

Origins of Empangeni: Rev. Aldin Grout's Mission Station Inkanyesi on the Mpangeni River May 1841 - 25 July 1842

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Introduction

This is a micro-regional study. Dr. Tony Minnaar's second edition of his *Empangeni: A Historical Review to 1989*¹ devotes two paragraphs to Aldin Grout's mission station, *Inkanyesi*, where he spread the Christian gospel to the Zulus from May 1841 to 25 July 1842. As this represents the first attempt by a white person to settle near Empangeni, and because May 1991 was the 150th anniversary of this important event, it is considered worthy of focusing a historical microscope on the subject.

Rev. Aldin Grout was appointed a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the South African field in January 1834. Specifically, he was designated to the "Maritime Zulus in the region of Port Natal".² He arrived on the "Dove" at Port Natal on 21 December 1835 and was received by Dingane at Umgungundhlovu (see map) on 18 January 1836 "with the utmost kindness and attention".³ Dingane, after consulting his *izinduna*, granted permission to found a mission station

and a school in Natal subject to the important provision that Grout first "teach my people to read and write."⁴ In August, along with Champion, he founded *Ginani* missions station (see map), *Ginani* from "I am with you", Matthew 28:30),⁵ but as a result of the death of his wife, Grout had to take his daughter, Oriana, back to the United States in December 1836. Grout returned to south east Africa with his second wife, Charlotte Bailey, in June 1840 to find a changed Natal.

Grout's Negotiations to Enter Zululand

After the struggle for hegemony between the Voortrekkers and the Zulus, Mpande, the new Zulu king, following the death of Dingane in March 1840, was clearly under the control of the Voortrekker government in Pietermaritzburg. The Americans co-operated with the new government and Grout, on 6 August 1840, took an oath of loyalty to the Volksraad.⁶ Mpande had invited missionaries to Zululand and Daniel Lindley saw Grout's return at this time as providential: "The call is so direct and loud, that we think



View of Port Natal (Captain Allen F. Gardiner's Narrative of a Journey to the Zulu Country, p.84)

it best that Mr. Grout and one other member of the mission should make Umpana a visit and if things appear at the capital as we hear, see what can be done."⁷ This accorded with his Society's wishes⁸ and he began his preparation at *Umlazi*.⁹ Relations between Mpande and the Voortrekkers had been strained when two ambassadors had been "roguish" and stolen Zulu cattle in Zululand. The Volksraad, in an attempt to establish the truth, sent "two trusty men" who invited Grout to join them on their journey to Mpande. Grout left on 6 October 1840 and sadly passed the "burned" shell of *Ginani*, his first mission station.

Grout found Mpande "perfectly accessible, free and familiar". Mpande 'was glad that I had come, and without hesitation gave me permission to come when I pleased into his country, and to stop at his place, or at any place in his country where I chose," and even offered to provide labour for "a large house".¹⁰ Grout was optimistic and on 5 December 1840 waited only for permission from "the Dutch authorities" to enter Zululand and begin his mission station.¹¹ On 15 January 1841 Grout was at last given permission by the Volksraad to enter Zululand and to negotiate with Mpande in order to establish a mission station in Zulu territory.¹²

On 6 May 1841 Aldin Grout began a three week journey¹³ (one week of which was spent waiting for the Thukela to subside) to Mpande's *umuzi Mlanbongwenya* - the crocodile river (refer map) situated near the present Eshowe show grounds on the edge of the Dlinza forest which was bigger then.¹⁴ On his journey from Port Natal Grout passed the solitary burnt and looted shells of the American mission stations at *Ginani* and *Hlangezwa*¹⁵ which were reminders to him of the uncertainty of his second mission to the Zulu people.



Rev. Aldin and Charlotte Grout (Killie Campbell Library).

Mpande offers Grout a Free Site: Inkanyesi - the First Use of the Place Name "Empangeni"

Grout was cordially received and he found Mpande "open, frank and social"¹⁶ and was fed ripe bananas (reserved for the King)¹⁷ and beef. It is possible that at this meeting there was a misunderstanding in Mpande's mind as to the intention and implications of Grout's mission because Mpande "yet regarded me (Grout) as a hunter."¹⁸ Grout

accepted Mpande's apparent invitation to found a mission station and he "...moved into Zululand and located at Empangeni just beyond the Umhlatuze" i.e. a short distance north of the Mhlatuze at the mission station he proudly called Inkanyesi - "Star"¹⁹ These are vitally important words because this is perhaps the earliest indication of the exact location of the site which, regrettably, cannot be precisely pin-pointed. On 13 June 1856, when Grout delivered his paper to the annual meeting of the American Mission Society, he called the location of the site "*Empangeni*" which is the anglicised version of *Mpangeni*. From these details it may be deduced that there is a strong possibility that Grout's *Empangeni* might have been on or near the present river of that name because he said it was "just beyond the Mhlatuze" i.e. referring to the river.²⁰ This is supported by oral tradition,²¹ and particularly by Lewis Grout's clear references to *Empangeni* in 1862 as being a river i.e. "he commenced operations anew, at *Empangeni*, an eastern branch of the Umhlatuzi"²² and Mr. Oftebro "has now a station at Empangeni, a branch of the Umhlatuzi."²³ We also know that Grout could hear the "grum (sic) tones of the hippopotami" from Inkanyesi.²⁴ These hippopotami could well have been in the lake on the lower Empangeni river before it enters the Mhlatuze.

All this leads one to believe that the name *Empangeni* was already in use between 1856 and 1862 to identify the present Empangeni river and this would later provide the name for the village, rail and mill components of the present town of Empangeni which all drew their water from this common river.

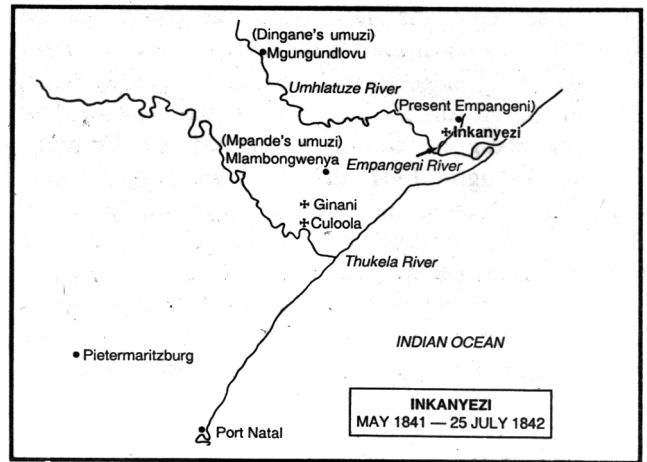
Delegorgue's Visit

The first independent source of information on *Inkanyesi* comes from the French naturalist Adulphe Delegorgue, who visited the mission station with its "very fine dwelling on the banks of the lake of the Om-Schlatousse"²⁵ (Mhlatuze) on the afternoon of 3 November 1841. He arrived with David Steller, Dick King and Douglas, who had been commissioned to bring him goods. They did not meet but Grout sent him a curt letter complaining to Delegorgue that the oxen had eaten the recently planted wheat in his garden. Grout presumed to lecture the proud Frenchman and did not take into account that his wheat was unprotected, or that the oxen were not the responsibility of Delegorgue who was affronted by Grout's abrupt approach. Delegorgue verbally retorted that "Panda alone is master of all those who are in this country, whether they be white or black. All, including the omphandiss (missionary), must obey his orders".²⁶ In the light of subsequent events this was to be important advice. Delegorgue left that afternoon.²⁷

Inkanyesi Prospers

Rev. Aldin Grout had great hopes for *Inkanyesi*. He selected this name because he fervently hoped that it would be "the day star of gospel light to them".²⁸ He was enthusiastic about the site which he had selected so carefully. "The circumstances which induced me to select this as the place of my residence and field labour are, that

it is desirable to have a station in the Zulu country on this side of Umpandis, and this appears to me (to be) decidedly the most advantageous that I have seen or heard of." The great potential for converts to Christianity from the large numbers of Zulus living in the seven nearby villages made up for his isolation and for the fact that he lived only "in a native hut".²⁹ He was so excited and full of faith that on 14 June 1841 he cried, "Now is our time. The door to them (Zulus) is fully open. Send me help as much and as soon as you can".³⁰ His congregation numbered some 200 - 300 Zulus in the winter but he expected a great assembly "in the warmer weather". His cattle were doing "well" in "healthy country" and he enthused that "I had never felt better and stronger, since I have been here, than I have been for many years".³¹



Kart: Inkanyesi, May 1841-25 July 1842

The Site of Inkanyesi

Grout must have felt very satisfied after several hard years in southern Africa. After travelling around and examining the area he selected a site for *Inkanyesi*. Even today it is a most idyllic setting of green undulating hills separated by numerous fertile valleys. The Mpangeni river, which is substantial and clean, flows into the Mpangeni lake (from which Grout heard the Hippopotami) which in turn flows into the Mhlatuze river. In the south the beautiful Ongoye mountains are majestically silhouetted against the Zululand sky. While one can only surmise the actual site of *Inkanyesi* there are several suitable places that suggest themselves.

The Missionary Work Begun

A month after his arrival Grout again requested help from the American Board of Commissioners in Boston, America, for his work at *Inkanyesi*.

"I could tell you, and through you the churches, of the miseries, suffering and degradation of these poor people, (the Zulus) touching both their temporal and eternal interest, and plead for help in my labor for their good as with a trumpet-tongue, but I will only say that here I am, single-handed, about one hundred miles from a fellow laborer, and the same distance from anybody that I call civilized, in the midst of a nation, which if it does not ask for teachers, will not throw the least obstacle in their way."³²

Grout soon got the help of an Englishman from Natal, an 18 year old interpreter and two Khoi to help build his fine house which by 25 October was "nearly done" and he considered himself "very well off." The mission school,³³ the first in the Empangeni district, was based in a native hut and Mrs. Grout had up to a 'hundred' pupils a day.³⁴ The pupils were keen and talented and some quickly learned to write the alphabet. Grout spoke favourably of the Zulus, who treated him well and helped him.³⁵ They were neither drunkards, licentious, nor thieves, though he had his reservations about their polygamy and heathenism and this caused him to call "loudly for a reinforcement of our mission".³⁶ Grout ploughed the fertile land and planted rye, wheat and barley seeds that he had brought with him. The local Zulu planted Indian corn (mealies), pumpkins, melons, beans, *imfe* (an indigenous sugar reed) and sorghum. The chiefs monopolised sugar cane and

banana production.³⁷ The Zulus requested Grout to pray for rain during a drought and because rain fell before sunset they thought Grout possessed special powers. Word of this gift even got to Mpende who sent "a principal chief" to request rain for the country and again rain fell before nightfall. Thereafter Grout became, in the eyes of the Zulus "the author of the rains" somehow associated with his large black coat.³⁸

While at *Inkanyesi* Grout seems to have been one of the original propagators of the modern harbour at Richards Bay. On 21 October 1841 he wrote laconically that "there is in probability a better port there (the bay at the mouth of the Mhlatuze) than at Port Natal, and it will soon be surveyed."³⁹

The Clash of Interests between Grout and Mpende

Rev. Aldin Grout, a Christian with an international background and recently arrived in Zululand, seemed to have misread the situation in Zululand with regard to the authority of the King and his (Grout's) own influence over the local Zulu population. He said paternalistically that: "From the king downward the people stand in perfect fear of the white people."⁴⁰ Disenchanted Zulus saw the mission station as a haven from Mpende's cruelty just as Port Natal had been from Dingane.

"I hear the people saying publicly and before one another, that if Mpende does not treat them well, they will just walk off, or move their village upon my place, taking it for granted if they are upon the station, they are out of the way of Zulu authority."⁴¹

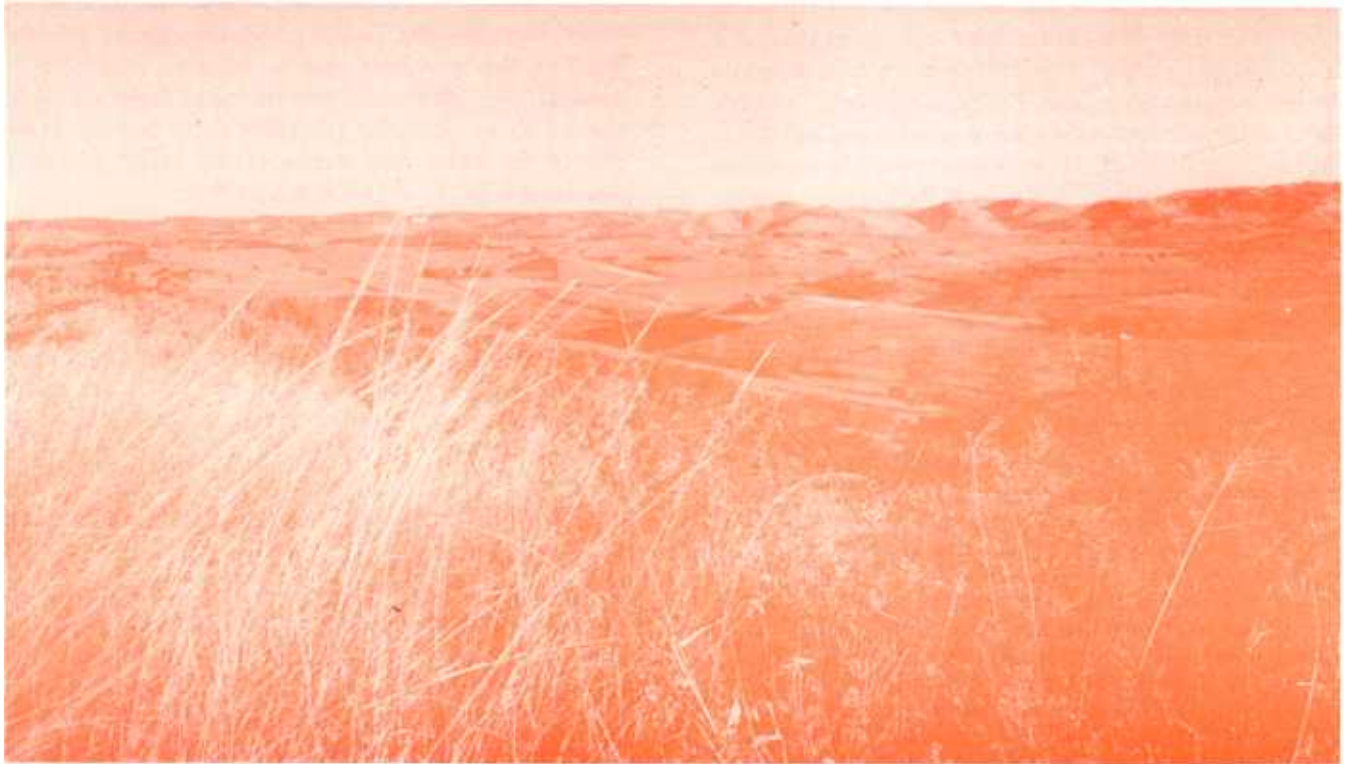
Grout mistakenly believed that Mpende would not remain in power long. The Zulu king could not countenance such provocative and rebellious behaviour from the white American Missionary even if only expressed in his letters to Boston. Grout interpreted this attitude as indicative of his Zulu neighbour's "confidence in me".⁴² There seems to be an element of truth that Grout encouraged these seditious ideas among the Zulus. Deleorgue had reason to believe that the Zulus in the vicinity of *Inkanyesi* were already according him (Grout) the respect due to a chief.

Panda discovered this and said: "The country of the Amazoulous is not made for two kings."⁴³ But we must remember that Delegorgue was no friend of the American. Trusting in the distant authority of the Volksraad in Pietermaritzburg, he foolishly maintained that "Umpande now (on 3 August 1841) dares not, and cannot hinder missionaries coming and locating where they please."⁴⁴ But Grout was isolated in Zululand and at Mpande's mercy on the northern bank of the Mhlatuze. He was a foreign *parvenu* enjoying the patronage of a sovereign king and until he established himself and gained the support of the Zulu hierarchy he had to tread warily.

To even think about an *imperium in imperio* while he was seeking to establish his mission station was to misread Mpande's power and authority as established Zulu king,

seeking often all too enthusiastically to propagate the Christian gospel. Probably all shared Grout's reservations which he, being the only White in the area, kept to himself and hopefully only communicated in his correspondence with Boston. He recognised and indicated the need to be cautious "about meddling with their government" and that basically he had "nothing to complain of and much to be grateful for."⁴⁸

Grout did become increasingly aware of the reality of the situation at Inkanyesi. He knew that "the chief men are suspicious of a white stranger that gets influence among the people, lest he weaken their power and influence."⁴⁹ Grout believed that Christian missionaries were not understood or appreciated and in fact Mpande "did not want them".⁵⁰ The bottom line for the local Zulus was that: "So far as we can protect them or afford them any



Mpangeni Lake . Angoye Hills in background.

and seriously jeopardise his own mission. Grout patronisingly dismissed Mpande with a condescending "He is a simple man" and regarded the Zulus as "hopeful subjects to operate on".⁴⁵ Grout was increasingly involved in disturbingly seditious thoughts which, sooner or later, were going to be noticed by Mpande.

"At present his (Mpande's) people are leaving him in considerable numbers, and I know that they talk of leaving him by thousands. Talk is heard also of assassinating him, and putting a brother into authority."⁴⁶

Norman Etherington goes too far when he claims that Grout was responsible for "irreparable damage to the cause of evangelism"⁴⁷ in Natal. Many missionaries before and after this event had been forced to flee Zululand due to the ambivalent attitude and behaviour of the 19th century Zulu monarchs towards the Christian missionaries

temporal good they are glad of our presence, but when preaching crosses their inclination and cherished practices, they do not like us".⁵¹ To show his reappreciation and respect to the King, Grout travelled to Mpande's *umuzi* at Mlanbongwenya on the last Sunday in February 1842. He was anxious to talk to Mpande about the state of his mission. On his return to Inkanyesi neighbouring Zulus were curious as to why Grout had not held a Sunday service at Mpande's *umuzi*. The local Zulus became extremely afraid because they inferred that Mpande was not friendly towards Grout and therefore did not support the mission and, being loyal to Mpande, they had no wish to offend him. Indeed, they had only supported the mission work because they believed that the king supported Grout's efforts.⁵² They believed that they were "caught" and "deceived" and that, having offended Mpande, their lives were no longer safe. They were so

scared that they now refused to go to the King's *umuzi* because they believed he would surely kill them.⁵³ This reaction increased Mpande's suspicions as to the influence of Grout's mission on his people. Their fear was justified when Mpande soon accused them of disloyalty by apparently accepting Grout as their chief. The situation was immediately exploited by ambitious Zulus who desired promotion and/or cattle for their over-zealous loyalty towards Mpande. In their enthusiasm to do the apparent will of the Zulu king, they even sentenced some of the local people to death because Grout's people had forsaken Mpande and had attached themselves to Grout.⁵⁴

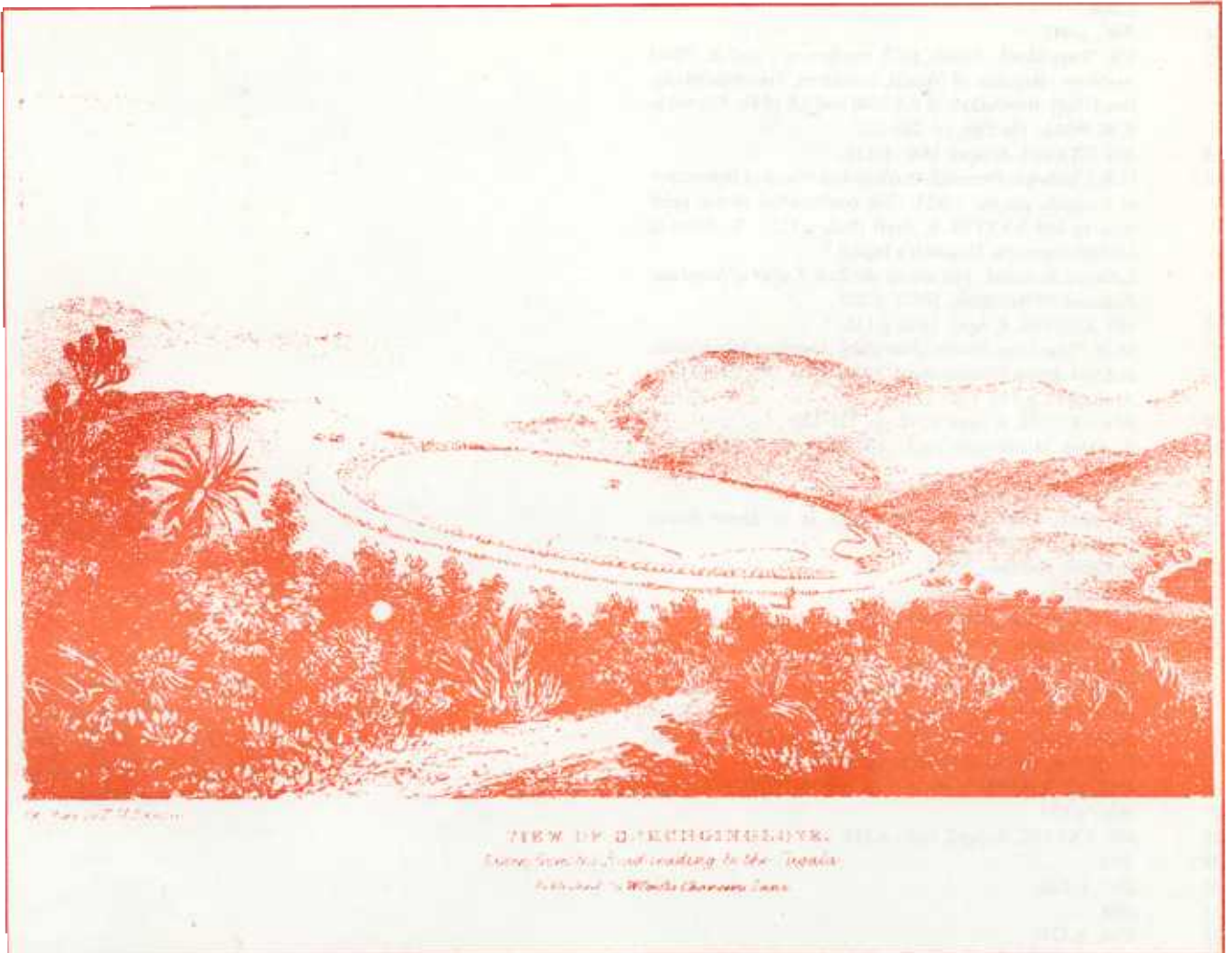
The Denouement

At daybreak on 25 July 1842 the Grouts were informed that the surrounding Zulus were being attacked by Mpande's impis who came to assert the king's authority. Aldin Grout described the horrific experience:

"We knew not whether it (the impi) had come for us, or the people, or both, and to prepare for the event we commended our spirits to God before leaving the room ... An attack was made upon the six places nearest our house, the people of which had been most friendly to us and had furnished our school with children, with orders to put to death every man, woman and child belonging to three (homesteads - *umunzis* - family huts) of them."⁵⁵

Shocked, Grout realised that Mpande had deliberately "butchered" his Zulu friends "because they were our friends".⁵⁶ As he forlornly surveyed the devastation of those he sought to help, Grout, although his family had obviously been spared, soon, but sadly, came to the inevitable decision that Mpande's attack on Inkanyesi "put an end to my usefulness there, and rendered it unsafe for me to remain, and I left immediately, July 1842, after a residence of little more than a year".⁵⁷

Mpande's message to the Zulus at Inkanyesi was dramatically effective among the local Zulu population. Grout counted the cost: "... it would be long at least before any would dare again show me friendship, or to show an interest upon religious subjects".⁵⁸ Later he was not entirely despondent but like other missionaries in Natal he did hope that the "English authorities"⁵⁹ would soon control Mpande so that the Christian missionaries could continue their work under their protection. Despite the harrowing experience, Grout remained optimistic that "the Zulus are decidedly favourable subject for our work."⁶⁰ It was not until 1851 that Rev. Hans Schreuder of the Norwegian Mission Society was to bring the gospel of Christ to the Zulus at Empangeni again.



Reproduced from Capt. Allen F. Gardiner, *Narrative of a Journey*.

Endnotes

- 1 A. de V. Minnaar, *Empangeni: a Historical Review to 1989* (Empangeni, 1989), pp. 3-4; A. de V. Minnaar, 'The Establishment and Growth of Empangeni', *Contree*, 15, 1984, pp. 6-7.
- 2 H. Newcombe, *Cyclopedia of Missions* (New York, 1855), p.50 and J. Tracey, *History of the American Board of Commissioners* (New York, 1842), p.300.
- 3 Aldin Grout, 'A Narrative of the Establishment of the American Mission in Natal' (*The Natal Star*, 25.6.1856), p.2.
- 4 *Missionary Herald* (MH), XXXII, 9, September 1836, p.340. Letter from Grout dated 12.2.1836.
- 5 Ginani, according to H.C. Lugg, *Historic Natal and Zululand* (Pietermaritzburg, 1949), p.136, is situated above the junction of the Msunduze and Winya streams on the road to Ndulinde and about half a mile from the point where this road leaves the (old) main Zululand road, a short distance north of Mandini. This was the second mission station in this area. Captain Allen Gardiner founded *Culoola* or *Kulula* (to set free/redemption) nearby on the banks of the Msunduze on 2.6.1835. *Ibid.*, p.180.
- 6 J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Notule van die Natalse Volksraad 1838-1845*, Bylaag 24, 1840, p.347; E.W. Smith, *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley* (London, 1949), pp. 219-221.
- 7 *MH XXXVII*, 6, Jan. 1841, p.219. Letter from Lindley and Adams, 14.7.1840. Quoted in M. Williamson, *Grout's Missionary years in Natal 1835-70*, p.11.
- 8 A. Grout, 'A Narrative', p.9; *MH VII* 6 Jun. 1841, p.248.
- 9 J. Tracey, *History*, p.420; J.H. Breytenbach, *Notule*, p.72.
- 10 *MH XXVII*, 6, June 1841. Letter from Grout, 22.10.1840, p.246.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.247.
- 12 J.H. Breytenbach, *Notule*, p.72, resolutions 1 and 2; Natal Archives: Republic of Natalia, Landdrost, Pietermaritzburg, No. 1/202: Resolutions of 8.1.1840 and 5.8.1840. Quoted in E.W. Smith, *The Life*, pp. 219-220.
- 13 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.131.
- 14 G.A. Chadwick, *Research on Historical Places of Importance to Kwazulu*, pp. m2 - m11. For confirmation of this point refer to *MH XXXVIII*, 8, April 1842, p.131. "I arrived at Umlanbonguenye, Umpandi's capital."
- 15 L. Grout, *Zululand. Life among the Zulu-Kaffirs of Natal and Zululand* (Philadelphia, 1862), p.210.
- 16 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.131.
- 17 M.W. Tyler Gray, *Stories of the Early American Missionaries in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1933), p.39; *MH LXXXII*, 4, April 1886, p.135.
- 18 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, pp. 131-132.
- 19 A. Grout, 'A Narrative', p.9; *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.131.
- 20 A. Grout, 'A Narrative', p.9.
- 21 A. Bozas, *Empangeni. The Origin of its Street Names* (Empangeni, 1970), p.viii.
- 22 L. Grout, *Zululand*, p.210.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.241.
- 24 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.131.
- 25 A. Delegorgue, *Travels in Southern Africa*, Vol. 1, p.40. We must remember that 150 years ago the Umhlatuze lake could possibly have been one continuous lake i.e. not like the present Richards Bay, Cubhu, Mageza and Empangeni lakes. However, we do know that, in any case, Inkanyesi was situated on the present Empangeni river.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 170-172.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p.174.
- 28 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.131.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, p.132.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*, p.131.
- 33 *MH XXXVIII*, 8, Aug. 1842, p.337.
- 34 *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340; *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.132.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 M.W. Tyler Gray, *Stories of*, p.39; *MH LXXXII*, 4, April 1886, p.135.
- 38 *MH XXXVIII*, 8, Aug. 1842, p.340. R. Guma in his *Groutville Mission Station Centenary*, p.2 uses this and other sources without acknowledgement.
- 39 *MH XXXVIII*, 8, Aug. 1842, p.339. Reporting news from a "Dutchman".
- 40 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.132.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 A. Delegorgue, *Travels*, p.40.
- 44 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.132.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 *MH XXXIX*, 2, Feb. 1843, p.79.
- 47 A. Duminy and W.R. Guest, *Natal and Zululand* (Pietermaritzburg, 1989), p.278.
- 48 *MH XXXVIII*, 4, April 1842, p.338.
- 49 *MH XXXVIII*, 8, August 1842, p.338.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p.339.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p.340.
- 52 *MH XXXIX*, 2, Feb. 1843, p.78.
- 53 A. Grout, 'A Narrative', p.9.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p.10; *MH XXXIX*, 2, Feb. 1843, p.78.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 A. Grout, 'A Narrative', p.10.
- 58 *MH XXXIX*, 2, Feb. 1843, p.78.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p.79.
- 60 *Ibid.*