

The Journal of William Clayton Humphreys: Port Natal to the Zulu Country August–October 1851

Introduction

Humphreys' life and career

William Clayton Humphreys¹ was born in Liverpool in 1829. In April 1851, he emigrated to Natal as part of a private immigration scheme aboard the *Jane Morice*, arriving in Port Natal on 9 July 1851. Humphreys spent his first few weeks in Natal accompanying a Mr Holden on a hunting and trading expedition to Zululand.² During this trip, Humphreys kept a detailed journal of his experiences in Zululand.³ Little else is known of Humphreys' South African career until the year 1857, by which time he had become Town Treasurer in Durban, one of the first people to hold this post. In the same year, he married Mary Elizabeth Benbow who had come to Natal from Liverpool. Humphreys remained Town Treasurer until 1864 and there is another gap in his career until 1868, when he moved to Verulam. He moved his family to the Cape during the 1870s and eventually settled in Oudtshoorn where he died in 1885.

The Manuscript

Humphreys' account of his hunting and trading trip to Zululand contains interesting information on a number of topics. Material has been selected for this extract to cover the various issues he described, such as the variety of game encountered, the personalities he met in the Zulu kingdom and the mission station where he and Holden based their hunting. Humphreys also made an effort to learn some of the Zulu language and he included a list of vocabulary at the end of his journal.

In this extract, nineteenth century phonetic spellings of Zulu words and names have been retained as Humphreys used them, while modern orthography has been used in the explanatory footnotes.

Holden's and Humphreys' expedition into Zululand was one instance of an increasing trend during the mid-nineteenth century. Between 1849 and 1851,

some 5 000 new British immigrants came to Natal and this influx intensified the trade between Port Natal and the interior of the Zulu state to such an extent, that after 1840, Zululand became increasingly reliant on imports.⁴ These Natal traders wanted cattle from Zululand, and the Zulu monarch, Mpande kaSenzangakhona, objected strongly to his subjects negotiating with the traders and selling cattle to Natal against his orders. This eventually resulted in the balance of cattle shifting from Zululand to Natal by the late 1840s.⁵ By the 1860s, these cattle depletions had caused a serious resource crisis, worsened by the introduction of cattle 'lung-sickness' (bovine pleuropneumonia) during the mid-1850s.⁶

With the escalating number of white hunters entering Zululand, hunting also passed from the control of the Zulu rulers and the destruction of game added to the resource shortage.⁷ The settlers hunted indiscriminately over the entire Natal–Zululand region with the result that by the 1870s, many species such as lion and elephant, had been entirely destroyed.⁸ This situation was made worse by the fact that no protective legislation was passed by the Colony of Natal until 1866.⁹ The indigenous vegetation was also severely exploited but as timber was vital to the colonial economy, a proclamation was made as early as 1853 regarding its conservation.¹⁰ In the first entries of his journal, Humphreys described the relative abundance of both flora and fauna in 1851:

'Port Natal for 15 miles from the coast has the appearance of a dense forest full of fine timber (while) the country a short distance inland abounds in elephants, leopards and other animals.'¹¹

Mpande's Zulu Kingdom

The Zulu king Mpande kaSenzangakhona, had defeated his half-brother Dingane in 1840 and since that time had been steadily consolidating his control within the Zulu state.¹² By the late 1840s, Mpande was probably at the height of his power and during the early 1850s was contemplating the external consolidation of Zululand.¹³ Humphreys' comment on the Zulu monarch was a typical colonial assessment.

'the country belongs to his highness King Panda, one of the most cruel, bloodthirsty and despotic monarchs I ever heard of. He can muster 50 000 warriors and is continually quarrelling and fighting with the neighbouring nations.'¹⁴

Mpande in fact possessed considerable diplomatic qualities, and succeeded in manoeuvring both internal and external forces to his own gain. On his accession he formed an immediate diplomatic alliance with the British on his southern border, and in 1847 he had repudiated the Klip River agreement with the Transvaal Boers in order to retain British favour.¹⁵ During 1851, Mpande sent an army against the Pedi in the north-eastern Transvaal, but the reasons for and outcome of this engagement are unclear.¹⁶

Norwegian Missionaries in Zululand

In 1845, Mpande had refused to allow the Norwegian missionary, Hans Schreuder, to establish a station in Zululand. By 1849, however, Mpande felt powerful enough to admit missionaries to his kingdom and following

Schreuder's successful medical treatment of Mpande, the Norwegian missionaries built a mission station at Empangeni which was situated near Mpande's royal capital, Nodwengu.¹⁷ During their trip into Zululand, Holden and Humphreys lived at Schreuder's mission for some time and used it as a base for their hunting and trading activities.

FOOTNOTES (INTRODUCTION)

- ¹ I would like to thank the William Humphreys' Art Gallery in Kimberely, for providing me with information about the Humphreys family. William Clayton Humphreys' grandson (1889–1965) founded the Kimberely Art Gallery. See the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 27 July 1965: Obituary.
- ² Private information (October 1988) from Mr Aubrey Humphreys.
- ³ I would like to thank Spencer Womack for making Humphreys' unpublished manuscript available for this article.
- ⁴ See P. Colenbrander 'External exchange and the Zulu kingdom' in W. Guest and J. Sellers (eds), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony. Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1985), pp. 108–109.
- ⁵ P. Kennedy, 'Mpande and the Zulu Kingship' in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 4 (1981), p. 36.
- ⁶ Colenbrander, 'External exchange', p. 110.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- ⁸ B. Ellis, 'The impact of white settlers on the Natural Environment of Natal, 1845–1870', in Guest and Sellers (eds), *Enterprise and Exploitation*, pp. 75–78, 92.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Unpublished manuscript of William Humphreys, entry dated 'July 1851'.
- ¹² P. Colenbrander, 'Some reflections on the kingship of Mpande' (Paper given at a Conference on Natal and Zulu History, University of Natal, Durban, 1985), p. 5; Kennedy, 'Mpande and the Zulu kingship', pp. 28–31; D.R. Edgecombe and J. Wright, 'Mpande kaSenzangakhona' in C.C. Saunders (ed.), *Black leaders in Southern African History* (London, 1979), p. 53; P. Maylam, *A history of the African people of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1986), pp. 70–72.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Unpublished manuscript of William Humphreys, entry dated 'July 1851'.
- ¹⁵ Kennedy, 'Mpande and the Zulu kingship', pp. 31–35.
- ¹⁶ Colenbrander, 'Some reflections on the kingship of Mpande', pp. 8–9.
- ¹⁷ P. Hernaes and J. Simensen, 'The Zulu kingdom and the Norwegian missionaries, 1845–1880' (Paper given at a conference on Natal and Zulu history, University of Natal, Durban, 1985), pp. 3–5; A. Winquist, *Scandinavians and South Africa. Their impact on cultural, social and economic development before 1900* (Cape Town, 1978), pp. 94–97.

JULIE PRIDMORE

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF WILLIAM CLAYTON HUMPHREYS, 1851

Note: Humphreys recorded that he left Holden's home at Sea Cow Lake on 18 August and reached the Umvoti 'location' on 20 August.

20 August

There are hundreds of kraals on the Umvoti. It is a missionary station and as usual the kafirs there *who call themselves Christians*¹ are more inhospitable

and saucy than any other. They would not give us any milk or beef though they had been killing an ox that afternoon.

23 August

Saw a great number of reed bucks and other game and about 2 pm arrived at the river Tugella the boundary between Zulu Country and the Colony of Natal.² It is the widest and fullest river in the colony and abounds in alligators and hippopotami.

25 August

Inspanned at sun rise and proceeded, fell in with two deserters from Panda's army, escaping for the kafir location on the Umvoti.³ Saw an eland close to the cart—it was as large as an English ox and the handsomest beast I ever saw.

We also saw a great number of tiger tracks and also the tracks of elephants and buffalo. The elephants could not have been far off and had we guns we might have had a slap at some. Slept in the bush and was much disturbed with wolves and hyenas which kept prowling about and making a most hideous noise the whole night through.

26 August

About 2 pm arrived at the first kraal in Zulu Country. The Zulus were extremely kind, giving us as much *amas*⁴ and new milk as we wanted. We trekked on and at sundown arrived at Mr Schroeder, a Norwegian missionary having travelled 30 miles since morning.⁵

27 August

Rose at sunrise and took a walk to look at the country which was very hilly and bushy. On my way back I perceived some of the natives running towards me at full speed. I perceived it was about a dozen Zulus chasing another who was certainly running for his life. It appeared that the one who was trying to escape was believed to be an Umtanganti or evil spirit⁶ and the others had gone to his kraal to murder him but he ran out and when about 100 yards from me one of the pursuers threw his assegai which entered the man's neck and brought him down he was then murdered with knob kerries or sticks with large heads.

28 August

Began to feel very unwell.⁷ The missionary gave me medicine which did me a little good. The heat here on the hills is almost unbearable during the day and at night I cannot keep myself warm. I have seen the thermometer vary more than 40 degrees the same day. Bartered with some Zulus for a cow and young ox today. Three of our kafirs went over the country to trade for cattle, they each took as much goods as they could carry.

29 August

Rose at 7 am after passing a sleepless night and prepared for service. At about 10 o'clock a Zulu boy went on all the surrounding hills with a Chinese gong and struck it for about 5 minutes on each; in a short time the Zulus began to assemble until they numbered 163, principally females, many had come a long way. It was one of the most interesting sights I ever witnessed. They squatted all together on the grass in front of the hut and service commenced by the missionary praying, he afterwards read a chapter from the Bible (in the Zulu language of course) and they afterwards sung a hymn. The missionary then put up a placard with the Zulu alphabet on and they pronounced each letter after him.⁸

30 August

About a dozen Zulus came this morning to be doctored by the missionary. He gave them medicine enough to physic a horse. There are on average I should say 20 come every morning to be doctored.⁹

1 September

If I had been well I might have plenty of sport for there is any quantity of game about and the missionary has two first rate guns.

12 September

Am now beginning to feel stronger, went this morning to a Dutchman's wagon that was outspanned about two miles off. Got a good breakfast there of sea cow. He shot the sea cow last night. He let me have about a dozen pounds of it. This afternoon saw a white hunter who had been here seven months and had the tusks of seven elephants he had shot.

13 September

The missionary told me that the walk would not do me any harm so I determined to pay a visit to Noncalass one of the greatest chiefs in Zulu country.¹⁰ I was told his kraal was eight miles off and I started about 9 am taking my pistols and a soldier's bayonet, together with a good assegai. I eventually arrived at the kraal at about 4 pm and was surprised to see a larger place than I ever saw before in the Zulu country. Noncalass had not less than 2000 head of beautiful cattle besides sheep and goats. He had about 200 wives and 300 or 400 children. He was exceedingly kind to me and treated me to a pot of thin *amas* with boiled *mabele*¹¹ in which I made a first rate meal of and afterwards drunk more than a quart of *tchualla* or beer. Many of his wives and children had never seen a white man before. After they had become a little more used to me they all gathered round. The old chief and his head men examined the pistols and bayonet. I was offered an ox for the latter but it was not mine and for the former I believe I could have got four or five cows although the pistols were not worth more than as many shillings but besides

there being a penalty for selling firearms to the kafirs I would never do so for there is no knowing how soon they might be used against the whites.¹²

17 September

I am now mending Mr Holden's tents to go further up the country with the cart, we have been staying within 20 miles of Panda's kraal.¹³ I would have gone up to see him if I had been well. Proceeded directly after breakfast and about 1 o'clock outspanned at a kraal belonging to Panda in which he keeps a regiment of soldiers.¹⁴ I had no idea that the Zulus ever had such a kraal as the one I was now at. It was built up as the rest but the outer fence was fully a mile and greater in circumference and enclosed about 1 000 huts. About a score of the soldiers came to the cart but they were a saucy lot of devils and most of them drunk with *tchaulla*. We met the queen of the kraal (one of Panda's wives)¹⁵ and she was very kind and agreeable but did not give us anything.

18 September

Started on our way to Mondi's (a great chief who is sick and who the missionary treats).¹⁶ About 4 o'clock we arrived at a large kraal belonging to Mondi where we outspanned, and slept in the cart.

20 September

About 2 o'clock this afternoon the chief Mondi and his retinue appeared. He shook hands with me and said he was very glad I came to see him. He is very ill indeed. I think he cannot live long; he spits blood and his breathing is quite audible. He is of royal blood about 6 feet 4 in. high and if well would be a remarkably fine looking man. He lay in front of his hut in the sun all day looking at his cattle. He has about a thousand in that kraal of the finest cows and oxen I have seen. In the evening he gave us an ox to kill. This evening a messenger from Panda came with a proclamation ordering every body capable of bearing arms to report to his kraal as he was going to war.¹⁷ We could not learn who he is going to fight with and Mr Holden is in a terrible fright as he says he is sure it is with the whites if so we are in for it and no mistake. Mr Holden has determined to pack up and start back again by daylight in the morning.

FOOTNOTES (JOURNAL)

¹ In 1847, the American missionary Grout had left Zululand and established a mission station in the newly-established Umvoti Location. The American missionaries laid down strict rules for their converts and most of the Nguni people in the area were, for this reason, unwilling to become *amaKholwa*. See N. Etherington, *The Rise of the Kholwa in South East Africa: African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand, 1835–1880* (Michigan, 1971), pp. 83–85.

² The Thukela (Tugela) boundary was official from 1839, following Mpande's agreement with the Natalia Volksraad after the defeat of Dingane. See P. Kennedy, 'The Fatal Diplomacy: Sir Theophilus Shepstone and the Zulu Kings 1839–1879' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, 1976), pp. 41, 49, 52; Kennedy, 'Mpande and the Zulu kingship', p. 29.

- ³ The Umvoti Location was declared in March 1847, following West's 1846–1847 Locations Commission. E.H. Brookes and C. de B. Webb, *A History of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1965), p. 27; Kennedy, 'The Fatal Diplomacy', p. 48.
- ⁴ i.e. *amasi* or sour milk.
- ⁵ Holden and Humphreys stayed at Hans Schreuder's Norwegian Missionary Society station at Empangeni.
- ⁶ An *umThakathi* is a person who uses supernatural forces for evil purposes. C. de B. Webb and J. Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive*, Vol. I (Pietermaritzburg, 1976), p. xxiv.
- ⁷ Humphreys' illness, which he described as a 'severe chest cold', lasted from 28 August to 9 September.
- ⁸ Schreuder, while living in Natal in 1850, constructed a Zulu grammar as well as a Zulu–Norwegian dictionary and a Zulu hymn book. Winquist, *Scandinavians*, p. 128.
- ⁹ Schreuder had considerable knowledge of medicine, and during his early years in Zululand, spent much of his time treating the population near his mission station. See Winquist, *Scandinavians*, pp. 127–128.
- ¹⁰ Nongalaza kaNondela, a prominent chief of the Nyandwini people, was Mpande's commander-in-chief and had led Mpande's forces in the battle against Dingane at the amaQongqo hills in 1840. Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive*, Vol. II, p. 225; Vol. III, pp. 292–295.
- ¹¹ i.e. *amaBele* or grain. Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive*, Vol. I, p. xxiii.
- ¹² Before leaving Port Natal, Humphreys reported that 'Mr Holden told me such awful accounts of the cruelty of the brutes that he almost frightened me from going'. See also introduction, footnote 14.
- ¹³ i.e. Mpande's royal capital at Nodwengu.
- ¹⁴ Mpande had revitalized the *amabutho* system and built many new *amakhandas* near his Nodwengu homestead. Colenbrander 'Some reflections on the kingship of Mpande', pp. 8–9.
- ¹⁵ A female relative of the king traditionally presided over an *ikhanda* and was particularly charged with the distribution of food and other provisions. Mpande had deliberately used loyal relatives in positions of authority in order to ensure that his position was maintained. Kennedy, 'Mpande and the Zulu kingship', p. 32; E. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg, 1936), pp. 264–265.
- ¹⁶ 'Mondi' is possibly Mundi kaTshangana kaJobe, one of Mpande's prominent *izinduna*. See Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive*, Vol. III, p. 258.
- ¹⁷ This call-up was for Mpande's campaign against the Pedi in the north-eastern Transvaal. See Introduction, footnote 16.

