



Mungo Park

The African
Traveler

Kenneth Lupton

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OXFORD NEW YORK TORONTO IBADAN
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1979

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

OXFORD LONDON GLASGOW NEW YORK

TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

IBADAN NAIROBI DAR ES SALAAM CAPE TOWN

KUALA LUMPUR SINGAPORE JAKARTA HONG KONG TOKYO

DELHI BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lupton, Kenneth

Mungo Park.

1. Park, Mungo 2. Explorers, British—Biography

916.6'04 DT356.P37 78-40200

ISBN 0-19-211749-1

Printed in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd,
Aylesbury, Bucks

TO MY PARENTS

Preface



This book explores the life of Mungo Park. I hope that the reader can easily discover in it the boundary between fact and interpretation, and that what was known of Africa in Park's time has been sufficiently clearly distinguished from what has been learnt subsequently. Park's own investigations were mainly geographical and social, and he obtained little historical information. Except where the text indicates otherwise, later studies have provided nearly all of the historical material here used.

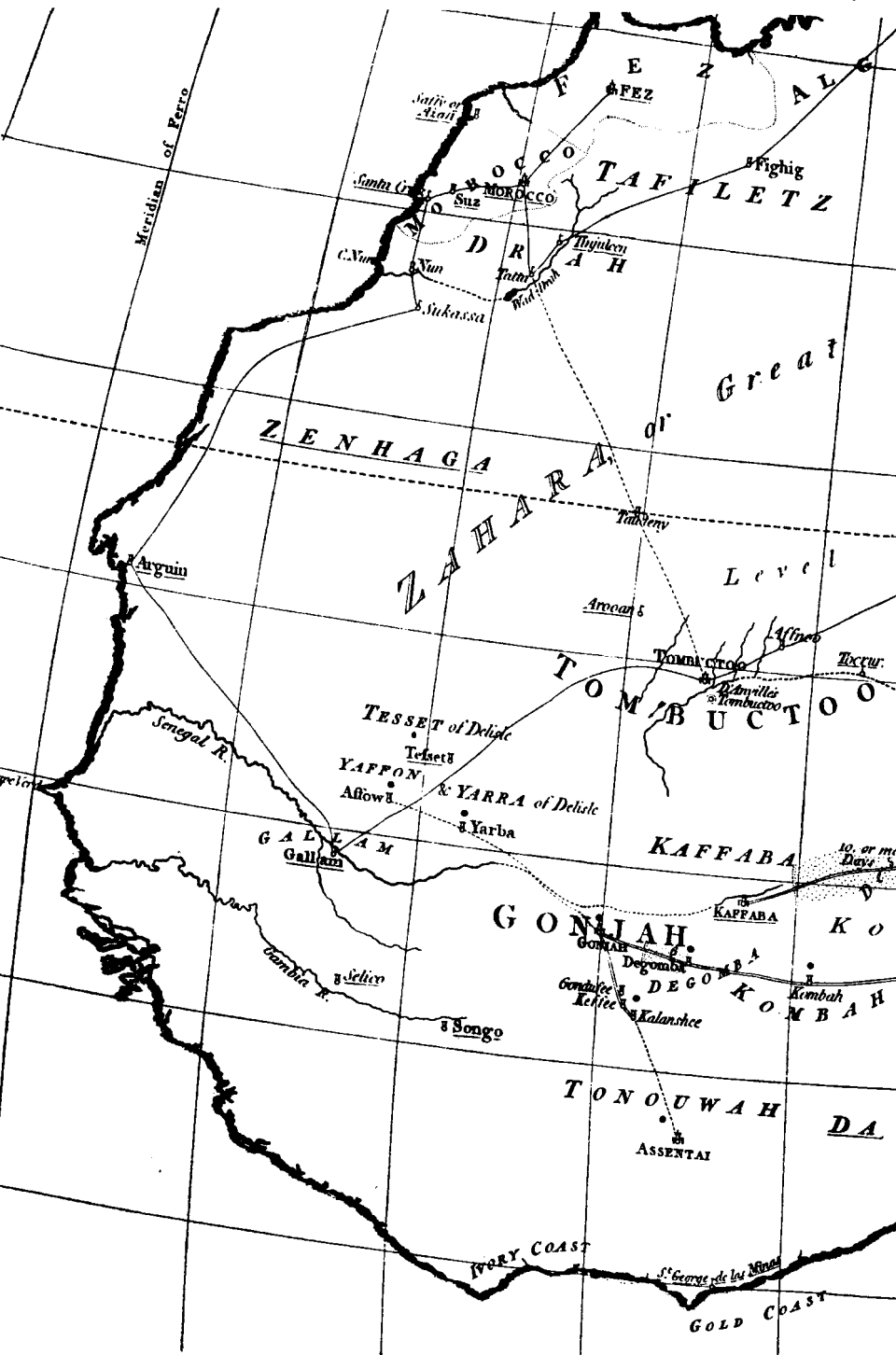
In quotations I have kept the original spelling. Where a place-name has a modern English form I have used it, and failing that a modern French form. For places that have vanished or will not be found even in good atlases, it seemed pointless to change from Park's form of the name. Personal names have, for the most part, been kept as he used them. I do not see that any confusion should result from this, or over the different titles used at different times for office-holders.

Where it seemed useful to add a note to enlarge on a point, this has been placed on the page of text. The numbered notes at the end of the book are primarily source-references, with only a few comments on points of attribution, dates, etc.

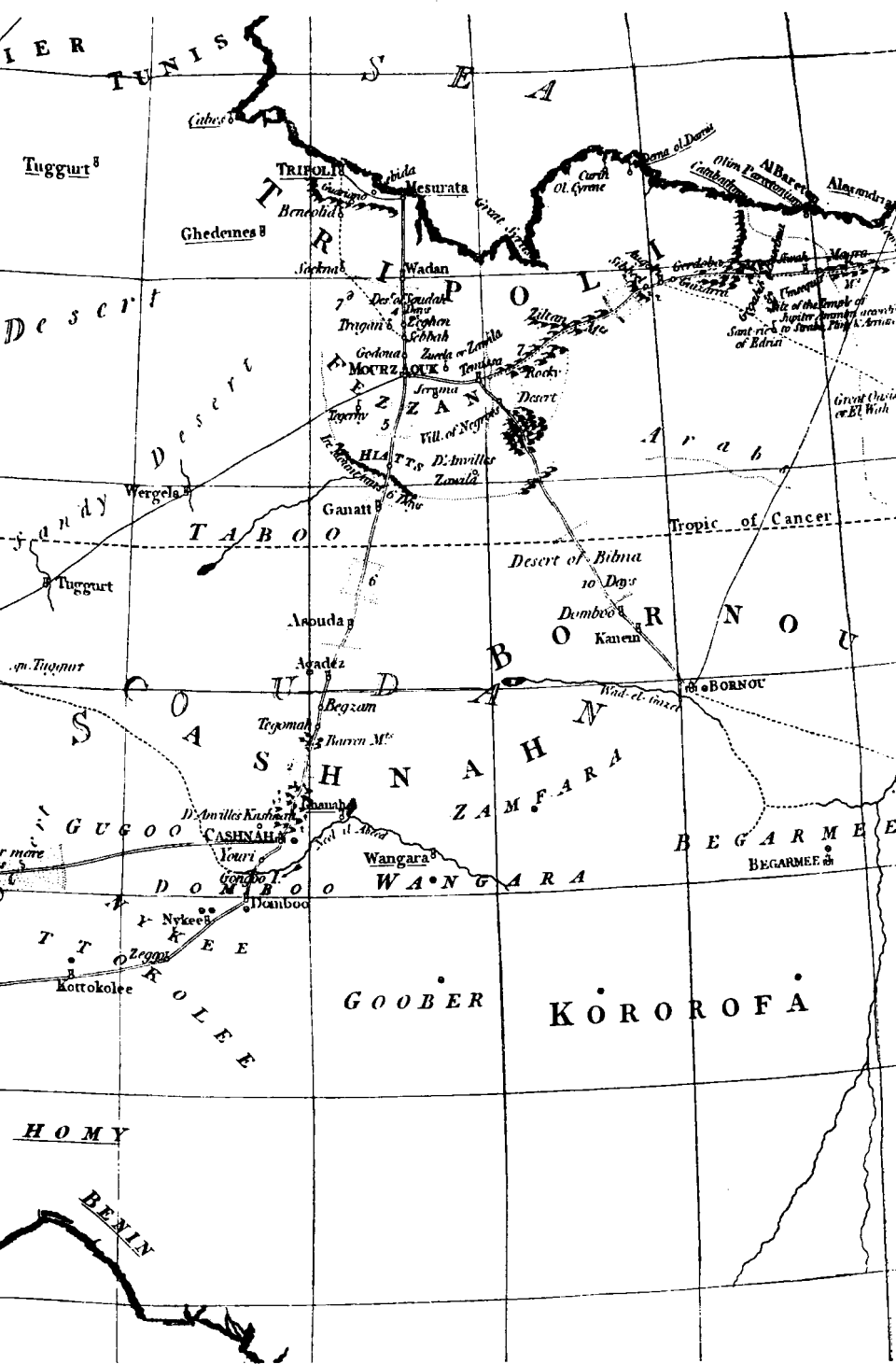
I wish to thank all those who have helped me, many of whom are named in the notes. I have received help and encouragement, including comments on drafts, from Professors Lalage Bown and Michael Crowder, both formerly of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, but now at Lagos University, and from Professor George Shepperson of the University of Edinburgh. At Selkirk, previously unpublished material, local knowledge, and help in tracing or preparing illustrations were all kindly made available. My thanks in this regard are offered especially to Mr J.B.Baxter, Mrs. N.Marshall, Mr. W.McL.Mitchell, the Librarian of the Public Library (Mr. James Smith), and the Selkirkshire Antiquarian Society. Mr. and Mrs. G.Ogilvie, and the Revd.

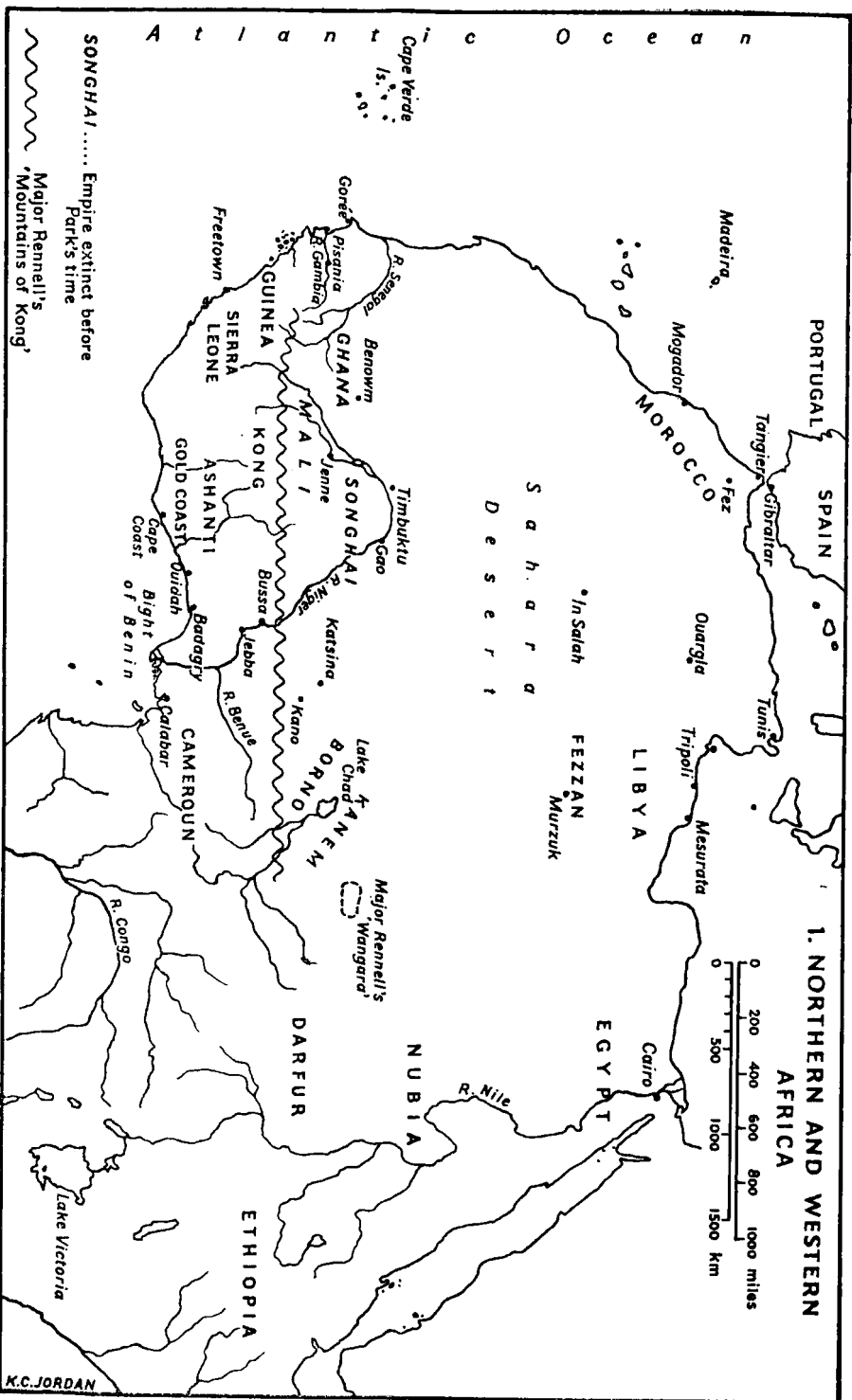
R.I. Johnstone have also generously allowed me to use previously unpublished letters. A number of Librarians have assisted in collecting material, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, also in the preparation of illustrations.

Transcripts of Crown-copyright records in the Public Record Office and the reproduction of Captain Clapperton's sketch-map of Bussa appear by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. I am grateful to the Trustees respectively of the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Maritime Museum, and the British Museum (Natural History) for permission to quote from their collections. In the case of the last-named, this extends to the reproduction of Park's own painting of a Sumatra fish. Permission has also been gratefully received to reproduce the portraits of Mungo Park by Henry Edridge, on the book jacket, from Mr. J. Mungo Park; of Sir Joseph Banks, from the Royal Society; of Mungo Park by Thomas Rowlandson, of Major James Rennell, and of the 1st Marquess Camden, from the National Portrait Gallery; and of James Dickson, from the Linnean Society of London. The drawing of Foulshiels is reproduced by permission of the Royal Scottish Academy. Reproductions have been made of copyright photographs with the permission of Messrs. R. Clapperton, Selkirk (the Mungo Park Monument and the Andersons' house); the Royal Geographical Society (the Awuru rapids); and Messrs. Aerofilms Limited (the Niger at Bussa).

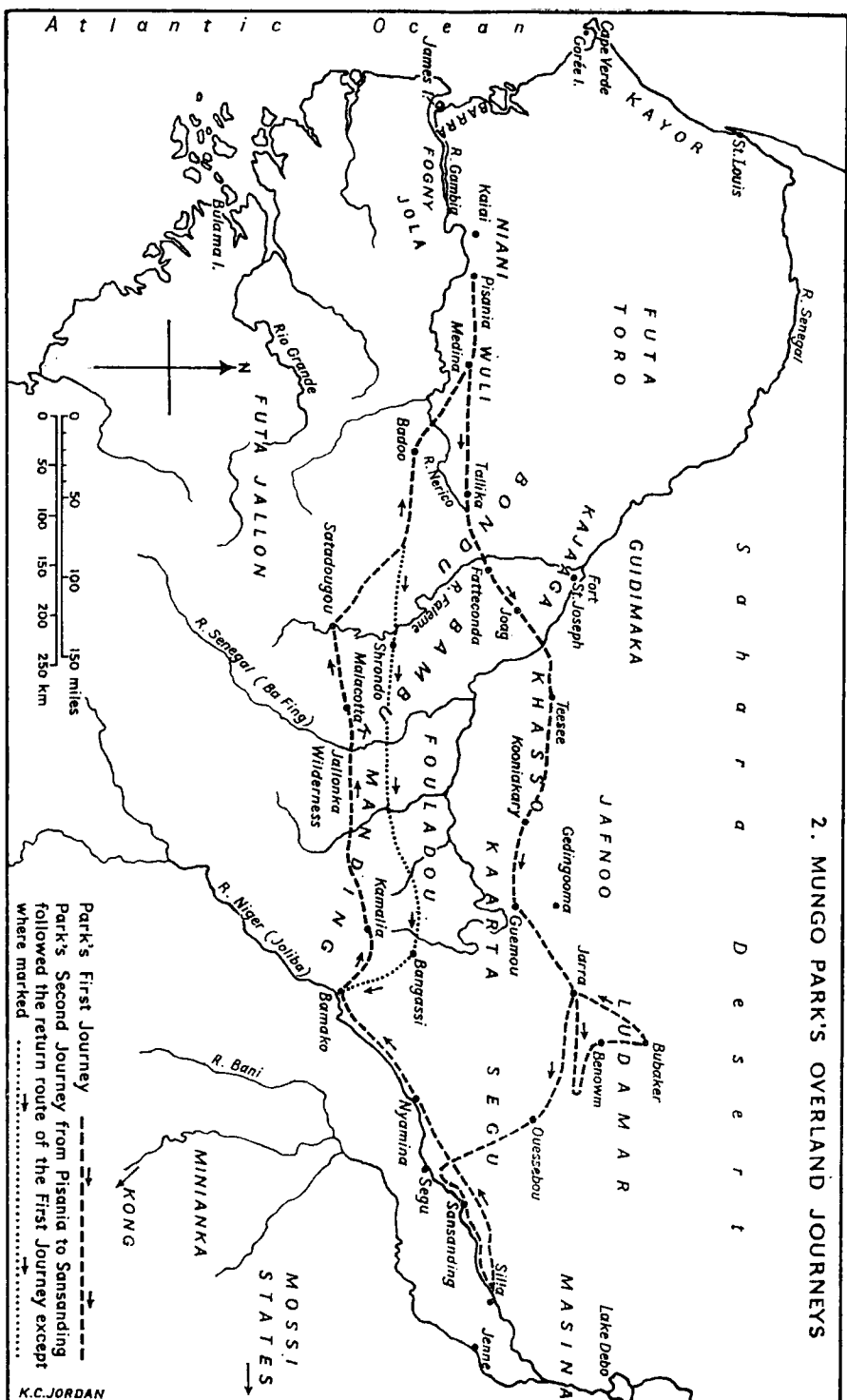


Section of Major Rennell's Map of Africa, 1790

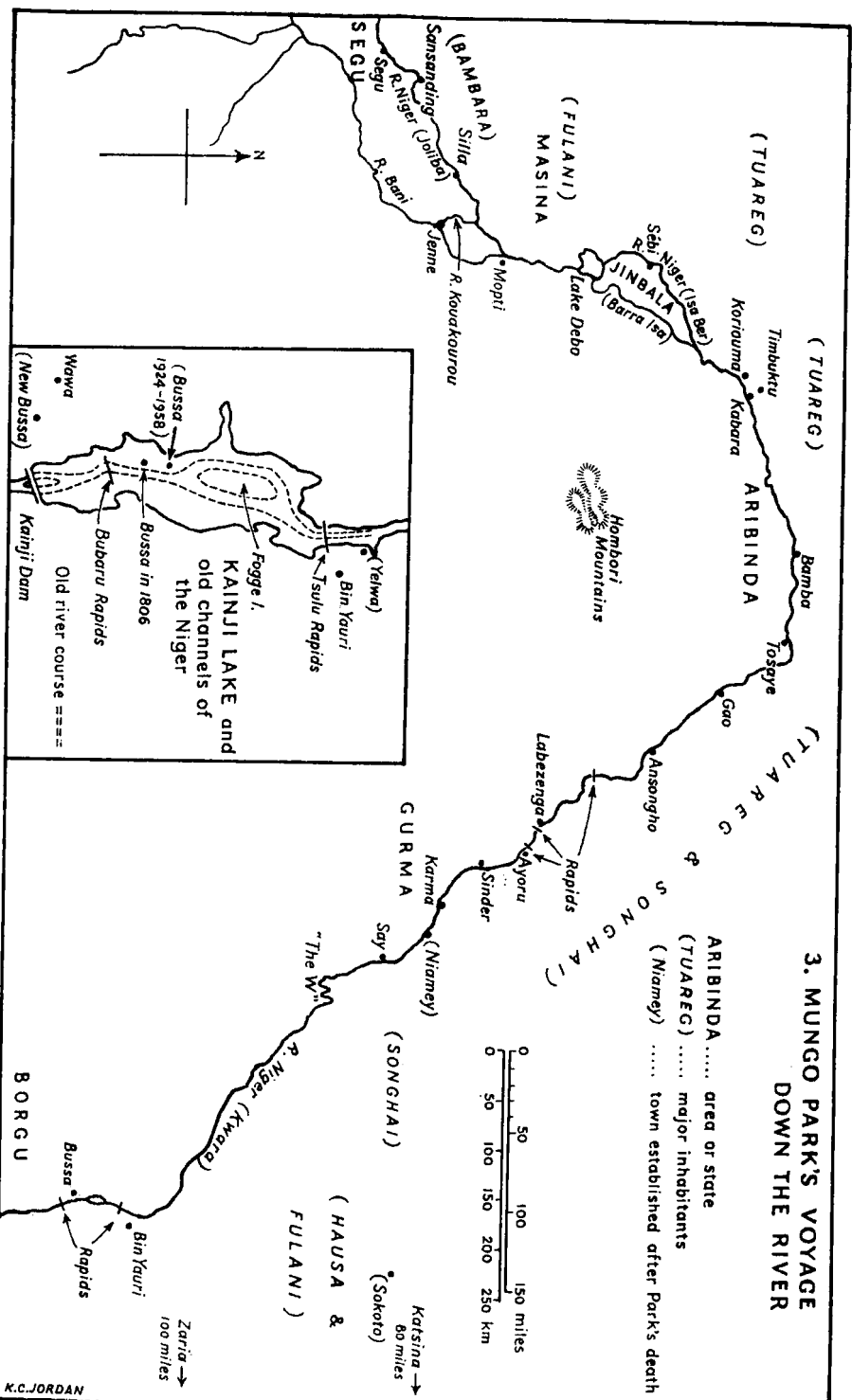




2. MUNGO PARK'S OVERLAND JOURNEYS



3. MUNGO PARK'S VOYAGE DOWN THE RIVER



Glossary



Note: Most of the following words are derived from Arabic

<i>Al-Hajj</i>	A person who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.
<i>Alkaid</i>	(Gambian usage) A town or district chief.
<i>Almami</i>	Political and religious head of a Muslim community.
<i>Bentang</i>	(Mandingo) A platform used for public business in a town or village.
<i>Bushreen</i>	A local term for a Muslim.
<i>Caliph</i>	'Successor' – Commander of the faithful.
<i>Coffle</i>	A caravan.
<i>Cowries</i>	Small white shells formerly used as currency.
<i>Dooty</i>	(? from Mandingo and Bambara, <i>Dougoutigui</i>) Chief of a town or village.
<i>Fama</i>	(Bambara) King.
<i>Harmattan</i>	A cold, dry wind blowing southwards from the Sahara for part of the dry season.
<i>Jihad</i>	A Holy War for the spread of Islam.
<i>Kafir</i>	An unbeliever or infidel.
<i>Kouskous</i>	A food made from grain.
<i>Mansa</i>	(Mandingo) King.
<i>Marabout</i>	Generally, a Muslim religious leader. In Gambian usage, any fully practising Muslim.
<i>Ramadan</i>	The ninth month of the Muslim calendar, a month of fasting.
<i>Ruma</i>	Descendants of the Moroccan conquerors of Songhai, settled and married in that area.

<i>Sahel</i>	Borderland between desert and sown areas (literally, shore).
<i>Saphie</i>	A charm.
<i>Savanna</i>	Predominantly grass-covered land in the wide belt between the Sahel and the tropical rain-forests.
<i>Shaikh</i>	An elder, head of a tribe, etc.
<i>Shari'a</i>	The corpus of Muslim law.
<i>Sharif</i>	One who claims descent from the Prophet Mohammed.
<i>Slatee</i>	Free African merchants, trading mainly in slaves.
<i>Sudan</i>	Short for Bilad-as-Sudan (Arabic), the Country of the Blacks; primarily the combined savanna and Sahel belt stretching across Africa south of the Sahara Desert.

Introduction



All Mungo Park's ambitions of opening a highway into western Africa along the river Niger died with him one day early in 1806. The 34-year-old Scot, making his second major journey in Africa, arrived then, in a large canoe of unusual construction, at a point on the river Niger near Bussa in what is now Nigeria. His unexpected arrival from the north was an extraordinary event there. In the resulting confusion he and his few followers perished and the records of his long journey down the river were lost. It was another twenty-five years before the brothers Richard and John Lander triumphed by covering the last few hundred miles down river to the ocean.

Mungo Park is the outstanding name in the early European exploration of inland West Africa. His achievements have maintained his fame ever since, and his *Travels* have always been regarded as a classic of their kind. Interest has been held too by the adventurous side of his journeys, by the tragedies of the last one in particular, and by the uncertainties, never fully cleared up, surrounding the circumstances of his death.

There was a file at Bussa when I was District Officer there in 1958, recording a story about his death told by an old man in 1913, and also containing some speculations by later Administrative Officers. It presented an incomplete and unsatisfying picture of events. I set out to read the early sources and other reconstructions of what had happened, to find out whether anyone could be sure when, where, how, and why Mungo Park had died. My conclusions were set out in an article published in *Nigeria Magazine* in 1962.

It struck me at the time that his death was not an isolated event, but could only be understood in the light of what had occurred earlier in this journey, and indeed in his previous African journey. In fact, nothing less than an understanding of his whole life and its setting both in Britain and in Africa would suffice to explain his death.

Several questions came to mind – what were the problems he set out to solve, as seen by him and his contemporaries? How much or how little previous knowledge was there to go on? What were his motives and aims, and those of his sponsors? What was the significance of his achievements for Africa and for Europe? What kind of man was he, after all, and how was he seen by Europeans and Africans? Why was his last expedition beset from its inception with so many misfortunes, and why did he then behave as he did?

Mungo Park rode the crest of the first large wave of European energies to pass beyond the Atlantic coastline into West Africa. What might follow was for long unclear. There were many localized ebbs and flows, rather than a steadily growing swell, before the spring tide of imperialism gathered and swept in during the 1880s and 1890s. Most lives of Park date from the time when this tide was high, and are coloured by the assumptions of that period, including the belief that the historical culmination was necessarily implied in the beginning. This is true even of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Niger: The Life of Mungo Park*, published in 1934, which set out to counter the romantic and heroic portrait previously depicted.

Now the tide has gone right out; the one-way flow of energies and ideas from Europe to Africa has begun to give way to an exchange, as Africa has recovered its own voice and will. It is time for a reassessment of Mungo Park, who was there when it all began.

Contents



Preface	vii
List of illustrations	xi
List of maps	xiii
Glossary	xix
Introduction	xxi
I Mungo Park's home country	I
II Family and education	5
III 'First step of the stair of ambition'	11
IV From Gravesend to the Dead Land and back	15
v 'Rescuing the age from a charge of ignorance': <i>The founding of the African Association</i>	20
VI 'Using materials of so coarse a kind': <i>The early years of the African Association</i>	27
VII 'It is a short expedition': <i>Park's departure</i>	36
VIII 'Like a child of the family': <i>At Pisania</i>	42
IX 'Before me a boundless forest': <i>From Pisania to Kajaaga</i>	48
x 'For fear some accident should befall me': <i>In Khasso and Kaarta</i>	56
xi 'A lonely captive, perishing of thirst': <i>In Ludamar</i>	64
xii 'The great object of my mission': <i>From Ludamar to Silla</i>	73
xiii 'Still under the protecting eye of Providence': <i>From Silla to Kamalia</i>	82
xiv 'Long numbered with the dead!': <i>The return home</i>	90

xv	'The warmest approbation of this Association'	97
xvi	'Of a very Close mind': <i>The Australian proposal</i>	103
xvii	'It has nothing to recommend it, but truth'	108
xviii	'Neither within my province, nor in my power, to explain': <i>Park and slavery</i>	115
xix	'My lovely Allie': <i>At Selkirk, 1799-1801</i>	121
xx	The reluctant surgeon: <i>At Peebles, 1801-3</i>	127
xxi	'Another trip into the Centre of Africa': <i>First plans for a second journey</i>	133
xxii	'Freits follow those who look to them': <i>Scotland, 1804</i>	139
xxiii	'His Majesty has selected you': <i>Final preparations</i>	145
xxiv	'The undertaking worthy of the Best of Governments': <i>The second journey begins</i>	153
xxv	'Thunder, Death and Lightning – the Devil to pay': <i>From the Gambia to the Niger</i>	160
xxvi	'Lonely and friendless amidst the wilds of Africa': <i>From Bamako to Sansanding</i>	170
xxvii	The quest for Mungo Park	179
xxviii	'A boat came having Christians on board': <i>From Sansanding to Timbuktu</i>	185
xxix	'The fixed resolution to discover the termination of the Niger': <i>From Timbuktu to Yauri</i>	194
xxx	'Or perish in the attempt': <i>From Yauri to Bussa</i>	204
	Appendix I Sources of information about Mungo Park's life	219
	Appendix II Park's final expedition: <i>Membership and after-effects</i>	222
	Appendix III Stories of Mungo Park at Yauri and of his death at Bussa	230
	Bibliography of principal works consulted	241
	Notes	245
	Index	263