

20th July

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life,

clear as crystal,

proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the midst of the street of it,

and on either side of the river,

was there the tree of life...

Revelation 22:1,2a.

Map work: Adventures in Africa

We had one earthly river yesterday. Now for some more...

The exploration and mapping of Africa was a long and difficult process. The routes of the major rivers, the Nile, the Niger, the Congo, the Senegal, the Orange, the Limpopo and the Zambezi all had to be charted. There was a great deal of interest in the source of the Nile. This was discovered to be Lake Victoria in 1858 by John Hanning Speke (1827-1864) although he was not proved to have been correct until some years after his discovery.



Two other rivers, the Niger and the Congo, were confused at first, largely because of the work of an earlier Scottish explorer Mungo Park (1771-1806) whose colourful and exciting book *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, together with his mysterious disappearance and death helped to inspire interest in Africa among the general public in Britain. Look at a map of Africa and study the courses of these two rivers.

Many European expeditions to chart the Niger had been unsuccessful. In 1788 the African Association was formed with the aim of encouraging the exploration of Africa. One of the association's main objectives was to find the River Niger. It was this association which sent Mungo Park to Africa in 1795.

In 1795 Mungo Park sailed to the Gambia with the objective of charting the course of the Gambia River and of finding the River Niger. He reached the Gambia River and travelled upstream for two hundred miles until he reached a British trading station called Pisania (modern name: Karantaba Tenda). Here he studied the local Mandinka language and collected as much information as he could about the area. Then, with two local guides, he started for the interior which was at that time completely unexplored. The route he selected after considering all the information he had been able to gather, passed across the upper part of the Senegal Basin and through a semi-desert region called

Kaarta, a kingdom in the western part of what is now **Mali**. It was not an easy journey.

While travelling in Ludamar, (the empire of the Islamic Berber tribesmen known as Moors) in modern west Mali, Mungo Park was captured. He was imprisoned by Ali, the ruler of the Moors, for four months. He was an object of great curiosity at first because of the colour of his skin but he was treated with cruelty and robbed of everything he had brought with him. However, he was able to escape. Now he was alone and had nothing except his horse and a pocket compass which he had managed to preserve because the Moors were afraid of it.

Evading recapture, Mungo Park finally reached the River Niger on **20th July** 1796. He was the first European to do so. Here is his description of the moment:

*Just before it was dark we took up our lodging for the night at a small, village, where I procured some victuals for myself and some corn for my horse, at the moderate price of a button, and was told that I should see the Niger (which they call Jolliba, or "the great water") early the next day.... The thoughts of seeing the Niger in the morning, and the troublesome buzzing of the mosquitoes, prevented me from shutting my eyes during the night, and I had saddled my horse and was in readiness before daylight; but on account of the wild beasts we were obliged to wait until the people were stirring and the gates opened. This happened to be a market-day at Segou [modern name **Ségou**], and the roads were everywhere filled with people carrying different articles to sell. We passed four large villages, and at eight o'clock saw the smoke over Segou*



...we rode together through some marshy ground where, as I was anxiously looking around for the river, one of [the Kaartans] called out, geo affili ("see water"), and looking forwards, I saw with infinite pleasure the great object of my mission – the long sought for majestic Niger, glittering in the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing slowly to the eastwards. I hastened to the brink, and having drunk of the water, lifted up my fervent thanks in prayer to the Great Ruler of all things, for having thus far crowned my endeavours with success.

Mungo Park was slightly surprised to find the river flowing eastwards, although he had been told by Africans that it did. He had expected it to flow westwards. He did not give up his theory that it joined the Congo, however. He followed the river downstream 80 miles to Silla. Here he had to turn back. He was ill with fever and had nothing left of food or money to enable him to continue. However, he did not take the decision lightly:

Worn down by sickness, exhausted with hunger and fatigue, half naked, and without any article of value by which I might procure provisions, clothes, or lodging, I began to reflect seriously on my situation. I was now convinced, by painful experience, that the obstacles to my further progress were insurmountable. The tropical rains were already set in with all their violence... But above all, I perceived that I was advancing more and more within the power of those merciless fanatics [the Moors]... I was apprehensive that... I should sacrifice my life to no purpose... my discoveries would perish with me."

Mungo Park set off on his second expedition to Africa to explore the Niger in 1805. Here is an episode he relates from this second journey. It gives a flavour of the kind of tales which made his book so popular. (Mr Anderson had accompanied him from England and is now very sick with

fever. Mungo Park has carried him on his back across a river and is now leading the pack animal on which rides):

We had not proceeded above a mile before we heard on our left a noise very much like the barking of a large mastiff, but ending in a hiss like the fuf of a cat. I thought it must be some large monkey; and was just observing to Mr Anderson, "What a bouncing fellow that must be," when we heard another bark nearer to us, and presently a third still nearer, accompanied with a growl.

I now suspected that some wild animal meant to attack us, but could not conjecture of what species it was likely to be. We had not proceeded a hundred yards further when, coming to an opening in the bushes, I was not a little surprised to see three lions coming towards us. They were not so red as the lion I formerly saw in Bambarra,¹ but of a dusky colour, like the colour of an ass. They were very large, and came bounding over the long grass, not one after another, but all abreast of each other. I was afraid, if I allowed them to come too near us and my piece should misfire, that we should be all devoured by them; I therefore let go the bridle, and walked forward to meet them.

As soon as they were within a long shot of me I fired at the centre one. I do not think I hit him but they all stopt, looked at each other, and then bounded away a few paces, when one of them stopt and looked back at me. I was too busy in loading my piece to observe their motions as they went away, and was very happy to see the last of them march slowly off amongst the bushes.

We had not proceeded above half a mile farther, when we heard another bark and growl close to us among the bushes. This was doubtless one of the lions before seen, and I was afraid they would follow us until dark, when they would have too many opportunities of springing on us unawares. I therefore got Mr Anderson's call [a bosun's whistle²] and made as loud a whistling and noise as possible. We heard no more of them.

Mungo Park encountered great opposition from the Moors who did their best to kill him and ended up having to keep to the centre of the river Niger (which is two to three miles wide at some points) in his boat and adopt a policy of a hostile attitude to any native people who approached. The last communication from him spoke of his intention to arrive at the coast, which he intended to reach without stopping anywhere, around the end of January 1806. No more was heard from him.

It was not until 1812 that, following a British government investigation, it was confirmed that he had been drowned following a native attack at the Niger rapids at **Bussa**.

Can you find the places mentioned on a map of Africa? In today's Optional Resources files are some pages from a project about homes around the world which show you some African houses. Mungo Park would have stayed in some houses very like these.

¹ In present day Mali.

² You can hear what this sounds like here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h35EnS0MVGM> as they are still used in the Royal Navy.