 90 years old, who tells me that the Mazitu took his grandparents away and many people were killed.

People can be very sure when I ask them about DL. They like to give positive answers on my questions. So I have to be very critical on my questions.

We walk around Salima through Kwamwamba country and hit the lake again at Chitawa. We have to go through the Lingadzi swamps that weren't there when DL passed. It was a few miles through the water or to go back and do an extra 20 miles. We hesitate to go through, don't know the route. It is all thick reeds with just a few small streams that run through. Then suddenly a few ladies with big round bosoms and pots full of tomatoes on their head come out of the reeds and can't stop laughing when we ask them if they guide us through the swamps. They live in small reed huts at the banks of the swamp. They look healthy and happy, so maybe there is no bilharzia here I hope, doing my best to be positive. Yes there are crocs in deeper parts. I realize that, seeing a few people with missing bodyparts, but today

we have our lucky day and when you walk with a group the chance a croc will take you diminishes with the factor of how many people you are.

From Matamba I go inland. From this point I will do DL's 1863 expedition in opposite direction because I want to connect with DL's boat expedition of 1861 from the town of Nkhota Kota.

We walk for days at end, loose our way, find out about how people in the villages take care of their vulnerable children and as they say; 'as long as there is enough food there is no problem'. Agriculture is still the same on many places as in Livingstone's days. It is fertilizer (when available) that makes the difference, but the hoe is still used everywhere. Only when I reach Kasungu I see for the first and only time oxen being used to plow. It is the oxen first working day since they were born. And it needs about 6 people, a lot of shouting and laughing to get them in the right track. I realize, so much is happening, when nothing is happening!

Fish traps haven't changed as we can see on the illustration in DL's Zambezi book. We're now in an area where children are afraid of white people. Some have never seen a mzungu before. This is merely because white people visit places that you can reach by car. They jump out, do their development thing and jump in their big white car to leave the villages and go back to their shelter where they can enjoy all the modern necessities they think they need. It's only priests that go deep into the bush on foot and there are just a few white priests left from oversea. Children will run away, afraid and inform the people in the village that a mzungu is coming on foot. It is so different to enter a village in a slow pace, stay for a little or sometimes longer time if we need a place to sleep and leave it again on foot, children and sometimes adults escorting us for miles.

Every evening we have to report to the chief and ask permission before we can put up camp. The chief feels responsible for our safety. Every day he gives us a person who knows the area and who guides us to the next place we want to go. Sometimes only about 8 miles further till we reach a certain village where we will find somebody else who will help us to find our way. As you can imagine we lose track too often. My gps knows where we are but cannot take me where we want to go. (see maps with names of villages not indicated on the right place) It makes it a real adventure and causes a lot of extra miles. We have to go through Ntchisi forest. Nobody wants to guide us through. There is that believe, since there is a white man in the group, that as soon as we are deep in the forest he will take out your organs to sell them to the Chinese. Just follow this path and you will reach Kayoyo around 2 o'clock, the man who brings us to the foot of the Ntchisi Mountains tells us. Yes, zikomo kwambiri, and of we go to arrive just before dark in Kayoyo. We almost reach 1700 m altitude but there are of course more tracks and as usual most of the time you first take the wrong one. Everytime we climb 250 meters we have to go down into the ravine till we reach the next little stream that is cutting through the Ntchisi Mountains. When we arrive in Kayoyo the people are very suspicious when they see us coming out of

the forest. A team led by the headmaster of the secondary school, the chief and some other important people of this village interrogate us. Again and again I have to explain what we are doing and only when I take out the expedition flag, Livingstone's Zambezi book and explain that I am a real catholic, then they decide we are OK and not terrorists who are connected with Bin Laden. As soon as the trust is there they help us with firewood and water and the headmaster gives us a classroom to sleep in. It is a cold evening there at an altitude of about 1400 meters. I am exhausted after 6 weeks being so busy, not a day of rest. Most of the energy goes is seized by finding out where we have to go, to talk to people about how they cope with life, their customs, what do they know about DL and are they familiar with the names mentioned in DL's book.

We cross the Bua River for the first time and arrive at Chambwe mentioned by DL. We buy a leg of a goat we had seen earlier that day on the back of a bicycle. In Chambwe I talk a lot with the headmaster and he organizes a big "bwalo" and people tell me about their sufferings. This year there is enough food, but there isn't enough money to buy medicines when you are ill. The nearest hospital is 25 km further on. There is no transport except to put the patient on a bike and push the very sick person the 25 km to the hospital. School classes outnumber 100 children per class with no learning materials then the sand and a thin piece of wood taken from a branch to start learning to write. Parents have died of HIV aids and grandparents are taking care of too many grandchildren. There is no money for school fees, so no further education. Problems, yes, always problems. An African person in Malawi faces and has to deal with an amount of real problems in a year for which we Europeans have a whole life.

There at Chambwe the night is very clear and temperature goes below 32 Fahrenheit. The goat takes revenge on me, I get sick, have to go out of my tent several times that night, feeling miserable with everything that belongs to that . But still, coming out of the bush that night I can only but enjoy the beauty of that crispy, clear night sky with the moon high above me and Jupiter almost touching Scorpion just above the western horizon. So silent, not a sound and I stay out for a few minutes and even feeling sick I have that enormous feeling of thankfulness that I'm standing there alone in this beautiful African night. Until a really cold shiver sends me back into my sleeping bag.

I'm finished, I need a rest. There is a deep pain just behind my liver after I 've been walking for about three quarters of an hour. The last five days I was too tired to write my diary. When DL walked here, there was hardly any food because of the Mazitu and the Yao slave raiders. Crops had been burned down, dead bodies every day and still he was able to walk about 15 miles a day, to keep records and once in a while to take coordinates. My respect that was already very high becomes greater

every day I walk through this paradise with all its problems. So, no complaints from my side, just feeling a bit sick.

I take my rest for two full days, write my logbook, and I recover quite well. When I start again the pain is just somewhere deep down in my body.

We are heading for Kasungu hill and Wang'ombe Rumen. The winds are fierce and dusty here high on the open plateau just like DL wrote about when he went up from Nkhota Kota and his Manganja and Senna men felt very sick and weak.

Just near Kasungu hill, at the same place DL met Chief Muazi I met his grand-or grand-grandson the great Chief Muasi. The very old man, over 90, is just back from hospital after a big operation. He really wants to meet us when we arrive at his village. He gives the encounter an extra touch by putting on his official dress. We chat and of course he knows about DL and that he passed there twice some time ago.

We honor him with our flag, stay near his place and are deeply moved that this important man received us so well. History comes very near when meeting a person who is so closely related to people DL met and wrote extensively about.

Up to Kasungu game reserve. Gogo Muasi gave me a lot of energy. There in Kasungu game reserve I have to explain and plead that it is so important to let me walk to the Wangombe Rumen the most western point DL reached on this expedition.

It is a two days' walk, through the bush with elephants, zebra, antelopes, buffalos and even lions around. Great days are ahead of us. The real animal pleasure of walking as DL mentioned it in his Last Travels is so real here in this Brachystegia country, similar as DL saw it 144 years ago.

Two men with big guns escort me as we leave camp. After an hour or so I walk more than 500 yards ahead just loving to be alone in this dry open country, feeling strong and alert. Sounds in the bush trigger me to be careful. Today the wind is so friendly to stay away. Thin yellow, dry grass helms are trembling in the hot air. There are elephants in the distance, two waterbuck are gazing at me ready to jump away as soon as they decide I'm a danger to them, an eagle hangs high up in a deep blue sky looking for a lizard or snake, grasshoppers make that high noise and then there is the beautiful glu-glu-glu-glu... of the emerald spotted wood dove also called the orphan bird because it seems it is calling ...my father is dead, my mother is dead, oh no no no no... I wonder if DL made that same comparison. A tsetse fly gives me a painful bite in my neck.

We go straight through the bush, following animal tracks of about 10-15 inch wide. We stop at the last iron kiln that is preserved in Malawi, there in the middle of nowhere. It was still used when DL past here. When Bantu-people were coming down from the NW over the Misuku hills, they saw in the distance the lights of a

thousand iron kilns glowing in the night and they called this land Maravi, land of the flames.

After another day of walking through this uninhabited country we put up our tents a few miles from Wang'ombe Rumen. A bare rock of dark granite of which the top sticks out about 220 m above the landscape. 150 years ago DL stayed here at Chinya'nga, for a few days to give his men a well deserved rest. He had found the watershed between Lake Nyassa and the Loangwa River here at Nombe Rume as he called the big rock. He didn't have time to continue to Lake Bemba (Bangweulu). It was a difficult decision for the man who always wanted to go further on than his eyes could see. He went back to the Pioneer in the Shire at Katchipiri. Since Kasungu is a national park there are no longer people living at the place Chinya'nga. We even can't find any remnants of it. The bush has done its work and in this area the only marks of times not even so long ago are a few frail rock art paintings at Solange cave and the iron kiln.

We camped hidden away in a thick bush so poachers, coming from Zambia who are roaming the area to kill the game cannot find us. My guards are rangers; it's their job to catch poachers, dead or alive. It has a direct effect that poachers want to get rid of the rangers and it can bring us in a dangerous position. Every sound I hear that night keeps me awake. It is all there that long night, owl, nightjar, hyena, bush baby, elephant, baboon high up in the trees and in the distance at the end of the night even the magical roar of a lion. It gives me a deep thrill and it is only the crack of a branch or the rustle of some dead leaves that warn me that there may be poachers around our tents. It makes me very alert and afraid and lets my heart pound faster. I'm happy when the long night is over, the fire is burning and we have a cup of tea before we set off to climb the Rumen in that fragile first morning light before the sun is up.

We scramble, almost to the top. The last part is too steep. It is a glorious moment. Standing there with my rangers Sjon and Paul in the first golden rays of a big bright sun, looking over the wide lonely country covered with miombo trees without people. In my imagination I see how DL arrived there at Chinya'nga, tired and hungry trying to get rid of all the horrors he had seen coming up from Lake Nyassa on this great slave route that started, far away in Katanga. He must have felt so helpless every time he met Arab or Portuguese slave raiders, armed with their shotguns and commanding those long rows of slaves often chained to each other and just knocking down every resistance of these poor people with their whips, left them behind tied to a tree where they would starve or just shot them.

We put our flag there and go back to camp. Tomorrow my love Cobi is arriving in Lilongwe to join me for the last part of this expedition. Since the 70's of last century we did all the things connecting us with Africa together so I asked her when I left The Netherlands to join me in this last part of the Big Walk.

We are three know walking and the daily guide given to us by the noble chiefs, as already DL writes, trying to find the great slave route DL used on his way up, coming from Nkhota Kota to Kasungu Hill. We walk the high lands, and pass Mount Chipata clearly marked on DL's 1863 map. Every 3-4 miles there is a village. People are poor in this area. People know about DL what they have learned at school and it is only in Mdunga that some elder man playing bao in the evening sun gets excited when I mention the name Livingstone and slave trade that they take my hand and bring me a few hundred yards further to show me a small footpath that goes around Kaparikwenji and Kapirikwakwa hill. Every time when we have a real hit ,meaning we can be sure we found a place where DL walked or slept, it gives that "high five" feeling. We are very well received by chief Mdunga, who speaks good English. We put up our camp near his house, because he has to protect us, as he says. The sun sets quickly and in a short time the temperature drops 25 Celsius degrees There are fierce winds that night. But we are protected by some trees. The old men give us a big smile and a "high five" when we meet them the next morning playing their century old game in the morning sun.

Before we cross the Bua River again, people take us to some beautiful well-preserved old rock paintings. DL doesn't mention them, but he must have passed here very near.

We try to follow the Bua River when we are only a long day's walk from Nkhota Kota. The winds are freezing cold when we arrive after a too long walk around 5.30 pm at the gate of Nkhota Kota game reserve. By no means we are allowed to go through the game reserve. There are no rangers at this site of the game reserve that is thickly grown with trees and bushes almost impossible to get through. Buffalo, elephant, lions are inside but because of the thick coverage difficult to find.

When in Kasungu, a doctor warned us that there are many tsetse flies in the reserve area and that this year in particular, people had died from being infected with trypanosomiasis. They strongly recommend not to go in from the west side. We walked 27 km up and down hill. We are cold, hungry and very tired and decide to go to the Lake. In the dark we drive down into the Rift Valley. We get a room in the Pottery Lodge and have the first warm shower in days, there is beer and nice food, there are nice smiling people who are laughing all the time and think we must be mad when we explain what we are doing. Life feels great sitting there at the shores of Lake Nyassa. My dreams are sweet that night.

We pick up our equipment and head towards the Bua river again. We now enter the reserve from the east and there is a beautiful place to camp on the banks of the Bua. We put up camp, arrange with the local ranger that we will go along the Bua as far as possible. The evening there at the Bua is one of the evenings you will never forget.

About here DL started '*his* great walk' up towards Chief Muazi to find the watershed of the Loangwa and the Lake. He walked the great slave route with all its horrors. To negotiate with slave raiders he disliked for what they were doing. But he needed their help on his long expeditions deep into the interior.

We are sitting around our campfire just the four of us eating chambo fish we brought from the Lake. It is a perfect harmony; an African evening in this beautiful nature and human beings who feel humble thinking about what DL had ahead of him when he was there and we who will start on the last part of the Great Walk in a country that has its problems and still has a long way to go. But the problems these days reach the people in a slower pace than the horrors (Open wound) in DL's days.

We go to the big Livingstone fig tree, where he sat down and argued with Jumba to stop the slave trade. We walk the last part of the small path of the great slave route towards Lingo, the place where the chained slaves that had managed to reach the Lake were put into dhows that would sail them across Nyanisi (Lake Nyasa). If you walk slowly and listen carefully, you can hear the soft weeping of the slaves, the rattling of the iron chains, the shouts of the slave raiders who bring about 19,000 slaves a year in this Lake area towards the slave markets at the Indian Ocean. You can smell the sweat of these strong bodies, because all the weak slaves have been left behind, to die on a spot they had never been before. You can see eyes that have lost their last resistance. Even the fear has gone after so many weeks or months walking that long route, often carrying heavy goods and now here at this place in Nkhotakota they know they have to say farewell to the country far away to the West, where they are born, where they grew up with their family, where their beloved are left behind or killed. Truly an open wound in their hearts and now they have to face that big open water in a small dhow that will bring them to an unknown land with an unknown future.

We sail for three days in a small open boat up north and camp along the shores of Lake Malawi. By noon on the second day the Lake gets very rough and we have to go ashore and stay at Chief Sulemani's village. At the end of the third day Mr. Frank our captain doesn't dare to go further north, too far away from home he says. We thank him, pay him and leave him, thankful for what he did for us. At least we have an experience how it is to go on this vast area of crystal-clear water in a small boat.

We drive up north and walk a few stretches along the lake as far as Makuzi Hill. From there we try to find Chisi point. It looks so easy on a map but coming from the land you can walk for miles up and down before you really reach the spot you're looking for. Here at Chisi DL went ashore to accompany the Manganja and Makololo land party. They were afraid for the Mazitu, who were raiding the Kandoli Mountains. The boat with Kirk and his brother Charles went on and DL and his men

got lost in these mountains that at certain points raise up to 3000 feet above the Lake. He walked for four difficult days up and down the steep hills. At night they didn't dare to make a fire afraid that those fierce Mazitu would attack them. We find Chisi point, 300 yards above the lake and follow the beach for a while till we have to go into the hills. The sun is hot, no clouds to protect us. After a long day we reach Nkhata Bay and the next day we continue north through the hills till Chusi. There we find two teachers and a village headman who know of the bay of Mwangina.

Thanks to the good work of Dr Gary Clendennen we know that Mwangina Bay is the place where our Livingstone expedition will end. He forwarded all the studies he did on Livingstone to me and in it is his very punctual study of DL's most northern point he reached in 1861 when exploring the western shores of Lake Nyassa.

Dr. Clendennen had asked me to let him know if Mnt Tinde is still a familiar name. He couldn't find it on any map. When we are at Chusi and go down a steep slope to the Lake I ask one of the teachers: "Is the name Mnt Tinde familiar to you?" "Yes he says it's that highest mountain in the distance, behind it we will find Mwangina Bay". I give him a big smile and now I'm sure I will find the place and can make Gary Clendennen and myself happy.

We go on with strong legs and just some food and a few blankets to spend the night somewhere on our way to Mwangina. Around 4.00 pm we are at the foot of mnt Tinde. DL went around it at the Lakeside. He was desperate in need to find the boat that went further up north. In DL's days the Lake was lower. These days you cannot pass mnt Tinde along the waterside.

We climb up the steep path to the top about 300 yards above the Lake. Just before dark we reach Tinde village, just a few houses with lots of children. We don't have to put up camp because we didn't bring our tents and cooking utensils. We just cut some grass to lie on for this last night of the Big Walk. The surprised, friendly people give us firewood and water and some nsima. In the dark evening we eat with about 25 pair of children eyes staring at us without saying a word and slowly coming nearer and nearer till they are close enough to touch carefully the white skin of our hands and arms.

A big wind with rain attacks us at night and we take our blankets and lie down on a small veranda of one of the huts. Inside there are at least 12 people sleeping. It seems as if the sun has some problems to rise from the lake. Dark clouds in the east promise rain.

We are aware that this is the last day of the Livingstone Expedition. We leave early, walk for about 1 ½ hour on the edge of the great African Rift valley and suddenly the village headman points his hand to a small hidden bay in the distance and says 'Mwangina Bay'.

We go down the very steep slope and suddenly we are at the confluence of the little Mwangina stream with Lake Malawi. Here on this sandy beach on a windy, cloudy morning we have reached the end of the Livingstone expedition 2007 dedicated to the children of Malawi. My dream has come true but already I have that deep gnawing melancholy; my dream has come to an end. We give our flag to very old Chief Mwangina and his very old wife. I got word that Chief Mwangina died in 2011. He had never heard about David Livingstone before we arrived at Mwangina.

Postscript

Kuyenda Ndawala kuvwila wana wamasiye ku Malawi tamala; the Big Walk dedicated to the children of Malawi has finished, were the first words I say when we arrive at the Sonda Youth Centre in Mzuzu after an extra walk we added. We wanted to finish at Sonda.. We were received by dancing Angoni (Mazitu) warriors and lots of happy children calling, wazungu, wazungu... when they saw Cobi and me.

What did you do **to** or what did you do **for** Africa and what did you do to **me** Dr. Livingstone?

Endless discussions about; were you a good leader, did you give proper coordinates, how could you miss the Cabora Bassa rapids when walking from coast to coast? For me these are minor things compared what you did right and how you went on with the people of Africa in a human way. I've also realized when walking through this special country that I was just passing by just like you were passing by and that I only had time to have impressions about the people I met and the area I walked through. If you really want to draw conclusions, you need much more time and make a more scientific plan to study what you intend to sort out. There is still work to do if we want to put these expeditions back on the map and if we want to get more knowledge about the slave trade in this part of Africa. There are still old people who have information that will be lost within a few years, maybe months. But time is the biggest problem. After a full day walking there is little time and energy left to get the most out of the information that is maybe available.

Christianity, fair trade for all, Gods Highway, sources of the Nile, dear Dr. Livingstone were not accomplished in the way you would have liked. But for me you gave Africa a human face, you dared to stand up for the African people, wanted a better life for them and above all you fought for, that the open sore of the world had to be treated. You where my guide to go deeper into Malawi. I tried to discover why things don't change as soon as you are more than a 100 yards from the tar road. There on my expedition I discovered that your expeditions where 1000 times as heavy as mine and I discovered that when you are tired or sick, at least for me it was not possible to keep correct records in my logbook. Still I was able to follow your 1863 and part of 1861 expeditions into the heart of Nyassaland with an accuracy of

about 80 maybe even 85 percent. That's due to your logbook and skills of taking coordinates, even in times of hunger, threatening by Mazitu in a country in a state of war and with all the dead bodies you encountered daily.

I presume Dr. Livingstone, better, I realize Dr. Livingstone you did a great work with the help of all your African men and sometimes women that joined you on your travels through Africa . For me your "faithful servants" there at Chitambo are fellow travellers and explorers just as Christofer Botha and Tobias Hojane were fellow travellers to me.

And then at the end there is only one fellow traveller I walked the whole line with since 1969, my brave, dearest love Cobi.

What I remember most

Little poem about ' dark brown eyes'