Centenary of the Matabele War of 1893:
Visit to the Laager Site near Iron Mine Hill, the Shangani Battlefield
and Fort Gibbs

Souvenir of an outing to the Midlands area
by members of The History Society of Zimbabwe

The Last Stand of Major Allan Wilson — 4 December 1893

from a painting by Allan Stewart

Source: National Archives
Brief Outline of the Matabele War

On 16th October 1893 the Victoria Column commanded by Major Alan Wilson joined up with the Salisbury Column, under command of Major Patrick Forbes, at what is now Finbald Farm, 3 kilometres west of Iron Mine Hill, the meeting point of the two columns.

A third column, 448 soldiers in strength, commanded by Lt. Col. Gooch-Adams of the Bechuanaland Border Police including 225 men from Tuli under Commandant Pieter Fisant, known as the Southern Column, left Tuli on 19th October 1893.

The objective of these forces was to overcome the power of the Matabele under their King, Lobangula, and to annex Matabeleland to the British South Africa Company's territory.

The first casualty of the Campaign occurred on 14th October 1893 when Capt. Campbell was shot in the thigh end, following the amputation of his leg by Dr. Jamison, died and was buried near the spot where the two columns first laggard.

The Victoria and Salisbury forces, numbering 672 troops, under the overall command of Major Forbes, progressed in a south-westerly direction towards Bulawayo. Their first major test under fire came shortly before 4 a.m. on 25th October 1893 after they had crossed the Shangani River. They were attacked by Matabele warriors of the Inukamini, Isibha, Khaza and Incuba Regiments, with the Amawuli, Ujina and Xaro Regiments in reserve. The Maxim machine guns dealt their devastation to the attackers, who, abandoning their traditional methods of warfare and fighting with modern rifles they were unused to, were forced to retreat.

The Column progressed towards Bulawayo and on 1st November 1893, encountered more determined and better organized Matabele Impis, including the Imba and Inyama Regiments, at the battle of the Bembozi. A frontal attack on the larger reflected the gout courage of the Matabele. A rear catastrophe for the invading force was narrowly averted when the Column's horses stampeded. But for the skill of Lt. Tyma-Biscoe on the Maxim and the horsemanship of a few members of the Column, the horses would have been lost to the Matabele. The weight of fire again won the day and Bulawayo was occupied by Forbes' Column on 4th November 1893.

Lobangula fled north and the decision was taken to follow him in the hope of catching up with him and bringing him back to his capital. Thus arose the most controversial aspect of the campaign when 158 men, again under the command of Major Forbes, marched off to attempt to capture the King. This culminated in the heroic deaths of Allan Wilson and 33 of his men in the mopane forest 17 kilometres north of the Shangani River, and some 50 kilometres east of Lupane on 4th December 1893.

Major Forbes and the battered remnants of his Column withdrew along the Shangani River, harried by the Matabele, desperately short of food and supplies, and surviving partially through the sharing and experiences of Commandant Fisant.

Lobangula and a band of his followers continued their move northwards. Lobangula died on about 22nd January 1894 and was buried in a cave called Malind in north-west Zimbabwe.
Personalities

Lobengula ('Driven by the Wind')
Second king of the Matabele. Born in the Transvaal in 1837. Succeeded father, Mzilikazi, on the 22nd Jan, 1870 after considerable political in-fighting. Harsh with his subjects but allowed many Europeans to live in his land prior to 1893. Skillfully held the balance between the demands of his warriors and the requests and claims of the Europeans. Had fled north from his capital Bulawayo by 1 Dec, 1893 and died, a fugitive, on 22nd or 23rd Jan, 1894 in north-west Zimbabwe.

Major Patrick William Forbes

Comdt P. J. Raaff CMG
Fought in the Zulu wars. Commanded 'Raaff's Rangers'. Directed much of the Shangani Patrol's withdrawal after the loss of Allan Wilson and his men. His experience largely accounted for the safe return of the Patrol to Bulawayo. Died Bulawayo 26 Jan, 1924.

Dr Leander Starr Jameson

Major Allan Wilson
Born 1858 in Scotland. Came to South Africa 1878 and joined Cape Mounted Rifles, then commissioned in Basuto Police. Became Bechuanaland Exploration Co's representative at Fort Victoria in 1892. As start of 1893 campaign was senior officer of the Victoria Volunteers and commanded the Victoria Column throughout campaign. Killed at Shangani on 4th Dec, 1893.
1893 Sequence of Events
(Note: Items in square brackets are comments/queries; modern names are in capitals.)

Sun 9 July Matabele impi commenced killing Mashona in Fort Victoria region

Salisbury Column (Salisbury-Fort Chartier-Iron Mine Hill)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Distance traveled (miles)</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tues 28 Aug</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Advance Party (Capt. Finch) left Salisbury for Fort Charter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues 5 Sept. 6</td>
<td>15:00 hrs. Salisbury Column (Major Patrick Forbes) left Salisbury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 6 Sept. 6+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Crossed Hwange at daybreak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs 7 Sept. 12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(Uneventful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri 8 Sept. 12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Crossed Umfuli and lagerged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat 30 Sept.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Jameson and Sir J. Willoughby visited Fort Chartier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 2 Oct. 6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Left Fort Chartier. To first water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues 3 Oct. ±11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>To Dawson's (disused) cattle post. [Present FEATHERSTONE]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 4 Oct</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Remained at Dawson's. Forbes to end from Fort Chartier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs 5 Oct.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Remained at Dawson's.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri 6 Oct. 11½</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>To Dawson's (other) cattle post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat 7 Oct. 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Left old Bulawayo-Salisbury Hunting Waggon route.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun 8 Oct. 7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Jameson confirmed 'push on'. Slight rain in evening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 9 Oct. ±2²½</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Crossed Umfutl (Matabelaland 'border'). Lagerged beyond river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues 10 Oct. 10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Two scout parties sent out (Capt. Williams followed Umfutl to old road and then turned south; 'A' troop went to Iron Mine Hill (through present CENTRAL ESTATES)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 11 Oct. 9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Crossed Sebave River, reached Umfutl River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs 12 Oct. 5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Crossed Umfutl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri 13 Oct. 5²½</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Near headwaters of Bembesware.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat 14 Oct. ±2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Reached Iron Mine Hill ('Sigara') in the morning (total distance 76 miles); in the afternoon lagerged 3 kms west-south-west to site nearer water. First Victoria Column Scouts reached lagerged that afternoon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun 15 Oct.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Patrol out to try to recover cattle [LALAPANZI area], Capt. Campbell shot (dead) buried next day. Grave at grid 085553. More Victoria Column Scouts arrive after an incident in which they killed 20 Matabele.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Victoria Column (Fort Victoria-Iron Mine Hill)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri 6 Oct. -</td>
<td>33 Left Fort Victoria. Appears covered 30 miles up main road to Salisbury, via MakoriMakorisi [new CHATSWORTH], and then (to avoid very broken country around Chilmuzi) turned north west for further 8 miles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun 8 Oct</td>
<td>- Stayed put, awaiting arrival of Artillery and Tuli Detachments (who arrived on 12th).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 9 Oct. -</td>
<td>- Stayed put, awaiting arrival of Artillery and Tuli Detachments (who arrived on 12th).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 11 Oct</td>
<td>- Crossed Umshagashi [Shagashi] to within 2 miles of Shashi River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs 12 Oct. 7</td>
<td>- Crossed Umshagashi [Shagashi] to within 2 miles of Shashi River.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distance travelled (miles)

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Crossed Shashi River (border with Matabeleland) then Talakwe River. Passed kraal of Choika and Maitlandia. Stopped 1 1/2 miles south west of Matonga River. Joined and Willoughby then left column (which was then 25 miles from iron Mine Hill) to ride ahead. They stopped that night near Makama's kraal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Joined and Willoughby reached Iron Mine Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Column continued (through Chilimanzi communal land)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>Victoria column reached Iron Mine Hill at 08:00 hrs (29 miles from Matonga River later).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Combined Columns (Iron Mine Hill - Bulawayo)**

| Tues  | 17 Oct. 10 1/2 05:30 hrs. Combined columns left Iron Mine Hill. [Laagered about 2 kms west north west of site of Fort Gibb's (built in 1895).] |
| Wed   | 18 Oct. 8 Continued west. False alarm of 4,000 Matabele turns out to be 100 Mashenzi. [Laagered just south of present Senale Farm]. |
| Thurs | 19 Oct. - No move. Day to rest horses.                  |
| Fri   | 20 Oct. 11 Passed 'old gold workings', crossed Owabo (Gweru) River. Laagered under kopje around Daylesford. Major Wilson left at midnight with patrol and burned new Insukamini Regiment Kraal (built for 3,000 people) recently deserted, beyond Khobell [now Kanyani?] hill. Name Insukamini still on maps ± 12 miles west of Gweru. Rejoined Column in afternoon of 21st. |
| Sat   | 21 Oct. 5 Passed South of Gweru kopje. Laagered about 3 miles south of WILLOUGHBY SIDING [named after Dr Jameson's military adviser, Sir John Willoughby]. |

Thereafter the route was some kms north and west of present main road until Shangani.

| Sun   | 22 Oct. 11 Through corner of Somabula forest (missing Matabele ambush) in thick fog. Crossed virtually dry Yungu River [Ghassymean area]. Scout skirmish in which 7 Matabele were killed. |
| Tues  | 24 Oct. 7 Crossed Shangani River and laagered on west bank. |
| Wed   | 25 Oct. 3 Battle of Shangani. Three miles travelled in afternoon [to near Shangani]. |
| Fri   | 27 Oct. 6 Several skirmishes [West past Nyasa]. |
| Sun   | 29 Oct. Uneventful. |
| Mon   | 30 Oct. Uneventful. |
| Tues  | 31 Oct. 2+ Moved in afternoon. |
| Wed   | 1 Nov. 5 Early morning fog. Battle of the Bembezi. |
| Thurs | 2 Nov. 8 Laagered 3 miles shot of Iniabas Induna [near Heany Junction]. |
| Fri   | 3 Nov. 6 Bulawayo magazine blown up. Town starts burning. |
| Sat.  | 4 Nov. 6 Crossed Umguzu River. Bulawayo occupied. |
Southern Column
Thurs 2 Nov. Attacked by Gambbo.
Tues 14 Nov. Arrived Bulawayo.

Shangan Patrol
Tues 14 Nov. Left Bulawayo 19:00 hrs. (300 men, 3 days food, no wagons.)
Thurs 16 Nov Arrived Inyati. Abortive follow-up to Bub River.
Thurs 23 Nov Arrived Shiloh. Wagons and resupply arrived from Bulawayo.
Sat 25 Nov Left Shiloh.
Wed 29 Nov Column halved (reduced to 158 men).
Sun 3 Dec Reached Shangan. Wilson Patrol crossed river at about 17:00 hrs.
Mon 4 Dec Wilson Patrol killed. Main column also attacked.
Tues 5 Dec Withdrawal starts.
Sun 10 Dec ‘Silent Escape’ (Maxim carriages left behind).
Thurs 14 Dec Sighted by rescuers (Seiwus and Acut with relief column).
Mon 18 Dec Reached Bulawayo.

Thereafter
26 Dec 1893 Raaff died in Bulawayo
13 Jan 1894 Capt. Lundy died in Bulawayo
22 Feb 1894 Death of Lobongwa.
24 Feb 1894 Trader Dawson found remains of Wilson Patrol.
14 Aug 1894 Wilson Patrol remains interred at Great Zimbabwe.
5 July 1905 Shangan Memorial unveiled at Matopos.
Organization of the Matabele

Notes:
1. At the battle according to Firth, 'The Defence of Lobengula.'
2. At the battle according to Bulz, 'The Banks of the Zambezi.'
3. At the battle according to Summers and Paddon, 'The Warrego.'
4. Reputed to have been wounded in the battle and hanged himself.

An 'impi' or task force sent out on a campaign, could be anything from 50 to several thousand men. Regiments blocked to be about 750 strong. Total strength at Shangani was possibly about 5,000, but it is more likely that there were 3,800 involved in the battle of whom about 600 became casualties. The total Matabele army was estimated to be 38 to 40 Regiments with a total strength of 16,000 men.
Battle of Shangani Wed. 25 Oct. 1893 — Summary
(Note: Details primarily from Major Forbes’s account)

By 03:45 hrs
Laager surrounded. Isibizi Regiment to north-east, Ihlati Regiment to north-north-west, Induba Regiment to south-south-west, Insukamini Regiment to south-south-east.

03:50 hrs
Water party from Quested’s Natives Contingent bumps into Isibizi Regiment which in turn attacks Contingent killing about 50. Alarm raised. Stand to.

03:55 hrs
First Attack. Laager attacked by rifle fire, but not rushed. Number of Shona sleeping outside laager killed but most get into laager. Attack lasts about 30 minutes and then dies away.

04:30 hrs
Capt. Spreckley’s Troop circles close to laager. Finds few Shona and some shots fired.

Dawn
Second Attack. All or part of Insukamini Regiment move down slope of kopje and commence firing when reach bottom. Rifles/maxims break up attack and Regiment retires. This attack also supported by rifle fire from other sides.

Daylight
Three patrols sent out. Capt. Hearney to north, Capt. Spreckley to west, Capt. Bastard to south. Each finds Matabele in bush within ½ mile, have sharp skirmish and forced to retire to laager.

Third Attack. Large Matabele force on kopje forms (probably including Induba Regiment). Shelled and dispersed. Small parties to south, either side, and north of Tsiikiso Hill also shelled.

07:30 hrs
Three further patrols sent out. Capt. Hearney to north-west; about 1000 yards away found Matabele and engaged them but had to retire quickly to new position when attacked on both flanks. Dispersed Matabele from new position. Other patrols went west. Accounts differ as to whether they found little or nothing or if they retired when Hearney came under attack.

The Matabele force which had attacked Hearney’s troop retired behind a kopje and stanced to attack but were shelled and dispersed.

08:00 hrs
Further patrols. Capt. Parlow to north (east of koojie last shelled), Capt. Hearney (probably) to west. Neither found anything.

09:00 hrs
Few Matabele on hills (to west). Mr Neff’s Natives Contingent sent out, as ground too difficult for horses, but Matabele retired. End of Battle.

Statistics
Casualties
Column
Killed 1 (Tpr. Walters)
Wounded 6
Shona killed ±50
Horses ±10
Oxen ‘Several’
Matabele Killed and wounded ±500

Ammunition expenditure
Martini Henry (incl. Maxims and Nordenfeldt) 3,645 rounds
7-lbr 7 rounds
Hochkiss Gardner 28 400 rounds
Battle of Bembezi 1 Nov. 1893

1 Columns lagged, a little before noon, on a generally good tactical position on a small hill; Salisbury Column to the north and Victoria Column to the south. Horses and oxen taken to water to south and pickets put out on all sides.

2 'Dark cloud' of Matabele seen over a mile to the west. Shelled but not considered a problem. This was in fact the Insukumani Regiment trying to start the right 'horn' of the attack, but it lost cohesion with the shelving. A little later the left 'horn', the Amawoni, were seen advancing to the east, but came within the range of the maxim with devastating effect.

3 Meanwhile the 'chest' (Imbeu or Mbuu — Lobengula's bodyguard) and Ingubo Regiments had got to within 400 yards of the laager without being seen. At about 13:00 hrs they (1,400 men) suddenly charged (unlike at Shangani) straight for the waggons. They got to within nearly 100 yards of the laager before they were decimated by rifle and maxim fire. One 2-man picket failed to hear the alarm bugle. One trooper was killed but the other, Tpr White, a marathon runner, ran the race of his life and got back to laager — hence the name of the local road.

4 When this battle started, the horses which were on their way back from being watered, took fright and stampeded westwards. Without them the Column would have been immobilized and helpless. Fortunately there were still a few men with horses in the laager and they eventually turned the horses back.

5 One hundred men, with fixed bayonets, were then sent forward to clear the bush, and troops of horsemen were sent west. The infantry and cavalry were not co-ordinated and the cavalry ran into the fresh Imbeu Regiment. However long-range shell and machine-gun fire dispersed them. The battle then spluttered to an end.

Casualties

Column 5 killed, 5 severely wounded.
Matabele Unknown but the Imbeu Regiment lost 500 out of 700 members.

Of the Matabele Charge: 'I cannot speak too highly of the pluck of these two regiments. I believe that no civilised army could have withstood the terrific fire they did for at most half an hour' (Sir John Willoughby). Burnham referred to it as 'a battle of Gettysburg [U.S. Civil War] in miniature'.
The Wilson (Shangani) Patrol, 3–4 Dec. 1893

The Background
Bulawayo occupied 4 Nov. A Column with orders to capture Lobengula left Bulawayo on 14 Nov. under the command of Maj Forbes, Maj Wilson and Comdt Raaff. The Column was poorly equipped (little food, no wagons or medical support), morale was low and the leaders bickered. Following the elusive King it eventually reached the Shangani River (about 200 kms downstream of the site of the 25 Oct. battle). Lobengula was thought to be only a few miles north and a patrol, under Maj Wilson, crossed the river in the afternoon of 3 Dec. to attempt his capture. The Patrol was reinforced during the night but surrounded, attacked and wiped out on 4 Dec.

The Events
The sketch map on the opposite page is based largely on conjecture. Only the Shangani River and the final battle site are certain, all other positions, distances and routes are approximate. In reality routes followed by Maj Wilson, Capt. Napier and Capt. Borrow probably followed the same route (the tracks of Lobengula's wagons); but have been separated on the map for clarity. Burrell probably followed a more circuitous route to escape.

Composition for the Patrol

Initially
(left Column ± 17:00 hrs 3 Dec.)
Major Allan Wilson*
Capt. Fredie Fitzgerald*
Capt. Harry Greenfield*
Capt. William Judd*
Capt. Argent Kirton*
Capt. Napier
Lt. Arvind Hofmeyer*
Lt. George Hughes*
Sgt. Maj S. C. Harding*
Sgt. Maj Judge
Sgt. C. Bradburn
Sgt. H. A. Brown*
Cpl. F. C. Colquhoun*
Cpl. Enghage
Tpr. D. M. C. Dillon
Tpr. A. Hay-Robertson*
Tpr. H. J. Heiler*
Tpr. J. Hopkinson*
Tpr. E. E. Wibby*
Mr. Russell Burrell
Mr. Robert Bain

Capt. Borrow's Reinforcements
Left Column ± 17:00 hrs 3 Dec.; joined Wilson at dawn
Capt. Harry Borrow*
Sgt. W. H. Birkley*
Sgt. H. D. W. M. Morey*
Cpl. H. G. Kinloch*
Tpr. Abbot*
Tpr. W. Bith*
Tpr. W. H. Britton*
Tpr. E. Brock
Tpr. P. W. da Vos
Tpr. L. Davis*
Tpr. A. Ewing
Tpr. Landsberg
Tpr. E. G. MacKenzie*
Tpr. M. Melidojohn*
Tpr. Nestelt
Tpr. P. C. Nunn*
Tpr. W. A. Thompson*
Tpr. H. S. Hintock*
Tpr. F. L. Vogel*
Tpr. H. G. Watson*
Tpr. T. C. Water*
Mr. Pete Ingram

Strengths
21 (at start)
16 (after Tpr. Judge and Enghage sent back)
16 (after Capt. Napier group left)
17 (after Tpr. Robertson rejoined)
16 (after Burrell broke out)

Final Strength: 34 killed on 4 Dec. (Shown as * above)
Wilson Patrol — Sequence of Events 3–4 Dec. 1893

1. Late afternoon, Patrol (Wilson and 18 others) cross river.
2. Cover 6 miles. No contact. Raining.
3. Light tactical, more open country.
5. Cover further mile. Find very large Matabele force on either side, but patrol passes through without incident.
7. Cover further mile. Practically dark. Find 2 wagons. Is Lobengula there? (In fact he had already gone.)
8. Scouts report Matabele Impi going towards river. Patrol may be cut off. Decide to retire.
9. Retire 1 mile in dark to thick bush. Decide they must get message to Column: 'Forbes must cross and reach us by dawn'. Capt. Napier and 2 troopers go back. Patrol spends night at this spot.
10. Capt. Napier and troopers back at laager at 9 p.m. No incidents on the way.
11. Forbes decides cannot cross river in the dark especially as Column is itself surrounded (Column only 145 men.)
12. Forbes decides to send assistance. Capt. Borrow and 20 others (but no maxims) leave at 01.00 hrs.
13. Borrow joins Wilson at dawn with no incident. Wilson decides to attempt the capture of the King.
15. Gallop back to anthill. Attacked. 3 wounded.
16. Retire slowly, with wounded, under attack. Burnham, Ingram and Gooding manage to break out and get back.
17. Burnham reports to Forbes: 'We are the only survivors'.
18. Patrol has to stop. Not able to break out in any direction. Final stand. Battle lasts several hours before all killed. Up to 400 Matabele also killed.
1896 Matabele Uprising in the Gwelo Area
Places and events

The Start.
On 20 March, 1896, an African policeman and two bearers were murdered near Essequile (Esgodini). The main 'storm' arose on the 24th when Bulawayo was roused by the first of a stream of reports of Europeans being murdered. The total number of settlers killed (by the Matabele) was 145. About 28 settlers were murdered in the Gwelo district and their names are recorded on a memorial outside the present Memorial Museum. The news reached Salisbury on 25th March.

Reaction in Gwelo (Gweru).
This settlement was first sited by Dr Jameson (an early proposal to call it Jamestown or Jamesontown appears, however, to have been dropped) and was pegged out by a surveyor called Brown (although an American scout, Burrell, claimed to have done so in 1894). The settlement was envisaged as a centre for mining and transport.

On Tuesday, 24 March the usual Zaanberg coach set out for Bulawayo as only half-believable rumours had reached Gweru by that time. On 25 March the settlement received firm news of the uprising (from young Napier from Shangaani) and a laager was formed that night (there were only 40 rifles available). On the same day, after only a couple of hours' notice, Capt. J. A. C. Gibbs (West Riding Regiment) with Mr. J. D. Tennant and a detachment of 10 men of the Rhodesia Horse, left Salisbury for Gwelo with 2 Maximis and 1,000 rounds of ammunition together with 50 spare rifles and 20,000 rounds of ammunition.

They arrived four days later in the late afternoon on the 29th, to find that 350 men, 27 women and 22 children (including 70 from Selukwe and 20 from Shangaani) had taken refuge in a rough wagon laager (at the junction of the present Lobengula Avenue and Fifth Street; that is, where the main Police station now stands). Captain Gibbs disgusted with state of laager, formed fatigue parties and commenced fixing us up; its a Godsend he came to camp. A week after Captain Gibbs arrival the laager was 'fortified and in order'. Surprisingly, the telegraph line to Bulawayo was not cut until 1st April.

On 6th April another force of 150 men of the Rhodesia Horse, under Lt.-Col. Beat left Salisbury, taking with them ample supplies for Gwelo. This column would have started several days earlier if it had not been for the scarcity of transport oxen due to the outbreak of the Rinderpest. This force was accompanied by Cecil Rhodes and reached Gwelo on Saturday 2nd May. It had several minor engagements on the way plus a sharp fight at Maven on 19 May. (Maven appears to have been about 25 kms northwest of Gwelo). The force later linked up with the Bulawayo Force on 24th May at Pongo Store.
Fort Gibbs

Capt. Gibbs left Gwelo on 20th May with a force of 66 troops and 120 others. On 22nd May he sited Fort Gibbs on Makalaka, a low but commanding kopje controlling the Charter–Bulawayo road and which dominated ‘rebel grain lands’. Outer store walling was completed in a week (still in very good condition) and work started on a brick iron-roofed store on 1st June (no sign of this today). Two weeks later the fort was completed. It was built in the form of a square. Later ‘a cattle kraal and pole and doggo huts for officers’ mess, hospital and telegraphist were built outside the fort entrance and a larger hut for the men inside’. (No sign of these remain today.)

The fort never saw action, except for a skirmish on 6th June when a coloured scout killed 3 Matabele. Gibbs left a garrison there on 25th June and went on to Shangani. At the end of 1896 the Fort was taken over by the BSAP and then abandoned at the end of the rebellion.

Fort Gibbs as it is Today
Further Reading

Causes of the War

The War Cronology
F. R. Burnham, *Scouting on Two Continents* (Doubleday, Page, 1927; Rhodesiana Reprint: Silver Series No. 4).
W. D. Gale, *One Man’s Vision* (Hutchinson, 1935; Rhodesiana Reprint: Silver Series No. 12).
G. W. H. Knight Bruce, *Memories of Mashonaland* (Arnold, 1895; Rhodesiana Reprint: Gold Series No. 13).

The Shangani Patrol

History Society of Zimbabwe
Previous Souvenir Brochures

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6 Chishawasha 28th July 1974
7 The Leager Site at Iron Mine Hill, Fort Gibbs, Nalatale Ruins 29th–30th May 1976
8 Salisbury—Marandellas Line 14th May 1978
9 Mutare, Premier Estate, Old Mutare and Penhalonga 11th–13th September 1987