

Background Notes



BECHUANALAND

Population: 543,000

Capital: Gaborone

The United Kingdom Protectorate of Bechuanaland is situated in southern Africa. It is bounded on the south and east by the Republic of South Africa, on the northeast by Southern Rhodesia and Zambia, and on the west and north by South-West Africa. The territory, which has never been completely surveyed, has an estimated area of 222,000 square miles (approximately the size of Texas).

The protectorate is a vast tableland with a mean altitude of 3,300 feet. The Kalahari Desert, consisting partly of undulating sandy country with some semidesert and extensive grassy areas, covers much of the south and west. In the northwest the land is watered by the Okovango and Chobe rivers, the former spreading over a great inland delta forming the Ngami Swamps. The country is a natural game reserve for most species of African fauna. The eastern region has the best agricultural land and the most favorable rainfall.

The climate is generally subtropical but changes with the latitude and altitude. Average annual rainfall is 18 inches and varies from 25 inches in the north to 9 inches or less in the Kalahari. The territory lies in the summer rain belt with rains beginning in October and ending in April. May to September are normally completely dry months. Temperatures range from in excess of 100° F. in summer to below freezing in winter.

THE PEOPLE

The total population is estimated at some 543,000. Aside from approximately 26,500 Bushmen, 3,900 whites, 400 Hottentots, 300 Asians, and some 3,500 mixed, the people are Bantu and are divided into eight main tribal groupings of the Batswana. The most important tribes of the Batswana are the Bamangwato, whose capital is Serowe, the Bakwena, the Batawana, the Bangwaketse, the Bakgatla, the Bamalete, the Barolong, and the Batlokwa. The great majority of the people live in the eastern part of the country, about one-half live in villages of 1,000 or more. Population density is about 2.5 per square mile. About one in seven of the population is Christian. Most others are animists.

The seat of government was moved from Mafeking in the Republic of South Africa in February 1965 to a new capital at Gaborone.

HISTORY

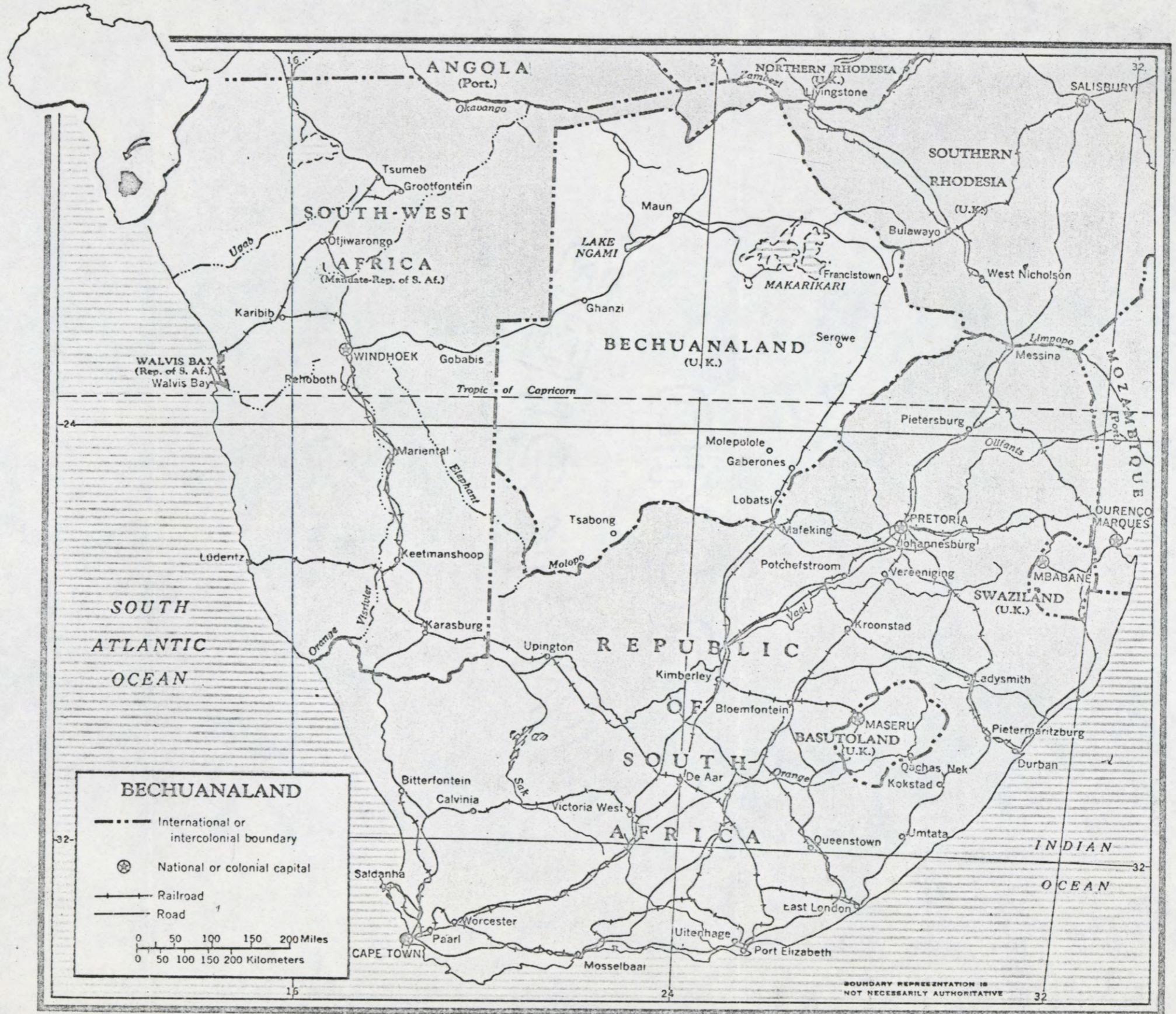
The early history of the tribes inhabiting Bechuanaland is shrouded in legend. The first contact with Europeans was through missionaries and took place in the early 19th century at a time when the territory was torn by intertribal warfare. In the last quarter of the century hostilities broke out between the Batswana and the Boers from the South African Republic (Transvaal). Following appeals by the Batswana for assistance, the British Government in 1885 proclaimed the whole of Bechuanaland to be under British protection. The southern part of the territory, which included Mafeking, was later constituted a Crown Colony and eventually became part of the Cape Colony. It is now in the Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa. The northern part, thereafter known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate, remained under the protection of the British Government. In 1909 when the constitution of the Union (now Republic) of South Africa was drawn up, the African inhabitants of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland asked that they not be included in the proposed Union.

A gradual expansion of central authority in the years that followed was accompanied by a steady evolution of local tribal government. Before 1934 the chiefs and tribes supposed themselves to be almost completely autonomous with respect to their local affairs. In that year proclamations were issued that regularized the position and powers of the chiefs and defined the constitution and functions of the native courts under the native authority system evolved in other British dependencies. Tribal treasuries were created in 1938.

In 1920 the central authority established two advisory councils representing the African and European inhabitants respectively. In 1950 a Joint Advisory Council was formed consisting of officials, Africans, and Europeans. Over the years these advisory bodies were consulted on a constantly expanding range of matters. In the sphere of local government the conciliar principle was introduced in 1957 under which tribal authorities received the advice of duly constituted local councils chosen from the ranks of tribesmen.

In 1958 the Joint Advisory Council passed a resolution "that the time had come when a Legislative Council should be formed and empowered to assist in the government of the territory." Following study and recommendations of a constitutional committee, a Constitution establishing a Legislative Council was promulgated and became effective May 2, 1961. The Legislative Council held its first session at Lobatsi on June 21, 1961.

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Following the announcement of the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the British Parliament in April 1963 of Her Majesty's Government's intention to review the Bechuanaland constitution with a view to further political advance, Her Majesty's Commissioner met with representatives of the political parties and other groups. There was unanimous agreement on the specifics of a constitutional revision, and the conclusions were published in a local White Paper in Bechuanaland in November 1963.

In June 1964 the British Government announced its acceptance of proposals for a form of self-government for Bechuanaland providing for a ministerial system and designed to lead naturally to independence. These proposals had been agreed upon unanimously at discussions in Bechuanaland between Her Majesty's Commissioner, representatives of the chiefs, political parties, and important minority communities. The new Constitution came into effect in March 1965.

Bechuanaland is scheduled to achieve its independence on September 30, 1966, and thereafter will be known as Botswana.

GOVERNMENT

Under the new Constitution the executive government of Bechuanaland is controlled by a Cabinet presided over by Her Majesty's Commissioner and consisting of a Prime Minister, a Deputy Prime Minister, and five other ministers drawn from the Legislative Assembly.

Her Majesty's Commissioner is the chief administrative officer, with the status of Governor, and exercises his general powers in accordance with advice of the Cabinet. He retains, however, a broad reserve executive power and is also responsible for external affairs, defense, and security. In exercising these latter responsibilities he acts wherever possible in consultation with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. He is also responsible for appointments to the Public Service and for the promotion, dismissal, and disciplinary control of officers in the service. He is assisted by an advisory, nonpolitical Public Service Commission.

The Legislative Assembly has 36 members (excluding the Speaker)--31 elected, 4 elected by the elected Members of the Assembly, and the Attorney-General who may speak but not vote in the Assembly.

For the purpose of electing members of the Legislative Assembly, Bechuanaland was divided into 31 single member constituencies on the basis of a population quota of 17,473 per constituency. A single voter's roll based on universal adult suffrage was prepared for each constituency. The first general election was held on March 1, 1965. A total of 140,789 people voted; 28 seats went to the Bechuanaland Democratic Party, and 3 to the Bechuanaland Peoples Party. The Botswana Independence Party gained no seats.

Under the new Constitution there is also a House of Chiefs. The Chiefs of the eight principal tribes of Bechuanaland are permanent *ex officio* members, and four other members are elected by and from the subchiefs in the Chobe, Francistown, Ghanzi, and Kgalagadi districts. The House of Chiefs is available to advise the government in the exercise of its responsibilities. The Legislative Assembly is prohibited from proceeding with any bill which particularly affects a defined range of subjects relating to matters of tribal concern unless a draft has been referred to the House of Chiefs.

The new Constitution contains a code of fundamental human rights which is enforceable by the High Court of Bechuanaland.

ECONOMY

Bechuanaland's economy depends almost entirely upon the export of cattle. The tribesmen are pastoralists and are traditionally much less concerned with agriculture, though some progressive farmers have demonstrated that agriculture can account for an increasingly important part of the economy. Approximately 2,000 square miles of arable land is at present under cultivation. About 50,000 square miles of potentially productive land is unused. Four, and in places five, years of drought led the government to initiate large-scale famine and drought relief schemes in 1965 in which the U.N. and other international organizations have participated.

The currency of Bechuanaland is the same as that of the Republic of South Africa. Rand 1.00=\$1.40.

A geological survey is being undertaken with a view to determining the mineral resources of the country. Present production of minerals is confined to asbestos, manganese, and negligible amounts of gold and silver. Active prospecting work is being carried out by several mining companies in different areas, and there are prospects for development of the copper, coal, and soda ash deposits in the east.

The Lobatsi Abattoir which was started by the United Kingdom Commonwealth Development Corp. is now operated by a consortium of the government, the corporation, and the producers. The corporation is still the managing agent. In 1964, 111,758 head of cattle were slaughtered. Total exports of carcasses and live cattle in 1964 amounted to R5,412,000 (\$7.6 million). The abattoir company's subsidiary, Export and Canning Co. (Pty.) Ltd., exported canned beef and meat extract in 1964 worth R992,000 (\$1.4 million).

The estimated value of exports in 1964 was R9,209,000 (\$12.9 million) consisting of animal products (85 percent); deferred pay and other cash savings of Bechuanaland laborers working in South Africa (9 percent); minerals (3.8 percent) and agricultural produce (2.2 percent). Some 45 percent of total exports went to South Africa.

Total imports in 1964 were estimated at some R9 million (\$12.6 million) and consisted mainly of general merchandise, motor vehicles and parts, and grains and other foodstuffs.

Bechuanaland has 5 miles of tarred roads and 4,930 miles of gravelled or dirt roads, 2,567 miles of which are maintained by the Public Works Department. A \$3.6 million loan made by the International Development Association in 1964 is being used for construction of a new road from Francistown to Maun and for improvement to gravel standard of the main road from the Rhodesian border in the north to the South African border in the south.

Of the main Cape Town to Rhodesia railway line, 394 miles lie within Bechuanaland.

Estimated budget revenue and expenditure for fiscal year 1964-65 is R8,434,000 (\$11.8 million). Main sources of revenue are a grant-in-aid from the British Treasury of R3.74 million (\$5.24 million) for fiscal year 1964-65; taxes and duties; ports and telegraphs; and customs and excise taxes. Bechuanaland has a customs union with the Republic of South Africa and receives a fixed percentage of the total customs revenue collected by the Republic.

RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA

The South Africa Act of 1909, which established the Union of South Africa, provided for procedure to be used if at some future date agreement should be reached for the transfer of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, Basutoland, and Swaziland to the Union.

Since 1909 the South African Government has several times expressed its desire for the three territories to be transferred to South Africa. Abortive negotiations between the South African and British Governments took place between 1913 and 1939. During the passage of the 1909 South Africa Bill through the British Parliament, the British Government pledged that transfer should not take place until the inhabitants of the territories had been consulted and the British Parliament given the opportunity of expressing its views. This pledge has been consistently reiterated by subsequent British Governments. In 1954 Sir Winston Churchill stated that there could be no question of the British Government agreeing at that time to a transfer of the territories. It was reaffirmed in 1959 and again in 1961 that there had been no change in this policy. In 1963 the South African Prime Minister stated that South Africa had no ambitions over the territories but that if South Africa were to become their guardian instead of Britain, it could lead the territories more effectively and quickly to independence and economic prosperity. In the same year a British statement in the United Nations said: "There is no question of these territories being incorporated into South Africa against the wishes of their peoples."

Owing to its geographical position, Bechuanaland, like Basutoland and Swaziland, has close economic links with South Africa. About 30,000 of the population are employed in South Africa, with about one-third of them permanently residing in that country. Forty-five percent of Bechuanaland's exports are sold to South Africa. With the other two territories it is joined with South Africa in a customs union; it uses South African currency, and there is close

co-operation over a wide range of practical matters including trade, transport, agriculture, health, and economic development.

U. S. OBJECTIVES

The United States desires to expand and strengthen the present friendly relations with the people of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and favors the country's orderly and progressive political, economic, and social development toward nonracial, democratic, independent government and greater viability.

PRINCIPAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Her Majesty's Commissioner--H. S. Norman-Walker

Cabinet

Prime Minister--Seretse Khama
Deputy Prime Minister--Q.K.J. Masire
Minister of Finance--B.C. Thema
Minister of Labor and Social Services--Archelaus M. Tsoebebe
Minister of Works and Communications--J. Haskins
Minister of Agriculture--~~M.P.K. Nwako~~ *Tshoko Tshoko*
Minister of Mines, Commerce, and Industry--A.M. Dambe
Minister of Local Government--~~Tshoko Tshoko~~ *A. Kgabo*
Minister of State for External Affairs--M.P.K. Nwako

PRINCIPAL U. S. OFFICIALS

The United States established a consulate at Gaberones, Bechuanaland on April 7, 1966. Previously U. S. Consul Richard St. F. Post, resident at Mbabane, Swaziland, was responsible for U.S. interests in Bechuanaland.

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* HMSO publications may be obtained from British Information Services, 845 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.