In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Burton and Speke’s encounter in Bath, September 1864, and their ‘Nile Duel’ which never happened.
Bath and the Nile Explorers

In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Burton & Speke’s encounter in Bath, September 1864, and their ‘Nile Duel’...which never happened
This account has been compiled using archive material from Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution (BRLSI), the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), The Bath Chronicle, Bath Central Library (Local Studies), Swindon & Wiltshire History Centre, and other sources, by Jane Sparrow-Niang.


The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the following individuals and institutions for photographs and illustrations: Royal Geographical Society, National Portrait Gallery, Dutch National Archives, Haags Historisch Museum, Bath Central Library (Local Studies), Bath in Time, Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution, David Baker, Roger Bolton, Dan Brown, Jude Harris, Garth MacIntyre, Cam McLeay, Marzolino/RTF.com, Jeremy Mayes, Rosemary & Kit Routledge, and Matt Williams.

Errors and omissions remain the author’s alone.

Drawings: Jeremy Mayes

Cover design: Jude Harris

Design: Lucy Frontani

Published in Great Britain by Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution 2014.

This is the third in a series of pamphlets published by BRLSI.

1. Mr Pinch’s Well

2. Adventures of a Merchant Banker

Available from Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution, 16-18 Queen Square, Bath BA1 2HN www.brlsi.org and local bookshops.

© Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism, review, as permitted under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored on a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

ISBN 978-0-9544941-7-9
Contents

Introduction by Alexander Maitland 1
Part I: Bath and the Nile Explorers 7
Part II: Exploration, Empire and the Advancement of Science 17
Part III: The 21st Century Nile 39
Bibliography 42
Caput Nili quaerere
Introduction

The mid-19th century was a ‘Golden Age’ of African exploration and discovery. Established in 1830, the Royal Geographical Society sponsored expeditions led by Burton, Speke and Livingstone to Lake Tanganyika, Lake Victoria, and the Zambezi. Of this saga, the search for the Nile was only an episode – albeit one of major importance.

Since its merger with the African Association in 1831, the Royal Geographical Society had fostered a serious tradition of exploration, cartography and research, and the mantle of such iconic explorers as Burckhardt and Mungo Park. The Industrial Revolution, and the consequent expansion of manufacturing and trade, increased demand for new markets and sources of raw materials.

Christianity, conquest, and commerce followed in the wake of geographical discoveries. Missionaries, encouraged by the Evangelical Movement, sought not only converts, but rivers, lakes, and mountains. Krapf, Erhardt, and Rebmann explored Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro and sent intriguing reports to the Royal Geographical Society of the Ukerewe, a vast inland sea (in reality, three large lakes) which inspired Burton and Speke’s 1856-59 Lake Regions expedition. In 1858 they discovered Lake Tanganyika. Six months later, Speke sighted Lake Victoria which, to Burton’s astonishment, he claimed was the source of the Nile. Lake Nyasa, the third lake forming the legendary sea of Ukerewe, was visited by David Livingstone in 1859.

Apart from missionaries, many of the early explorers were private adventurers or army officers. Samuel Baker and his wife Florence journeyed independently. Captains Richard Francis Burton, John Hanning Speke, and James Augustus Grant did so during long leave from military service in India. Baker, Speke, and Grant were keen sportsmen who hunted big game in Sri Lanka, India, and Tibet. In this way they developed an eye for country and at the same time learned survival skills, besides mapping and surveying.

The presiding genius in this era, Sir Roderick Murchison – a noted geologist, four times President of the Royal Geographical Society, and a founder of the British Association for the Advancement of Science
– gave influential support to many explorers, Burton, Speke and Livingstone among them. Murchison backed Burton's ill-fated expedition to Somaliland in 1855, and Burton and Speke’s controversial expedition to the African lakes. In 1859, the Royal Geographical Society’s Council approved proposals submitted by Burton and Speke for an expedition to verify Speke’s then unproven claim that Lake Victoria was the source of the White Nile. This expedition in 1860-63 was led by Speke, accompanied by his devoted friend and staunch ally, Grant.

Despite the Royal Geographical Society’s even-handed treatment of Burton and Speke, its over-cautious estimate of the cost of their previous expedition left both men personally responsible for any debts it had incurred. The late Dorothy Middleton – Honorary Vice-President of the Royal Geographical Society, and for many years Assistant Editor of the Geographical Journal – has gone so far as to suggest that it had been disputes between Burton and Speke over money, more than arguments about the source of the Nile, which damaged their relationship.

On 15 September 1864, the day before Burton and Speke had been invited to debate their claims at a special meeting held in the Royal Mineral Water Hospital at Bath, Speke was killed in a shooting accident at his cousin’s nearby estate. More than a decade later, in 1875, Henry Morton Stanley circumnavigated Lake Victoria and finally proved, beyond doubt, that Speke had found the source of the Nile.

Alexander Maitland
Captain Richard Francis Burton 1821-1890

- 1821 Born in Torquay, Devon; lived in England, France, and Italy
- Captain, East India Company
- Expeditions to Mecca & Somaliland
- 1856-59 Led expedition, accompanied by Speke, to search for the source of the Nile
- 1859 Awarded RGS Founder’s Medal ‘for his various exploratory enterprises, and especially for his perilous expedition with Captain JH Speke to the great lakes in Eastern Africa’
- 1861 Married Isabel Arundell
- Consular postings to Brazil, Fernando Po [Equatorial Guinea], Syria, and Italy
- Published more than 30 books
- A linguist with knowledge of over 25 languages
- 1886 Knighted
- 1890 Died at Trieste, Italy

Captain John Hanning Speke 1827-1864

- 1827 Born at Orleigh Court, Devon
- Lived at Jordans, Ilminster, Somerset
- Captain, East India Company
- 1855 Crimea
- Expeditions to Eastern and Central Africa with Burton (1853; 1856-59), Grant (1860-63) and Sidi Mubarak Bombay (1856-59; 1860-63)
- First recorded European to visit the source of the Nile, Jinja, Uganda & Lake Victoria
- 1861 Awarded RGS Founder’s Medal ‘for his eminent geographical discoveries in Africa, especially his discovery of the great lake Victoria Nyanza’
- 1863 Published Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile and What Led to the Discovery of the Source of the Nile
- 1864 Died at Neston Park, Box, Wiltshire
- Buried at St Andrew’s Church, Dowlish Wake, Somerset

Captain Richard F Burton (1821-1890) © Royal Geographical Society
Captain John Hanning Speke 1827-1864 © Royal Geographical Society
Captain James Augustus Grant 1827-1892
- 1827 Born at Nairn, Aberdeenshire
- Captain, East India Company
- Accompanied Speke on expedition to Central Africa to search for the source of the Nile (1860-1863)
- 1864 Awarded RGS Founder’s Medal ‘for his journey across Eastern Equatorial Africa with Captain Speke’
- 1864 Published A Walk across Africa; or, domestic scenes from my Nile Journal
- 1869 Married Nina Frances Kennard and had two daughters
- 1892 Died at Nairn, Aberdeenshire

James Augustus Grant © National Portrait Gallery, London

Sir Roderick Impey Murchison 1792-1871
- 1792 Born at Tarradale, Easter Ross
- Links with Bath; father buried at St. Nicholas Church, Bathampton
- Geologist and President of the Royal Geographical Society (1843-1845; 1851-1853; 1856-1859; 1862-1871)
- President of the Geographical and Geological sections of the British Association
- 1815 Married Charlotte Hugonin
- 1863 KCB & 1866 Baronet
- 1871 Awarded RGS Founder’s Medal ‘Who for 40 years watched over the Society with more than paternal solicitude, and has at length placed it among the foremost of our scientific societies’
- 1871 Died in London

Sir Roderick Impey Murchison © Royal Geographical Society
Dr David Livingstone 1813-1873

- 1813 Born at Blantyre, Scotland
- 1840 1st visit to Africa 1840-1856
- 1845 Married Mary Moffatt
- 1855 Awarded RGS Founder’s Medal ‘For his recent explorations in Africa’
- 1858 Started 1st expedition to Central Africa 1858-1864
- 1864 Ended 2nd expedition and returns to UK
- 1865 Started 3rd expedition to Africa, searching for the source of the Nile
- 1866 Left Zanzibar, on his last expedition
- 1869 Arrived at Ujiji, Lake Tanganyika (Tanzania)
- 1871 Met Stanley at Ujiji
- 1873 Died near Lake Bangweulu (Zambia)
- 1874 Buried at Westminster Abbey, London

‘Dr Livingstone – This distinguished traveller honoured Mr King of Milsom Street, with several sittings for photograph yesterday, to add to the series of British Association celebrities …These we have no doubt will be eagerly sought after by the many admirers of Dr Livingstone’

The Bath Chronicle, September 1864

Sidi Mubarak ‘Bombay’ 1820-1885

- Circa 1820 Born in Yao kingdom (Tanzania - Mozambique border)
- Captured by Arab slavers and taken to India to work as a slave
- Became a free man, returned to Zanzibar and joined the Sultan’s army
- 1857 Recruited as a guide by Speke and Burton ‘The gem of our party…is one Sidi Mubarak’ (Burton)
- Completed expeditions to Central Africa with Burton and Speke, Speke and Grant, Stanley, and Cameron, covering more than 5,970 miles
- 1876 Awarded RGS medal and a pension for his role in expeditions with Speke
- 1885 Died in Zanzibar

Moobarik Bombay who has accompanied Captain Speke during two expeditions in Central Africa © Royal Geographical Society
Isabel, Lady Burton (néé Arundell) 1831-1896

- 1831 Born in London
- 1861 Married Richard Francis Burton
- Accompanied her husband to consular postings in Brazil, Syria and Italy
- 1893 Published Life of Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton
- 1896 Died in London
- Buried, with her husband, in an ‘Arab tent’ mausoleum at St Mary Magdalen Church, Mortlake, Surrey

‘I forbid the printing by any one of a single immodest word ...or allow to be issued a single coarse or indecent word in any of my dear husband’s writings’ (The Last Will & Testament of Isabel Lady Burton, 28th December 1865)
Part I: Bath and the Nile Explorers

In 1864, in Bath, Murchison highlighted the lack of geographical knowledge about Africa and the White Nile in his address to British Association members:

‘Look first at the most recent maps of Africa, and see what enormous lacunae have to be filled in, what vast portions of it the foot of the white man has never trodden...In the central equatorial region, but for the example set by the three gallant officers of our Indian armies, Burton, Speke and Grant, and encouraged and supported, I rejoice to say, by the Royal Geographical Society, those countries would have remained as unknown as they have throughout all history, from the days of Ptolemy to our own. But if the chief water-basin of the White Nile has been boldly outlined, how much does there remain to be done...Is it not essential that the Victoria Nyanza of Speke, a body of water as large as Scotland, which has only been touched at a few points on its southern western, and northern shores, should have all its shores and affluents examined?...If central Africa is ever to advance in civilisation, and its inhabitants are to be brought into commercial relations with Europe, one of the best chances of our accomplishing it will, in my opinion, consist in rendering the great White Nile a highway of intercourse and traffic’ (The Bath Chronicle, British Association Special Daily Edition, 16th September 1864).

The British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Bath, September 1864

The 34th annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) – now known as the British Science Association (BSA) – was held in September 1864, hosted by the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution (BRLSI).

Scientists and explorers gathered in Bath – including Dr David Livingstone, Captain Richard Francis Burton, Captain John Hanning Speke, and Sir Roderick Impey Murchison – with exploration, empire and the advancement of science on their agenda.

The Royal Mineral Water Hospital hosted all ‘Section E’ Geography and Ethnology meetings, and the Theatre Royal was used for special events on the programme such as the inaugural address by the President of the British Association, Sir Charles Lyell, and a lecture by Livingstone.
Bath Chronicle played a key role throughout, publishing special daily supplements and, afterwards, a bound copy of the proceedings. The Geography and Ethnology section offered papers and reports about the newly explored regions of Australia and Central Africa, and
the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) played a key role in the proceedings with Murchison, the RGS President, in the Chair. On 19th September 1864, at the Theatre Royal, Livingstone spoke about his travels in Africa and the ‘gigantic evil’ of slavery:

‘The Theatre on Monday night was again crowded in every part by some 2000 persons anxious to hear Dr Livingstone’s account of his Africa travels’ (BAAS, 1864)
Livingstone did not look forward to public speaking engagements with much relish, according to letters he wrote shortly before the meeting in Bath:

‘...today have sat down to my speech, the thought of which always brings a cold shiver’ (Letter to John Kirk, 1st September 1864)

‘I am going to the British Association at Bath and am bothered what to say, as public speaking is totally against the grain in my composition. I wish you would do it for me’ (Letter to William Sunley, 13th September 1864)

Local excursions were arranged by carriage to Frome, Holwell, Bristol and Clifton for members and rail excursions were offered to Salisbury, Old Sarum, and Stonehenge. By the close of the September 1864 meeting, 2789 members and associates had attended, of whom 1059 were ladies and 9 were ‘foreigners.’

British Association for the Advancement of Science members on an outing to Holwell Quarry, near Frome, Somerset, 1864. Courtesy of BRLSI. Photograph courtesy of Matt Williams.
The explorer, Captain Burton, and his wife, Isabel, stayed at the Royal Hotel in Bath whilst they attended the British Association meeting. Burton knew Bath because his parents – Lt. Col. John Netterville Burton and Martha Baker – lived at 20 Bennett Street during the 1850s until their deaths in 1854 and 1857.

Captain Speke stayed at Monks Park, near Box in Wiltshire, with his brother, William – a magistrate. Livingstone and his daughter, Agnes, were guests of Dr and Miss Watson at No. 13, The Circus. However, Captain James Augustus Grant, Speke’s companion on the 1860-1863 expedition in search of the source of the Nile, did not attend. He was in Edinburgh working on his book – ‘A Walk across Africa’ – despite receiving an invitation from Speke and his brother ‘to their home in Somersetshire to be present at the British Association in Bath’ (Grant, 1864).

Speke was expected to share ‘his remarkable adventures and discoveries …and was regarded as one of the most attractive contributions to the association’ (Western Daily Press, 17th September 1864). Yet, according to Isabel Burton, ‘…Speke had said that if “Burton appeared on the platform at Bath …he would kick him”. I remember Richard’s answer – “Well, that settles it! By God! He shall kick me” and so to Bath we went’ (Isabel Burton, 1893)

Encounter between Captains Speke & Burton, 15th September 1864
On Thursday 15th September 1864, at the Royal Mineral Water Hospital (now the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases), the Section E audience eagerly awaited ‘several celebrities’ including Burton, Speke, and Livingstone. The agenda for the day included an address by Murchison and papers on Jordan, Iran, Central Asia, and China:
'Geography and Ethnology, under the presidency of Sir R I Murchison, reigned supreme in the large room at the Mineral Water Hospital. The section was densely crowded from a very early hour' (The Bath Chronicle, British Association Special Daily Edition, 16th September 1864)

Murchison delighted members with the latest expedition reports:

‘...that chivalrous explorer, Mr Samuel Baker, is successfully examining the central equatorial regions, from which, I trust, he will...determine the real source of the waters which supply the Luta N’zige of Speke and Grant’ (The Bath Chronicle, British Association Special Daily Edition, 16th September 1864)

Tension between Burton and Speke was palpable, as Isabel Burton recalled in her biography of her husband 'Life of Sir Richard Burton':

‘There was to be no speaking on Africa the first day, but the next day was fixed for the 'great discussion between Burton and Speke'...The first day we went on the platform close to Speke. He looked at Richard and at me, and we at him. I shall never forget his face. It was full of sorrow, of yearning and perplexity. Then he seemed to turn to stone. After a while he began to fidget a great deal, and exclaimed half aloud, “Oh, I cannot stand this any longer!” He got up to go out. The man nearest him said, “Shall you want your chair again, sir? May I have it? Shall you come back?” and he answered, “I hope not” and left the hall' (Isabel Burton, 1893)
The ‘Nile Duel’, 16th September 1864

‘Early in the forenoon, fixed for what silly tongues called the ‘Nile Duel’, I found a large assembly in the rooms of Section E’ (R. Burton, 1864)

Members who gathered at the Royal Mineral Water Hospital expected to hear a debate, chaired by Murchison, between the Nile explorers, Captain Burton and Captain Speke, ‘...a Somersetshire man, who would, in the course of the meeting of the Association, give an interesting account of the Nile’ (The Bath Chronicle Special Daily Edition, 16th September 1864).

Their conflicting views, about the location of the source of the Nile, guaranteed ‘the combined allures of a sporting contest, a scientific debate and an evangelical demonstration’ (Morris, 1992). Isabel Burton described what happened that day:

‘...a large crowd was assembled for this famous discussion. All the distinguished people were with the Council; Richard alone was excluded, and stood on the platform – we two alone, he with his notes in his hand. There was a delay of about twenty-five minutes, and then the Council and speakers filed in and announced the terrible accident out shooting that had befallen poor Speke shortly after his leaving the hall the day before... When we got home he [Richard] wept long and bitterly, and I was for many a day trying to comfort him’ (Isabel Burton, 1893)

Murchison announced the sad death of Speke to the gathering: ‘...it was only yesterday that I saw my eminent friend, Captain Speke, and he was to have come here to-day to speak to you on subjects of African discovery’ (The Bath Chronicle, 17th September 1864).

Burton, visibly shocked and unable to speak, asked the Secretary, Mr Markham, to read out a message to the meeting:

‘I cannot touch on African matters without a few words of deeply felt allusion to my old colleague, Captain Speke. The differences of opinion that are known to have lain between us while he was alive, make it more incumbent on me to publicly express my sincere feeling of admiration of his character and enterprise, and my deep sense of his loss now that he is so suddenly and shockingly removed from among his geographical associates’ (The Bath Chronicle, 17th September 1864)

The much anticipated ‘Nile Duel’ never took place. Instead, British Association members listened to Burton read his paper on Dahomey (Benin).
Speke’s death & funeral
On 15th September 1864, in the afternoon, Speke had gone to his cousin’s estate at Neston Park, about 10 miles from Bath, near Box, in Wiltshire. Whilst out pheasant shooting with his cousin, George Fuller, and the gamekeeper, Speke died.

Death of Captain Speke
We have to announce, with the deepest regret, the sudden and shocking death of Captain John Hanning Speke, the discoverer of the source of the Nile. His untimely end cast a gloom over the British Association meetings yesterday, and formed the theme of conversation during the day. The sad news was received almost with incredulity, inasmuch as the gallant and celebrated gentleman was on Thursday morning seen in the Grand Pump-room, in our city, and many members and associates were looking forward to his appearance in the Geographical Section, there to meet and discuss African discoveries with other renowned travellers...

Melancholy Death of Captain Speke
Inquest on the Body
On Thursday, the famous Captain Speke met with an untimely death. He was on a visit to his uncle, Mr.J.Fuller, Neston Park, near Corsham, and in the afternoon was out shooting with Mr. George Fuller, when through the accidental discharge of his gun...he received a mortal wound, and soon expired. His body was taken to the residence of Mr. W. Speke, Monk’s Park, Corsham, where the inquest on the body of the lamented “hero of the Nile,” was held yesterday before Mr. Kemm, coroner for Corsham, and a respectable jury. Deceased was 38 years of age...

Courtesy of Bath in Time – Bath Central Library. Photograph courtesy of Dan Brown
Speke’s funeral was held at St Andrew’s Church in Dowlish Wake – part of the Speke family’s ancestral lands – on 23rd September 1864. The mourners included Livingstone, Murchison, and Captain James Augustus Grant – Speke’s Nile expedition companion – who travelled from Scotland. Burton and his wife, Isabel, did not attend. Livingstone recounted the day in his journal:

‘23rd Sept. Went to the funeral of poor Captain Speke...He was buried at Dowlish, a village where his family have a vault. Captain Grant, a fine fellow, put a wreath or immortelle upon the coffin as it passed us in church. It was composed of mignonette and wild violets’ (Blakie, 1880)

Burton wasted no time airing his differences with his late companion in a letter to The Times, only a few days after Speke’s death:

‘Without disrespect to the memory of Captn. Speke, I may say that the popular version of the discovery of Lake Nyanza and of the ‘settlement of the Nile sources’ is in advance of the fact...the sources of the rivers are not in Lakes!...the discovery of the Nile sources can hardly be held a thing settled in all future times’ (R. Burton, September 1864)

Two months later, Burton published ‘The Nile Basin’. He commented on Speke’s death: ‘The charitable say he shot himself; the uncharitable, that I shot him’; the source of the Nile ‘arose like the ghost of discord between us’ (R. Burton, 1864).

Murchison proposed a monument for Speke and, in 1866, a memorial was erected in Kensington Gardens, London, inscribed ‘In memory of Speke Victoria Nyanza and the Nile, 1864’.
Speke’s Tomb,
St Andrew’s Church,
Dowlish Wake, Somerset
Photograph courtesy of
Jude Harris

Speke Monument,
Kensington Gardens, London
Photograph courtesy of
Jane Sparrow-Niang
Part II: Exploration, Empire, and the Advancement of Science

The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) encouraged expeditions to Africa to acquire geographical knowledge and to open the continent to commerce from Britain and Europe. The RGS ‘Hints to Travellers’ was first published in 1854 recommending suitable clothing and equipment for expeditions.

Burton and Speke’s Expedition to Central Africa 1856-1859

In 1856 the RGS Expeditionary Committee agreed to support Burton on an expedition to Central Africa, giving these instructions:

‘The objects of the expedition are geographical...to make the best of your way to the reputed Lake of Nyassa...to ascertain the depth and nature of its waters and its tributaries; to explore the country around it...minerals and other products and commerce...to the probable source of the Bahr el Abiad [White Nile] which it will be your next great object to discover’

(R. Burton, 1859)

Burton recruited Speke to be his second in command and they both arrived in Zanzibar, in late 1856, to prepare for their overland journey to the Central African interior. In a letter to the RGS, in December 1856, Burton wrote of the challenges which lay ahead:

‘Zanzibar 28th December...I arrived here a week ago...People here tell frightful stories about the danger and difficulty of the journey but I don’t believe a word of it...We are in excellent health and spirits, so adieu and with Speke’s compliments, Yours Ever, The Pilgrim’

Large teams of local porters, guides, interpreters and cooks – including women – accompanied European explorers on their expeditions. Most recruitment was done in Zanzibar, including ‘Bombay Africans’ – former slaves freed by the Royal Navy who were taken to the British Residency in Bombay (Mumbai), India and then returned to Africa. Sir Bartle Frere, RGS President (1873-74) and Governor of Bombay, recommended explorers to select ‘Bombay Africans’ for their expeditions.

One such former slave and ‘Bombay African’ was Sidi Mubarak ‘Bombay’, who was recruited by Burton and Speke to be their guide and interpreter. Bombay was captured by Swahili slave traders and later
Expedition Routes to Central Africa 1856-1877
(Adapted from Ondaatje, C., 1998. *Journey to the Source of the Nile*)
Map courtesy of Jeremy Mayes
returned to Zanzibar as a free man, on the death of his master. During the expedition, on 3rd March 1858, Bombay recounted his experience to Speke:

‘...Most of the villagers were captured like myself...all the captives were grouped together, and tethered with chains or ropes...We were then driven to the slave market [in Zanzibar], where I was bought by an Arab merchant, and taken off to India' (Speke, 1863)

Burton's expedition diary describes Bombay as ‘The gem of our party’, who was the ‘confident servant and interpreter of my companion, he being the only man with whom the latter could converse’ (R. Burton, 1859).

At the time of Burton and Speke’s expedition, slavery was rife in Eastern and Central Africa. A major trading route ran from Lake Tanganyika, via Tabora, to the slave market at Bagamoyo on the Tanzanian coast. Another route, over 1500 miles long, lay between the Congo Basin and the Swahili coast, via eastern Uganda and Kenya. Zanzibar had a thriving slave market until 1870, when slavery was abolished by the Sultan:

‘At Zanzibar the price of a boy under puberty is from 15 to 30 dollars...A man in the prime of life, from 25 to 40, fetches from 13 to 20 dollars...The price of females is everywhere about one-third higher than that of males’ (R. Burton, 1859)

Before leaving Zanzibar, Burton and Speke equipped themselves with
goods such as fabric, brass wire, and beads to use as currency and 'hongo' or sweeteners:

‘For trading purposes a number of different kinds [of beads] must be laid in – for travellers, the coral or scarlet, the pink porcelain, and the large blue glass bead, are more useful’ (R. Burton, 1859)

Donkeys and mules assisted the porters in carrying their many provisions. Burton sketched the rear view of a heavily laden donkey in his 1858 field notebook and labelled his drawing: ‘this is what our asses look like’.

On 16th June 1857, Burton and Speke sailed to the mainland to begin their journey to the interior, noting ‘The rate of caravan marching in East Africa greatly varies...In cool moonlit mornings...4 miles an hour...under normal circumstances, the greatest speed will be 3 miles an hour...’ (R. Burton, 1859)

Wildlife was abundant, with Burton reporting ‘plenty of hippopotamus’ in his field notebook (1858). Speke loved hunting and collecting specimens: ‘I shot a florikan for the pot; and as I had never before seen white rhinoceros, killed him now; though, as no one would eat him, I felt sorry rather than otherwise for what I had done’ (Speke, 1863).

After three months, Burton and Speke arrived with their party at the shores of Lake Nyasa (Tanganyika) but they were in poor health, unable to appreciate the views because of temporary blindness and opthalmia. Hazards lay everywhere. On 8th March 1858, whilst camping on an island in Lake Tanganyika, a beetle crawled into Speke’s ear and using a penknife, he ‘applied the point’ to dislodge it:

‘...although a few thrusts quieted him, the point also wounded my ear so badly that suppuration took place...It was the most painful thing I ever remember to have endured’ (Speke, 1863)

In July 1858, Burton was unwell again and not fit to travel, so he stayed at Tabora to gather intelligence whilst Speke travelled north to look for the Nyanza Lake, accompanied by 30 men. On 3rd August 1858, they saw a huge lake which Speke named in honour of Queen Victoria:

‘...the vast expanse of the pale blue waters of the Nyanza burst suddenly upon my gaze...But the pleasure of the mere view vanished in the presence of those more intense and exciting emotions which are called up by the consideration of the commercial and geographical importance of the prospect before me. I no longer felt any doubt that the lake at my feet gave birth to that interesting river, the source of which has been the subject of so much speculation, and the object of so many explorers’ (Speke, 1863)
After marching 500 miles over 45 days, Speke rejoined Burton and announced:

‘...the startling fact that he had discovered the sources of the White Nile...the moment he sighted the Nyanza, he felt at once no doubt but that the “lake at his feet gave birth to that interesting river which has been the subject of so much speculation and the object of so many explorers”’ (R. Burton, 1859)

Speke commented that ‘The trip to the Nyanza was particularly pleasant’ (Speke, 1859). Speke guessed that Victoria Nyanza was separated from the White Nile at Gondokoro in Sudan, by a series of rapids, having measured the lake’s elevation. Burton acknowledges this view in his journal: ‘The altitude, the conformation of the Nyanza Lake, the argillaceous colour and the sweetness of its waters, combine to suggest that it may be one of the feeders of the White Nile’ (R. Burton, 1859), writing from Zangomero, in a letter to the Secretary of the RGS.

Burton and Speke arrived back at the Indian Ocean coast on 2nd February 1859, then travelled to Aden together. Speke sailed for England, leaving Burton behind to recuperate as he felt unwell. When Speke arrived in London, on 8th May 1859, he told Murchison and Lord Ripon, the RGS President, that he had found Lake Victoria and was invited to present papers to the Royal Geographical Society. In a letter to Shaw, the RGS
Secretary, Speke clearly stated his views:

‘I believe most firmly that the Nyanza is one Source of the Nile if not the principal one’ (Letter to Shaw, RGS, 8th May 1859)

When Burton returned, just two weeks later, he discovered Speke had not only presented their expedition to the public but also that the RGS had promised funding for Speke to return to Central Africa. Speke records this in his journal: ‘Sir Roderick…said to me “Speke, we must send you there again”’ (Speke, 1863).

Speke made efforts to incorporate Burton’s input, as his letter to the RGS shows:

‘If a geographical paper is required to illustrate my map I shall be very happy indeed to write one. At the same time I think it would be unfair to Captain Burton Commandant of the Expedition if I touched upon anything not entirely relating to that branch. Especially as I know that Burton has been very industrious in observing and obtaining great masses of matter appertaining to the manners, customs, and production resources of all the country traversed by the expedition’ (Letter to RGS, 19th May 1859)

However, Burton found ‘everything had been done for, or rather against, me. My companion now stood forth in his true colours – an angry rival’ (R. Burton, 1872). From this point, their relationship deteriorated, addressing each other ‘Dear Sir’ in their letters.

The location of the source of the Nile continued to be controversial, as Speke remarked, when he was preparing to present his papers to the RGS:

‘My three papers for Monday are now written...The first one describes the physical Geography, and the means I employed to construct the map of the country; I like it the best, and think it likely to create much discussion if all arguments are not annihilated by it’ (Letter to Shaw, RGS, 9th June 1859)

Although assured of RGS funds for his next expedition, Speke had to wait for Government support to be confirmed, and, in a letter to the RGS, he recalled his differences with Burton:

‘have you heard anything about my going out again from the Govt: I am getting quite anxious about it as the time...is slipping away...I have just received a letter from Burton and am much amused to hear that he differs from me in his accounts of Africa...I thought he would for he used to snub me so unpleasantly when talking about anything that I often kept my own council [sic] – B. Is one of those men who never can be wrong, and will never acknowledge an error’ (Letter to Shaw, RGS Secretary, 28th October 1859)
Speke and Grant’s Expedition to Central Africa 1860-1863

Before leaving England on his expedition in search of the source of the Nile, Speke made arrangements for John Petherick, the British Consul to Sudan, to meet himself and Grant on the White Nile at Gondokoro, to assist their passage to Khartoum, then Cairo and England:

‘Jordans 28 Oct 1859…I have asked Petherick to come here for a few days before he goes out again that we may make arrangements for ripping open Africa together, he from the North and I from the South.’ (Letter from Speke to Shaw, RGS Secretary, 28th October 1859)

Speke chose Captain James August Grant to be his second-in-command:

‘My acquaintance with Captain Speke commenced as far back as 1847…We were both Indian officers, of the same age, and equally fond of field sports…not a shade of jealousy or distrust, or even ill-temper, ever came between us during our wanderings’ (Grant, 1864)
Speke and Grant left Portsmouth on 27\textsuperscript{th} April 1860 for Zanzibar via Madeira, Rio de Janeiro, and South Africa, arriving on 19\textsuperscript{th} August. A month later they sailed to the African mainland and began their expedition from Bagamoyo (Tanzania) with a caravan of 213 members, 12 mules, 3 donkeys and 22 goats. Speke’s journal lists his guides and the women who accompanied them: ‘…Bombay (no wife with him), Baraka (a chief’s daughter), Wadimoyo (a woman called Manamaka), Sangizo (his wife and sister)’ (Speke, 1863). Other women – Sikujuna, Raziki, N’yamezi and Faida – were amongst the party who reached Cairo and completed the expedition in 1863.

Speke and Grant recognised the value of local knowledge:

‘…I was not only surprised at the amount of information about distant places I was enabled to get here from these men, but also at the correctness of their vast and varied knowledge, as afterwards I tested it by observation and the statements of others’ (Speke, 1863)
Speke’s main role was ‘to map the country’, whereas Grant focused on ‘botanical collections and thermometrical registers’ (Speke, 1863), in the expedition’s daily schedule:

‘...On arrival in camp every day came the ascertaining, by boiling-point thermometer, of the altitude of the station above sea-level; of the latitude ... by the meridian altitude of a star taken with a sextant; and of the compass variation...The rest of our day went in breakfasting after the march was over, a pipe, to prepare us for rummaging the fields and villages to discover their contents for scientific purposes, dinner close to sunset, and tea and a pipe before turning in at night’ (Speke, 1863)
Members of the expedition met many hazards along the way, including wildlife: ‘...vicious insects fixed upon our skin, biting and clinging like leeches...These ants are no larger than ordinary ones in England, but bite with the greatest ferocity’ (Grant, 1864).

Along the route, the expedition party met kings and chiefs, negotiating their safe passage with gifts of cloth and beads, and sharing news from Europe:

‘King Rumanika could not understand how it was I spent so much and travelled so far, or how it happened such a great country [Britain] was ruled by a woman [Queen Victoria]’ (Speke, 1863)

In 1862, Speke lived at the ‘kibuga’, or palace, of Mtesa, King of Buganda for nearly five months from 19th February to 7th July, in the province of Bandawarogo, some days march west of Lake Nyanza (Victoria) and wrote extensively in his journal about his stay:

‘...Our confinement, for we were in reality prisoners to Mtesa’s friendship, became, at length, almost intolerable...But every effort we made seemed only to increase the king’s desire to keep us at the capital of Uganda’ (Speke, 1864)
‘The palace or entrance quite surprised me by its extraordinary dimensions, and the neatness with which it was kept…and fenced all around with the tall yellow reeds of the common Uganda tiger-grass...’ (Speke, 1863)

Speke received a memento from Mtesa – an African stool or throne (Maitland, 1971). This is now displayed in the Speke collection at the Museum of Somerset in Taunton.

Grant spent time at the palace too, but in early July 1862, he had a leg injury and so the explorers agreed to separate to ensure good progress. Speke was already convinced about where to find the Nile’s source, writing to Murchison at the RGS from ‘Bandowarogo the Kibuga or Palace of Mtesa Uganda’:

‘July 6th 1862...My dear Sir Roderick...the Victoria Nyanza is the true and undisputable source of the Nile’ (Letter from Speke to Murchison, RGS, 6th July 1862)

Speke left Mtesa’s palace on 7th July 1862 and headed for Lake Victoria and the Source of the Nile. He travelled north east via Namavundu, Nasire, Baja, and Urondogani to the River Nile, recording in his journal:

‘21st July 1862...The expedition had now performed its functions. I saw that old father Nile without any doubt rises in the Victoria N’yanza...I now christened the ‘stones’ Ripon Falls, after the nobleman who presided over the Royal Geographical Society when my expedition was got up’ (Speke, 1863)
Speke was spellbound: ‘...most beautiful was the scene...with a magnificent stream from 600 to 700 yards wide, dotted with islets and rocks, the former occupied by fisherman’s huts, the latter by sterns and crocodiles basking in the sun, flowing between the fine high grassy banks, with rich trees and plantains in the background, where herds of the nsunnu and hartebeest could be seen grazing, while the hippopotami were snorting in the water’ (Speke, 1863).

Apparently Speke returned to Mtesa’s court, where he wrote to Rumanika:

‘24th July 1862, Bandowarogo, Mtesa Kibuga...In the Evening Mtesa wishes to know if I would like to shoot Kites in his Palace, but I say no, if he can’t show either Elephants, Buffaloe or Rhinoceros then I won’t be very happy to shoot with him’ (Letter to Rumanika, copied to Murchison, RGS)

He also wrote to Petherick, inviting him to come to Mutesa’s court:

‘26th July 1862 My Dear Petherick...bring a lot of pretty things...Grant is at Karagwe with a game leg and I am sending boats for him’ (Letter to Petherick, copied to Murchison, RGS)
Speke and Grant rejoined each other and travelled together to the River Nile at Karuma Falls, then northward, downstream, to reach King Kamrasi’s court in Unyoro – now in northern Uganda – on 9th November 1862.

On 15th February 1863, after more than two and a half years on their expedition, Speke and Grant arrived in Gondokoro (Juba), Sudan. Petherick, who was meant to be there to meet them, did not arrive in time and reported being cold-shouldered by Speke: ‘Instead of the cordial meeting I had anticipated from the ardently sought-for, and now successful travellers, we were met by coolness…’ (Petherick, 1869). Speke ‘felt much annoyed’ but ‘did not wish to break friendship’ with Petherick (Speke, 1864).

**John Petherick**

1813-1882
- 1813 Born at Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan, Wales
- Studied mining engineering at Breslau University, Eastern Prussia (Poland)
- Worked in Germany and met Murchison on a geology tour
- 1845 Left for Egypt to work for the Viceroy, Muhammed Ali Pasha, searching for coal and trading in gum arabic
- 1849 Appointed British Vice Consul, Sudan and travelled to Congo-Nile watershed
- 1853 Moved to Khartoum to trade in ivory
- 1859 Returned to Britain
- 1860 Married Katherine Edelmann and appointed British Consul in Sudan
- 1861 Published *Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa*
- 1864 Expected to meet Speke and Grant at Gondokoro and assist their return to Britain
- 1869 Published *Travels in Central Africa and Explorations of the Western Nile Tributaries* with his wife, Katherine
- 1882 Died at Kensington, London

**Katherine Petherick**

(née Edelmann) 1828-1877
- 1828 Born; christened in the Isle of Man
- 1860 Married John Petherick
- 1869 Published *Travels in Central Africa and Explorations of the Western Nile Tributaries* with her husband, John
- 1877 Died at St Austell, Cornwall

‘This [Sudan] is a horrible place!...All the Europeans traffic in slaves, even the Dutch ladies’ (Letter from Katherine to her sister, 1864)
Instead, to Speke and Grant’s surprise, Samuel and Florence Baker were waiting at Gondokoro and had organised boats for them back to Khartoum:

‘At a distance of about a hundred yards I recognised my old friend Speke... For the moment he did not recognise me...and as I was totally unexpected, my sudden appearance in the centre of Africa appeared to him incredible... Speke appeared the more worn of the two; he was excessively lean, but in reality he was in good tough condition; he had walked the whole way from Zanzibar, never having once ridden during that wearying march...both men had a fire in the eye that showed the spirit that had led them through’ (Baker, 1866)

Speke and Grant gave their maps to the Bakers, enabling them to trace Luta Nzige, as Samuel Baker recounted: ‘Speke and Grant with characteristic candour and generosity gave me a map of their route, showing that they had been unable to complete the actual exploration of the Nile, and that a most important portion remained to be determined...I had been much disheartened at the idea that the great work was accomplished, and that nothing remained for exploration’ (Baker, 1866).

When the Pethericks finally arrived in Gondokoro, they dined with Speke and Grant, as Katherine records in her journal: ‘During dinner I endeavoured to prevail on Speke to accept our aid, but he drawlingly replied “I do not wish to recognise the succour-dodge”’ (Petherick, 1869). Speke recalled this incident in a letter he wrote the following year, when back in England:

‘19th February 1864, 79 Eccleston Square...Mr Petherick never sent boats to the foot of the Cataracts above Gondokoro, nor did he send any up the Nile, above that point, to look after me. I found Mr Petherick coming from his trading post West of Gondokoro, with a large party of men laden with ivory. In this fact Captain Grant and Dr Murcia both can testify.’ (Letter from Speke to the RGS, 18th February 1864)

Before they left Gondokoro, Grant described their travel plans to Khartoum ‘where the Viceroy of Egypt had a vessel lying to take us down the Nile to Alexandria...We found the Egyptian vessel waiting for us, accompanied by another, on which were a number of adventurous ladies [Alexandrine Tinné et al] who had come up to welcome us’ (Grant, 1864).
Sir Samuel White Baker
1821-1893

- 1821 Born in London
- 1843 Married Henrietta Biddulph Martin
- 1847 In Ceylon (Sri Lanka)
- 1854 Retired from Ceylon; death of first wife, Henrietta
- 1860 Married Florence von Sass – bought from a slave market in Vidin, Bulgaria
- 1861 Bakers launched their expedition to find the source of the Nile, reaching the Nile-Abara junction in June
- 1862 Bakers left Khartoum to travel to Gondokoro to meet Speke and Grant travelling downstream on the White Nile from Uganda
- 1863 Met Speke and Grant at Gondokoro and arranged boats to take them to Khartoum
- 1864 First Europeans to visit Luta Nzige (named Lake Albert) and Murchison Falls (named to honour the RGS President)
- 1866 Awarded RGS Medal and knighted
- 1866 Published *The Albert N’yanza: Great Basin of the Nile & Explorations of the Nile*
- 1869-1873 Baker served as Governor-General of Equatoria, working to suppress the White Nile slave trade
- 1893 Died in London

'I believe that the mighty Nile may have a thousand sources' (Baker, 1866)

'for the years of tenacity with which we had toiled through Africa. England had won the sources of the Nile!' (Baker, 1866)

'I had traced the river to its great Albert source, and as the mighty stream glided before me, the mystery that had ever shrouded its origin was dissolved. I no longer looked upon its waters with a feeling approaching awe for I knew its home, and had visited its cradle' (Baker, 1866)
Florence Barbara Maria, Lady Baker
1841-1916

‘not a screamer’ (Samuel Baker, 1866)

- 1841 Born Florence Barbara Maria von Sass
- 1860 Married Samuel White Baker, who bought her from a slave market in Vidin, Bulgaria
- 1861 Expedition with her husband to find the source of the Nile
- 1862 Left Khartoum and travelled to Gondokoro to meet Speke and Grant
- 1863 Met Speke and Grant at Gondokoro and arranged boats to take them to Khartoum
- 1864 First Europeans to visit Luta Nzige and Murchison Falls
- 1870-1873 Accompanied Samuel on an expedition to suppress the slave trade ‘we never had such a miserable voyage’ (Baker, 1873 from Baker, 1972)
- 1916 Died in London

Alexandrine (known as Alexine) Tinné and her mother, Henriëtte, from the Netherlands, were the first European women to follow the White Nile beyond the latitude 4° north. On 30th September 1862, they arrived at Gondokoro but had to return to Khartoum because Alexine became ill, instead of continuing further up the Nile.

On reaching Khartoum in March 1863, Speke sent a telegram to the Royal Geographical Society in London: ‘Inform Sir Roderick Murchison that all is well, that we are in latitude 14° 30 N upon the Nile, and that the Nile is settled.’

He also wrote to Tinné’s aunt:

‘Khartoum 11th April 1863, My dear Baroness…If a Scientific Expedition was the object at issue, every sacrifice, even life, must be risked for its accomplishment…I should be sorry to see any ladies attempt an exploring journey when failure would inevitably be the result, not from want of luck..., but the fearful effects of African climate which cannot be overestimated. Believe me. Yours ever truly, J. H. Speke.’ (Letter from Speke to Baroness Adriana van Capellen, 11th April 1863)
Alexandrine Pieternella Françoise Tinné 1835-1869

‘ever since she was a little girl doing lessons she had longed to see what there was on the great blank spot on the map of Africa’
(Letter from Alexandrine’s half-brother, John Tinne)

‘I admire nobody as much as the Dutch lady, Miss Tinné who, after the most awful domestic disasters, persevered in spite of all the difficulties’
(Livingstone, 1874)

- 1840 On her father’s death became the richest heiress in the Netherlands, with the family’s wealth from West Indian plantations. Preferred to be called Alexine.
- 1856 Travelled to Cairo with her mother, Henriëtte van Capellen
- 1861 Set out to explore the White Nile, in a steamboat, accompanied by her mother, a small crew, 1 horse, 1 donkey, and 5 dogs
- 1862 On 30th September, Tinné and her mother arrived at Gondokoro - the first European women to travel so far south on the White Nile.
- 1863 Expedition to the Bahr-el-Ghazal and Azande region
- 1864 Planned to meet Speke and Grant but Tinné had to return to Khartoum because of deaths of her mother, aunt, and others in the party
- 1867 Moved to Algiers, Algeria
- 1869 Attacked on an expedition from Tripoli to Lake Chad and died in the Sahara desert near Ghat, Libya

Alexine Tinne by Henri d’Ainecy Montpezat (1849)
Courtesy of Haags Historisch Museum

Alexine Tinne, (Self) portrait in the garden of her house, Lange Voorhout 32, The Hague, July 1860 Courtesy of Dutch National Archives (collection De Constant Rebecque)
By May, when Speke and Grant finally arrived at Cairo, only a small group of porters and guides remained in the party, including Bombay and four women who had set out with them in 1860. All were granted free passage back to Zanzibar with the Oriental and Peninsular Company [P&O], and given land and medals on their return.

Back in London, on 22nd June 1863, Speke and Grant announced their successful expedition to the source of the Nile to members at the Royal Geographical Society and were treated as heroes. Speke was also treated as a celebrity back at home in Somerset.

Public demand was growing for the explorers to publish accounts of their expedition. Blackwood’s publishing house invited John Hill Burton, a lawyer from Edinburgh, to edit Speke’s *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, which was published in December 1863. Grant was working on his book, *A Walk across Africa* (published in late 1864), when Speke died. Meanwhile, in the United States, Speke and Grant’s expedition was packaged as an exotic adventure story in lands full of riches:

‘Capts. Speke's and Grant's Travels and Adventures in Africa: A Thrilling Narrative of the perils and hardships experienced by Captains Speke and Grant, the celebrated African explorers, who, after an absence of over two years, having just returned from Central Africa, where, besides ascertaining the true Sources of the River Nile and the existence of highly civilised nations, have discovered vast regions abounding in gold and precious stones, drugs, fine woods, cotton, tobacco and honey, in short the real Eldorado of the earth’ (1864)
The Victoria Nyanza Exploring Medal
Courtesy of Bath in Time – Bath Central Library. Photograph courtesy of Dan Brown

Reception of Captain Speke & Grant by the Royal Geographical Society, Illustrated London News, July 4, 1863
Courtesy of Bath in Time – Bath Central Library. Photograph courtesy of Dan Brown
Testimonial to Captain Speke,
28th November 1863
Courtesy of Bath in Time – Bath
Central Library. Photograph
courtesy of Dan Brown

‘Speke comes first as a geographer
and African explorer. He
was superior to Burton as a
painstaking, determined traveller...

But Burton excelled Speke in
cleverness and general information,
though he was not so reliable. Speke
was a splendid fellow in every
way...Grant (his companion) was
one of the most loyal and charming
creatures in the world. Perfectly
unselfish, he adored Speke...They
were all friends of mine’
(Letter from Samuel Baker to
Douglas Murray, 22nd August 1893
in Johnston, 1903)
In an unfinished letter to John Tinne, Alexine’s half-brother, dated the day before his death – 14th September 1864 – Speke highlighted the resources and opportunities for trade in the Nile Basin:

‘Neston Park, Corsham 14th Sept ‘64 Dear Mr Tinne...There is no richer land in the world than the Equatorial regions and nothing more of importance to the interests of Egypt as well as our own merchants than that of opening up those lands to legitimate commerce.’ (Letter from Speke to John Tinne, 14th September 1864)

The search for the source of the Nile continued for the next ten years, with expeditions by David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley. Livingstone was invited by Murchison and the RGS to solve ‘a question of intense geographical interest.’ However, Livingstone died in 1873 before completing his third expedition, leaving the challenge to Stanley. Two years later, Stanley successfully circumnavigated Lake Victoria, in his boat Lady Alice, and confirmed that the Nile is the only outgoing river, thus finally proving Speke’s intuitive conclusion.

Dr David Livingstone 1813-1873
- 1865 Began 3rd and final expedition to Africa, in search of the source of the Nile
- 1866 Left Zanzibar for the interior
- 1869 Arrived at Ujiji, Lake Tanganyika
- 1871 Met Stanley at Ujiji
- 1873 Died near Lake Bangweulu, Zambia

‘I am thankful to old Nile for so hiding his head that all ‘theoretical discoverers’ are left out in the cold’ (Livingstone, 1874)

‘I shall regard...[ending slavery] as a greater matter than the discovery of all the Nile sources’ (Letter from Livingstone quoted in Stanley, 1895)
Sir Henry Morton Stanley 1841-1904

‘We...made the interesting discovery that a low hilly ridge...forms the water-shed of rivers flowing into the Albert and Victoria Nyanza’
(The Exploration Diaries of H.M. Stanley)

- 1841 Born at Denbigh, Wales, as John Rowlands
- 1857 Ran away from St Asaph workhouse and sailed to America where he became a journalist
- 1869 Dispatched by his newspaper to find David Livingstone
- 1871 Found Livingstone at Ujiji, Lake Tanganyika
- 1871 Stanley & Livingstone confirm the Ruzizi River flows into, not out of, Lake Tanganyika
- 1872 Left Livingstone at Unyanyembe & returns to England via Zanzibar
- 1872 Published How I Found Livingstone
- 1873 Awarded RGS Patron’s Medal ‘For his Relief of Livingstone, and for bringing his valuable journal and papers to England’
- 1875 Circumnavigated Lake Victoria, in Lady Alice, and confirmed the Nile is the only outgoing river, proving Speke’s intuition
- 1876 Started circumnavigation of Lake Tanganyika
- 1878 Published Through the Dark Continent
- 1890 Published In Darkest Africa
- 1891 Married Dorothy Tennant
- 1899 Knighted
- 1904 Died in London
Part III: The 21st Century Nile

‘Memories of heroic exploration and fantasies of the frontier are alive and well’ (Driver, 2001)

Since the 19th century expeditions of Burton, Speke and Grant, the Nile continues to lure explorers from Europe and elsewhere. During the 20th century, Sir Ranulph Fiennes (1969) and Sir Christopher Ondaatje (1996) completed expeditions of the White Nile.


Neil McGrigor and Cam McLeay in Northern Sudan
Courtesy of Cam McLeay. Photograph courtesy of Garth MacIntyre
‘Ascend the Nile’ Expedition, 2005-2006

In the spirit of the great explorers of Africa – Burton, Speke, Livingstone and Stanley – the Ascend the Nile expedition team travelled over 4000 miles in inflatable boats, tracing the Nile from the Mediterranean to Rwanda. The Ascend the Nile team – including Neil McGrigor, Garth MacIntyre, and Cam McLeay – measured the Nile using the Global Positioning System (GPS) and found it to be 6718 km long (4174 miles), 107 km longer than usually believed to be.

‘We used outboard motors, GPS and Google Earth to travel over 98% of the rivers length in our small Zap cats...Of the 2% of the Nile we were unable to navigate by boat, we did some of this by air. Neil...was able to fly the deflated zap cats over Murchison Falls, taxi between curious pods of hippos and use the disturbed water between crocodile resting places as a runway...GPS allowed us to track our position by satellite all the way from the Mediterranean Sea (near Rashid) to the upper reaches of the Rukarara River deep in the Nyungwe Forest...What Reuters fondly called the 'Mac Source of the Nile' is the longest and farthest source of the Nile from the sea’ (McLeay, www.adrift.ug)

‘Walking the Nile’ Expedition, 2013-2014

A British adventurer, Levison Wood, aims to be the first person to walk the entire length of the Nile, from its source in Rwanda to the Mediterranean Sea. His 4,250 mile expedition began on 3rd December 2013.

‘Day 151 – Sudan: Ground Hog Day: Today marks 5 months on the road. I am over half way now through the expedition...Now in the Sudan, the expedition has taken on so many new dimensions. The threat of rain has passed and my main issue at the moment is rogue scorpions...our new donkey, James Augustus Grant, is holding out well but less so than the cart he pulls which managed to get 2 flat tyres today’ (Wood, 2014)

Wood had to abandon part of his walk near Bor in South Sudan because of fighting, but managed to get back on track.

‘Day 158: Saw the confluence of the Blue and White Nile, although I have to say there’s not much difference in colour! Sold our donkey, Grant...he has been replaced by not one but three camels named Burton, Speke, and Gordon’

www.channel4.com/programmes/walking-the-nile
The Sir Samuel and Lady Florence Baker Historical Trail

The Sir Samuel and Lady Florence Baker Historical Trail opened in 2014 – a 500 mile trail from Gondokoro (Juba), the capital of South Sudan, to Baker’s View, overlooking Lake Albert in western Uganda. Markers are placed where the Bakers camped on their two expeditions in the 1860s and 1870s.

The trail has been established by the Uganda Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, the Uganda Wildlife Authority, and the Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism for South Sudan, in collaboration with descendants of the Bakers, explorer and anthropologist Julian Monroe Fisher, and commercial sponsors.

www.thebakertrail.com

‘And the Nile, just when it seems to have revealed all of its mysteries, will suddenly find a way to puzzle us anew’ (Ondaatje, 1998)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival sources
Bath Central Library (Local Studies Collection), The Bath Chronicle, British Association Special Daily Edition (15th September 1864, 16th September 1864); Western Daily Press (17th September 1864); British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) 1864 Proceedings. Accessed on 26 February 2014.
RGS Archives. Burton Collection (1858 Field Notebook; letters); Speke Collection (JHS/1/5, JHS/1/6, JHS/1/9, JHS/1/16, JHS/1/43, JHS/1/47, JHS/1/49) Accessed on 21 May 2014.

Primary sources


RGS, 1859. The First ‘Lake Regions’ *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* Volume XXIX


Secondary sources
Bath and the Nile Explorers offers a glimpse into Victorian exploration, empire and the advancement of science—when explorers Burton, Speke and Livingstone and the President of the Royal Geographical Society, Sir Roderick Murchison, met in September 1864 for the British Association meeting in Bath. This story is brought up to date with perspectives on the 21st century Nile and contemporary expeditions.

British Association for the Advancement of Science members on an outing to Holwell Quarry near Frome, 1864

This account has been compiled from archive material from Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, the Royal Geographical Society, and other sources, by Jane Sparrow-Niang