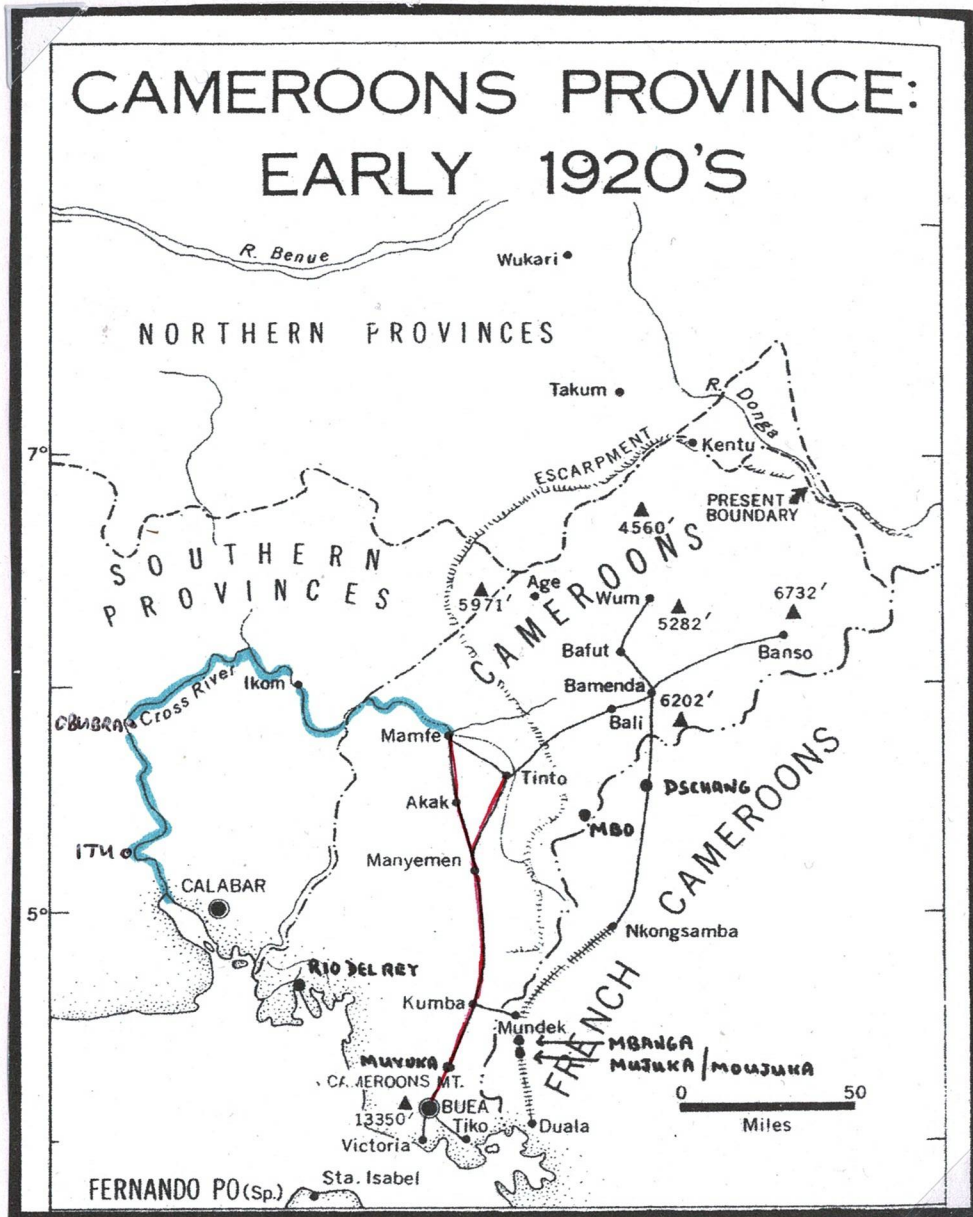
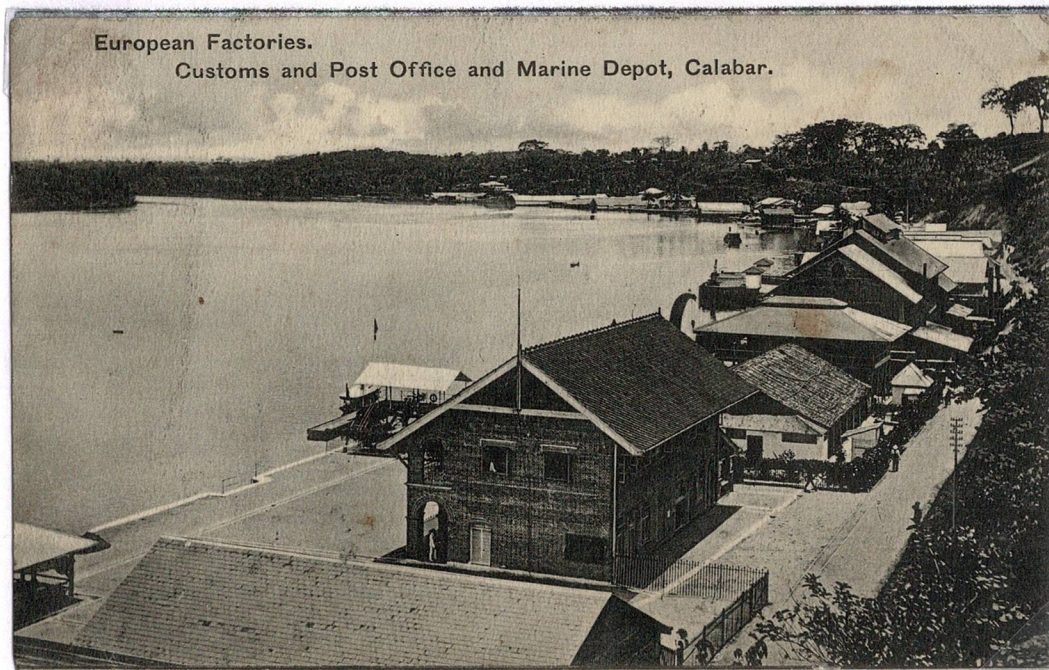


The Cross River

The map on this page shows the route of the telegraph line from Buea to Tinto and Ossidinge (renamed Mamfe) in the early 1920s and the route of the Cross River to Calabar in blue. Mamfe and its hinterland, including Bamenda, were served from 1904 by river steamers and launches on the Cross River as far as Ikom, and by canoe from there to Mamfe. The modern map on the next page shows the whole length of the Cross River in green, the Eastern Railway to Port Harcourt in black and principal settlements underlined in blue.

Rainfall in this tropical rain forest area is highly seasonal, with flood conditions between May and September and low water between December and April. The timetables show the steamer *Hornbill* operated only during the wet season alongside the converted gunboat *Jackdaw*. During the dry season small motor launches *Spider* and *Sandfly* provided the mail service.



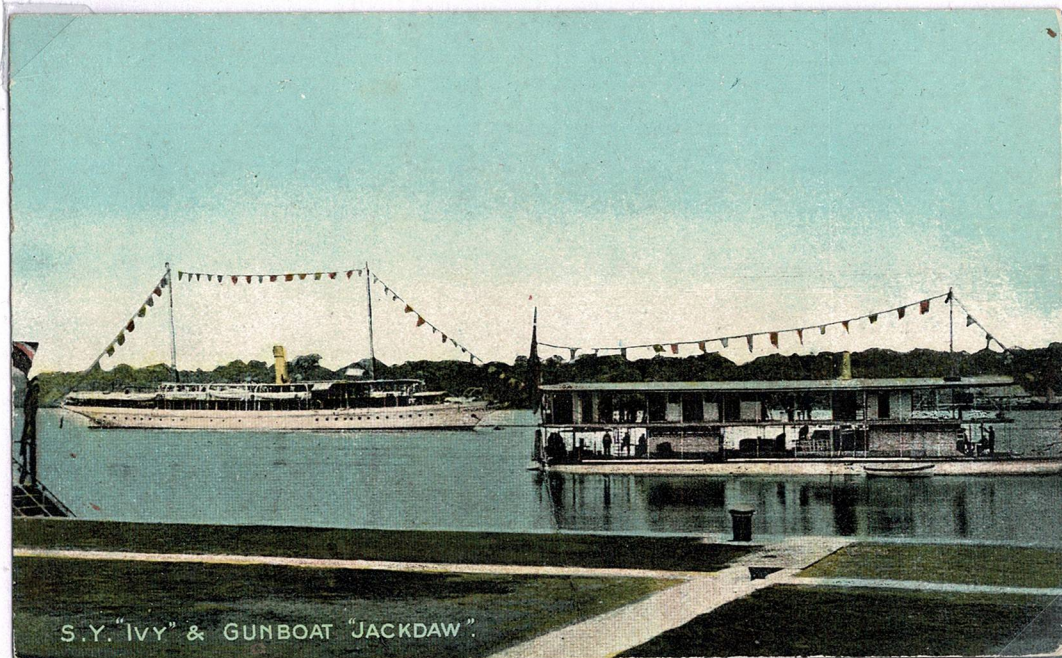


European Factories.
Customs and Post Office and Marine Depot, Calabar.

Figure 5.2: postcard view with the post-1895 post office in the foreground and the Customs-secure area behind and around it. Note how the fences permit public access to the post office only. The location of the post office became inconvenient so a new post office was eventually built in the town centre in 1951. The old post office building still exists but is inaccessible because it is within the secure Naval dockyard. (author's collection)

The Cross River

The Cross River rises on the north side of the Mount Cameroun volcano complex where the total annual rainfall is very high. As a result this soon becomes a deep wide river which is navigable from Mamfe/Ossidinge in Cameroun all the way to its mouth at Oron and Calabar. The river flows into Nigeria upstream of Ikom, and its westerly flow is the reason it is named the Cross River. About 140 miles from the coast it turns south and flows through swampy rain forest in which any land transport is difficult. The tidal part of the river starts from Itu then by the time it reaches Calabar the estuary between it and Oron on the western bank is 20 miles wide. The total distance from Ossidinge to Calabar is 242 miles.



S.Y. "IVY" & GUNBOAT "JACKDAW".

Figure 5.3: postcard view of the Governor's Yacht "Ivy" and the river steamer "Jackdaw". (author's collection)

PROPOSED TIME TABLE FOR CROSS RIVER MAIL SERVICE.

UP.

		Launch.	Jackdaw.	Launch Extra.	Launch.	Jackdaw.	Launch Extra.	Launch.	Jackdaw.	Launch Extra.	Launch.
		JUNE	JUNE	JUNE	JULY	JULY	JULY	JULY	JULY	JULY	JULY
		8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.	8 A.M.
Old Calabar	... leave	18th	25th	29th	2nd	9th	13th	16th	23rd	27th	30th
Brick Field...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Itu ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	20th	"	"	10th	"	"	24th	"	"
Afikpo ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	27th	"	"	11th	"	"	25th	"	"
Ediba ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	28th	"	"	12th	"	"	26th	"	"
Obubra ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	29th	"	"	13th	"	"	27th	"	"
Okuni ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"

DOWN.

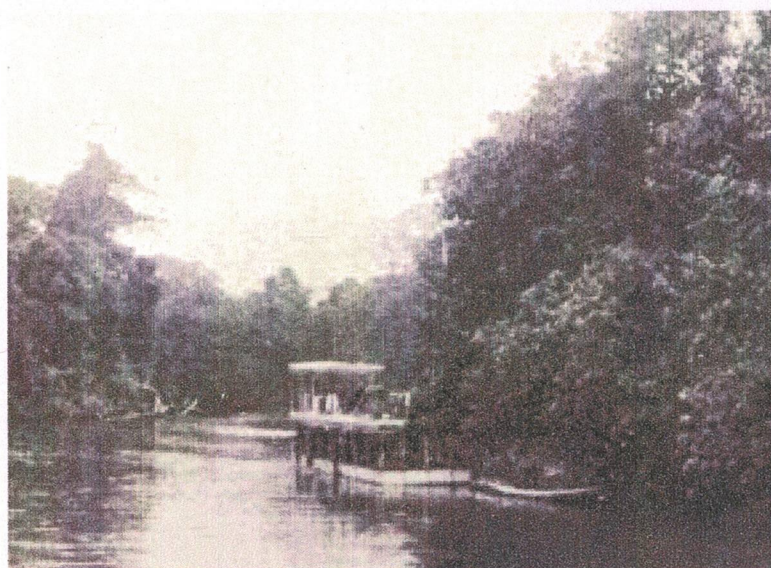
Okuni ...	... leave	18th	30th	29th	2nd	14th	13th	16th	28th	27th	30th
Obubra ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	JULY 1st	"	"	15th	"	"	29th	"	"
Ediba ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	2nd	"	"	16th	"	"	30th	"	"
Afikpo ...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	4th	"	"	18th	"	"	AUG. 1st	"	"
Itu ...	... arrive	"	5th	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	20th	6th	30th	4th	19th	14th	18th	2nd	28th	AUG. 1st
Brick Field...	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
"	... leave	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Old Calabar	... arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"

V. BUCKLAND.

*Local Marine Officer.*Local Marine Office, Old Calabar.
18th June, 1904.

Figure 5.4: Extract from the Southern Nigeria Gazette showing the first timetable for the Cross River Mail Service.

Inbound cover to the German governor of Ossidinge, Dr Mansfeld, from Lagos in March/April 1907. This was mailed during the dry season, from Lagos on 30 March 1907 passing through Calabar on 11 April. Dr Mansfeld, an ethnographer and avid collector of African artefacts, was Governor of Ossidinge from 1904 to 1907 and was resident in Kamerun until 1914. Before the Great War Elder Dempster's ocean steamers from Liverpool operated fortnightly to Calabar via Lagos and picked up mail from Lagos for the eastward ports of call, including Calabar. The letter was then taken up the Cross River on one of the dry season launches, *Spider* or *Sandfly*. Unfortunately, there is no date of arrival at its destination.



The motor launch *Spider* on the Cross River



Figure 5.5: cover from Calabar, Nigeria to Ossidinge, Kamerun dated AU 23 07 at 5d (international double weight) endorsed by the sender "S/S Hornbill Cross River" to avoid it being sent by sea to Victoria or Duala which would have taken longer overland from that coast. (author's collection)

No. 547.] **TIME TABLE, CROSS RIVER TRANSPORT SERVICE, WET SEASON, 1907.**

UP.

STATION.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.	Jackdaw.	Hornbill.		
	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.		
Calabar	leave	3	10	17	21	31	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23
Brickfields	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Itu	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
... ..	leave	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24
Afikpo	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Ediba	leave	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25
Obubra	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
... ..	leave	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26
Ikoni... ..	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"

DOWN.

Ikoni... ..	leave	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28
Calabar	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	Nov.	"	"	"	"
Ediba	leave	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29
Afikpo	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Itu	leave	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30
Brickfields	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Calabar	leave	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	Dec.
... ..	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	1
Brickfields	leave	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2
Calabar	arrive	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"

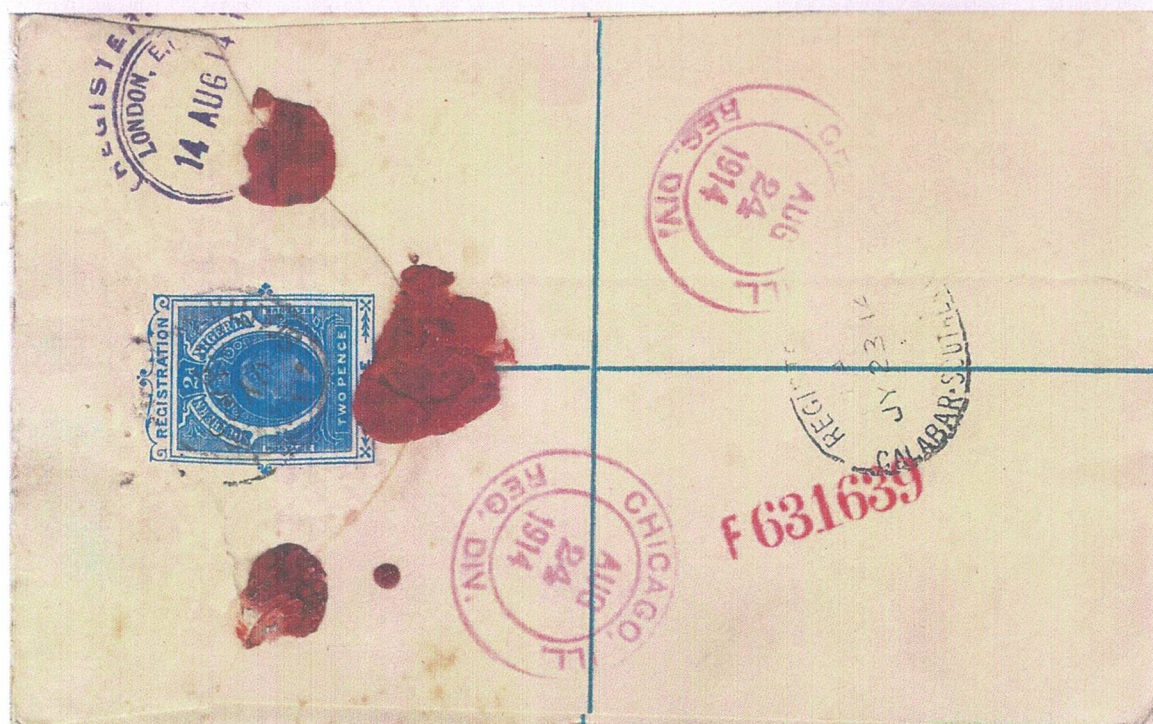
Launches and "Jackdaw" will leave Queen Beach at 7.30 a.m. Intending passengers should be on board by 7.15 a.m. Should the Mail Steamer be late, the launch Mail will leave Calabar the day after arrival of mail.

Transport Office,
Calabar, 15th May, 1907.

A. GREENSTOCK,
Transport Officer.

Figure 5.6: 1907 wet season Cross River timetable

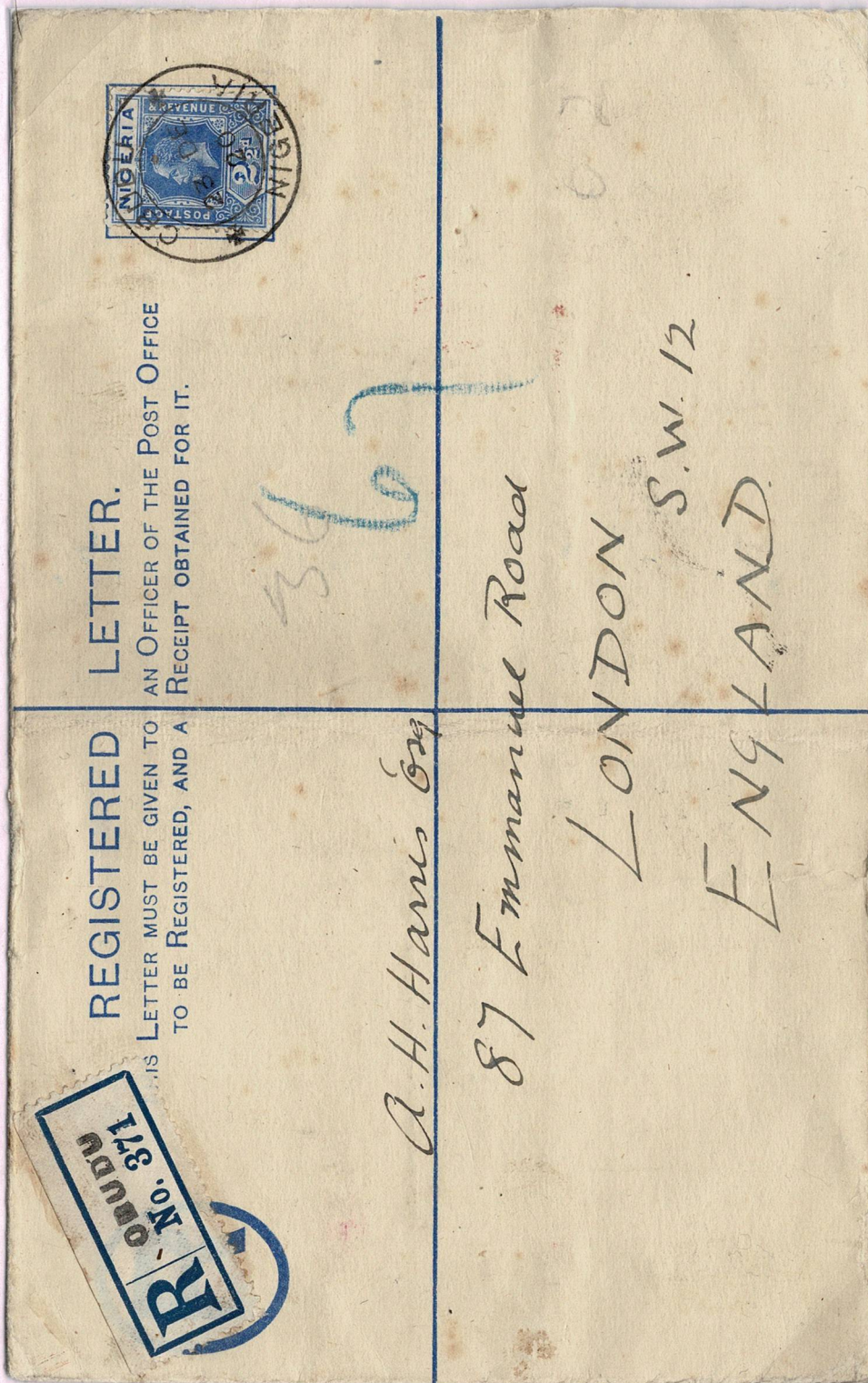
In the pre-war period there was a weekly ocean mail service at Calabar made up of three different routes; a fortnightly "slow" service from Liverpool, a monthly express service from Liverpool and a monthly express service from London. Mails from the Cross River were therefore carried down river to Calabar and the river timetables were designed to make the quickest connections to them. Figure 6.11 shows front and reverse of a cover carried down river from Itu to Calabar in July 1914, shortly before Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August.



Registered cover from Itu on ~~22~~ July 14 to Chicago, via Calabar on JY 23 14, London on 14 AUG 14 and Chicago on AUG 24 1914. This was the penultimate weekly sailing from Calabar.

Obudu is situated north of Ikom in a remote mountain location 26 miles east of Ogoja. It was a district office under Southern Nigeria with access by track from Ikom on the Cross River, but Ogoja was better connected by road to the Cross River and became the district headquarters in about 1918.

This registered PSE, posted on 23 DE 1920, towards the end of the life of the postal agency, is backstamped at Ogoja on 24 December, Itu on 6 January and Port Harcourt on 8th. Carriage to Ogoja was by runner. From there to Itu was by runner to Ikom then by government mail launch to Itu during the dry season. There were more steamers from Port Harcourt than from Calabar so the mail was usually taken off the river at Itu, carried by road from Itu to Aba and by rail from there to Port Harcourt.



During the Cameroons Campaign, the Army had set up a telegraph line to Ossidinge and Tinto, later extended to Bamenda and Dschang. It was announced in the Nigeria Gazette that Telegraph Stations had been opened in August 1916 at Ossidinge and Tinto, presumably civilianizing the pre-existing Army facility. A similar announcement was made in November 1918 for Bamenda and Dschang. All these offices were supplied with bridge – type Southern Nigeria Telegraphs handstamps which do not show the name of the office. Instead there is a code letter or letters at the start and end of the bridge.

These telegraph offices did offer a basic postal service, via Ikom in Nigeria, mainly for the expatriate personnel manning them. The KGV 1d stamp on this cover to the UK is cancelled with a telegraph marking, –T 18 VII 18 AU, and five days later a second telegraph marking, –O 23 VII 18 –S, has been used as a transit handstamp. This second marking is known on telegraphs from Ossidinge, Cameroons telegraph office.

The direction of travel of this cover, down the Cross River to Obubra in the wet season when this river was fully navigable, means that the letter must have been mailed from a telegraph office east of Ossidinge. The only possible telegraph office origin for this letter is Tinto at this date. Bamenda and Dschang did not commence telegraph services before November 1918. It is the only known example of this marking.



Obubra Hill registered. The first registered oval read OBUBRA HILL and is known until 18 July 1923. It is shown on piece dated 25 AU 15 and as a transit postmark on cover dated 17 AP 23 shortly before its last known date of 18 July 1923.

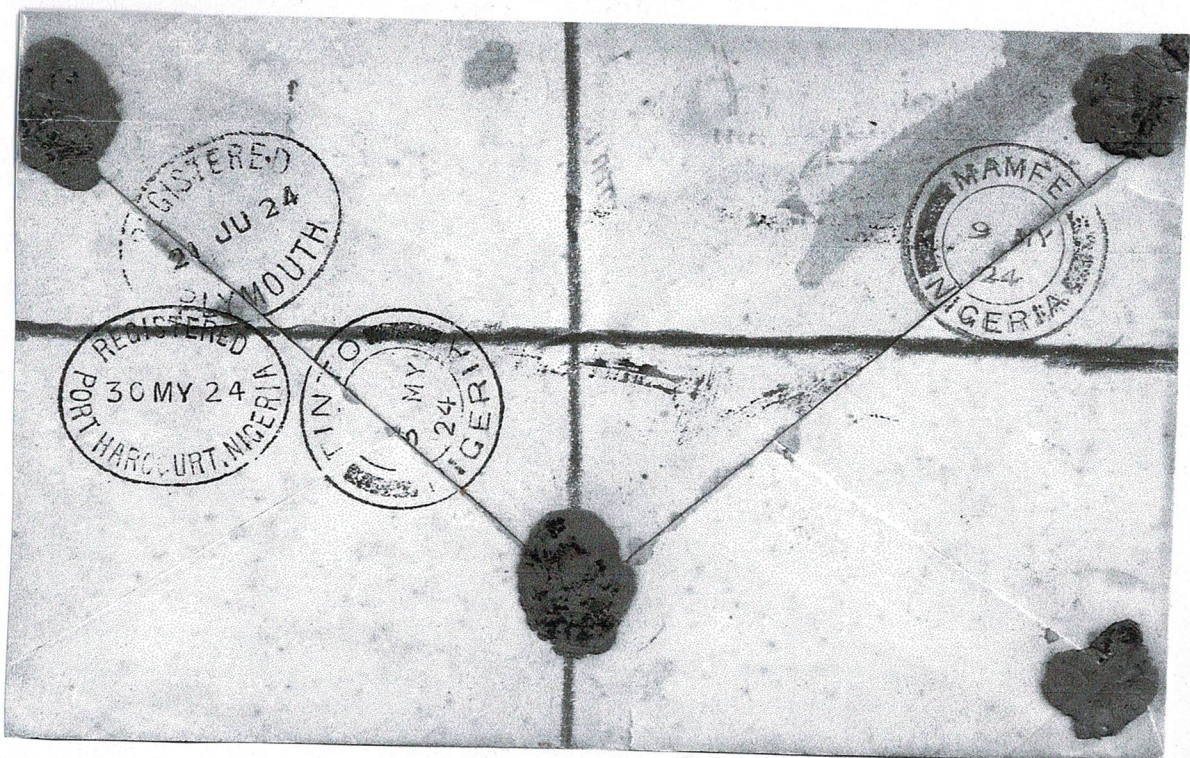
This registered cover from Tinto has a fine sequence of transit marks showing its route to the UK via the Cross River and Port Harcourt in the dry season. The cover left Tinto on 9 April by runner to Mamfe (the weak postmark of 10 23), then took four days to reach Ikom by canoe. There was a fortnightly launch service from Ikom to Itu in the dry season depending on the water level. The Obubra Hill cancel on 17 AP 23 could show that the upper river may have been too shallow for the launch and the letter may have continued to Obubra by canoe to catch the launch there. It was bagged at Obubra through to Port Harcourt.



Tinto post office was officially opened some time in 1902. From November 1920 it used a double-ring date stamp TINTO / NIGERIA in which the name TINTO was about 11.5mm long. From 10 Feb 1924 a second device was in use at the same time in which the word Tinto is about 14.5mm long, shown here dated 5 May 1924.

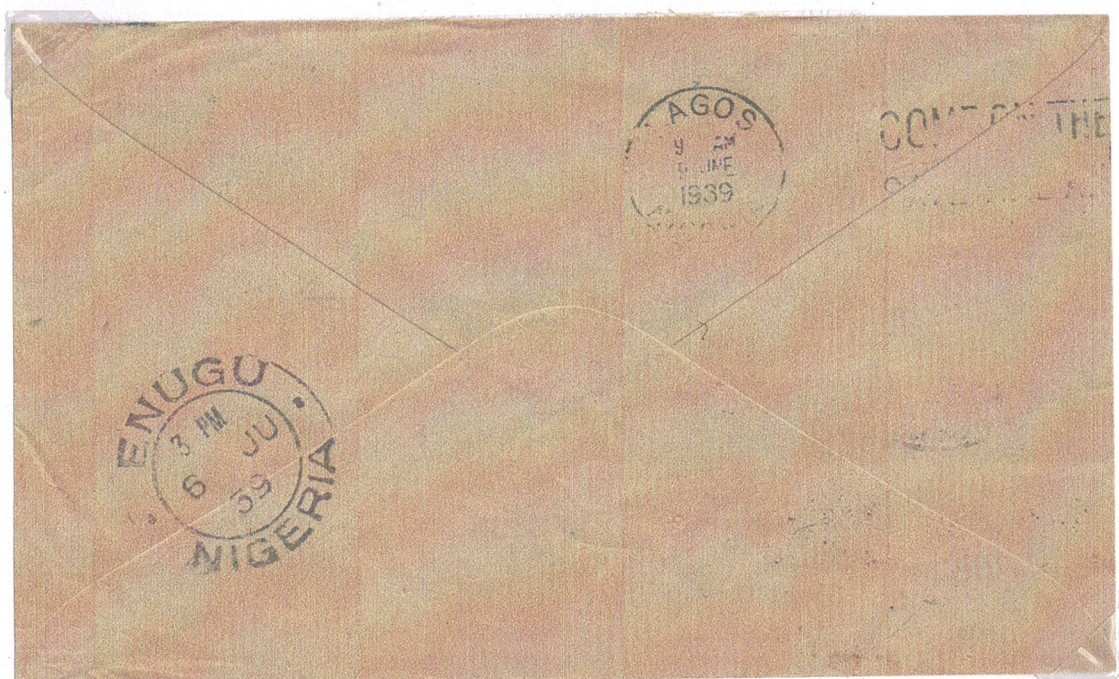


On the reverse of this cover is a transit mark of MAMFE / NIGERIA dated 9 May 1924. Mamfe post office and Ossidinge post office are one and the same: the name was changed on 31 March 1922. This cover shows that, as with the telegraphs cover, the mail runner from Tinto to Mamfe took four or five days to carry the mails that distance west to join the Cross River from that point; further supporting the assessment that the -T code telegraph mark was applied at Tinto. This is the EKD for this double ring MAMFE / NIGERIA postmark.



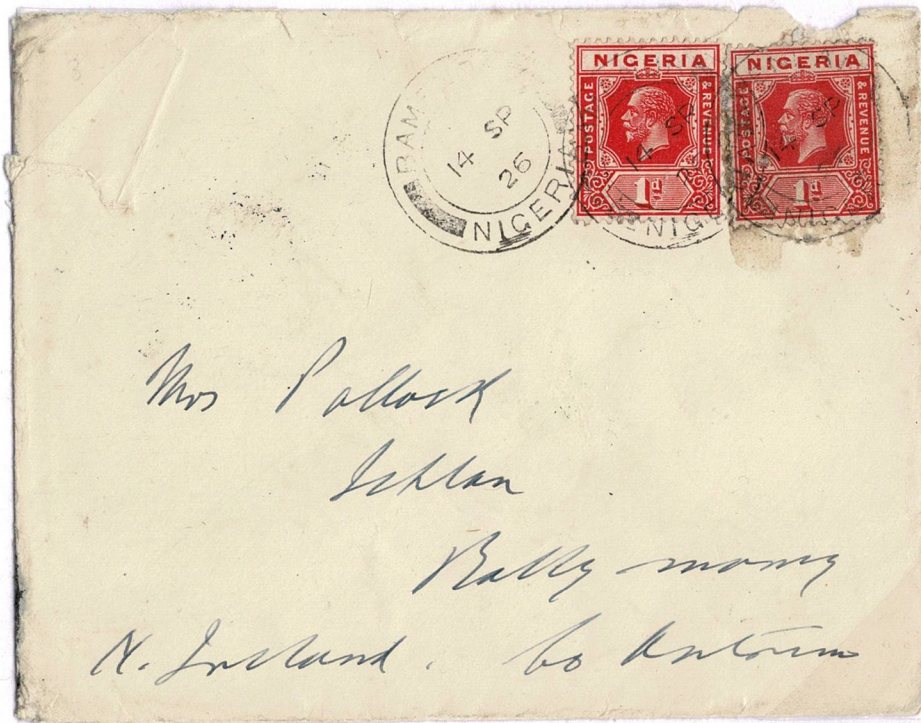
River boats on the Cross River were the primary mail route for the hinterland of Calabar and parts of Kamerun / Cameroons until the Second World War. However, the mail was diverted away from the southern stretch of the river when the Eastern Railway reached Aba and a road was built between Itu and Aba in about 1916. From 1926 a road from Enugu to Abakaliki and runner from there to Obubra enabled mails for places on the Cross River upstream of Obubra to be carried by rail to Enugu then by road between Enugu and Obubra.

This cover from Mamfe, Cameroons on 29 May 1930 was carried by river and road to Enugu on 6 June then by rail to Lagos, arriving on 9 June.



This cover from Bamenda, British Cameroons to Northern Ireland, sent on 14 SP 26 travelled downstream on the Cross River into Nigeria during the high-water season, to be put aboard a liner to the UK at Port Harcourt. It passed through Tinto on 17 SP 26, then reached Port Harcourt/Nigeria on 1 OC 26.

In the 1920s the British Cameroons was administered as an integral part of Nigeria and the town postmarks only included the word "NIGERIA", so collectors need to be aware of the names of all the Cameroons post offices at that time. After a complaint from the League of Nations the postmarks of the 1930s were changed to show the Trust status of the Cameroons. Tinto post office closed for good in 1932.



Marine Notice.

TIME TABLE—CROSS RIVER MOTOR LAUNCH SERVICE—ITU—IKOM.

DRY RIVER SEASON, 1929—30.

UP.

		December.			January.			February.			March.			April.		
		Nov. 27	11	25	—	8	22	5	19	—	5	19	—	2	16	—
Itu	Leaves Wednesday 8 a.m.															
Afikpo	Arrives Thursday ...	28	12	26	—	9	23	6	20	—	6	20	—	3	17	—
Afikpo	Leaves „ Noon	28	12	26	—	9	23	6	20	—	6	20	—	3	17	—
Obubra	Arrives Friday ...	29	13	27	—	10	24	7	21	—	7	21	—	4	18	—
Obubra	Leaves „ Noon ...	29	13	27	—	10	24	7	21	—	7	21	—	4	18	—
Ikom	Arrives Saturday ...	30	14	28	—	11	25	8	22	—	8	22	—	5	19	—

DOWN.

		December.			January.			February.			March.			April.		
		2	16	30	—	13	27	10	24	—	10	24	—	7	21	—
Ikom	Leaves Monday 8 a.m. ...															
Obubra	Arrives „ ...	2	16	30	—	13	27	10	24	—	10	24	—	7	21	—
Obubra	Leaves Tuesday 8 a.m. ...	3	17	31	—	14	28	11	25	—	11	25	—	8	22	—
Afikpo	Arrives „ ...	3	17	31	—	14	28	11	25	—	11	25	—	8	22	—
Afikpo	Leaves „ 1 p.m. ...	3	17	31	—	14	28	11	25	—	11	25	—	8	22	—
Itu	Arrives Wednesday ...	4	18	—	1	15	29	12	26	—	12	26	—	9	23	—

1. The Government Cross River Motor Launch Service between Itu and Ikom will be maintained as previously, during the Dry River Season, 1929—1930.

2. Starting from Itu on Wednesday, the 27th November, 1929, the Service will be run fortnightly until the end of April, 1930, or until such time as the River has risen sufficiently to enable Messrs. Elder Dempster & Co., Limited, to resume the service through to Ikom with their own Steamers.

3. The above Schedule shows the dates on which the Launch is due to call at intermediate Stations between Itu and Ikom, but in view of the uncertainty of navigation during the Dry Season the dates should be regarded as only approximate.

4. For Schedule of Public Fares—See Public Notice No. 21 of 12th November, 1923, which is still in force.

Marine Headquarters,
Lagos, Nigeria, August, 1929.

L. J. HALL,
Acting Director of Marine.

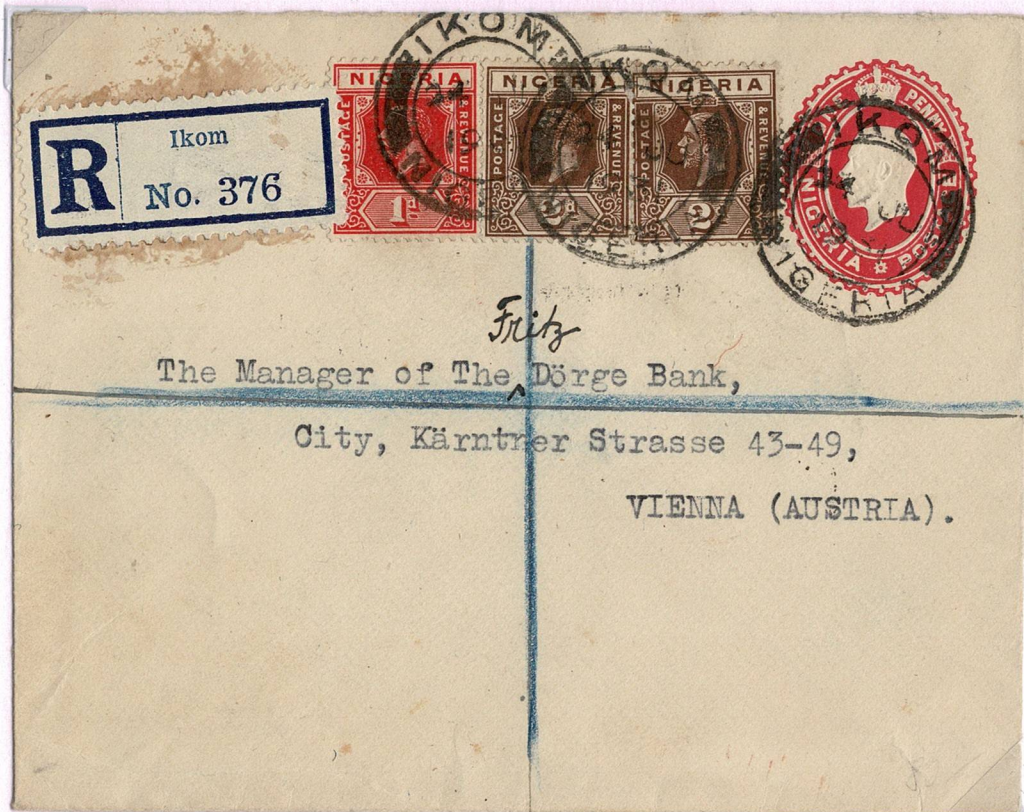
Figure 5.14: 1929-30 dry season timetable of the Government mail launch service

It was in 1930 that the Government Dry Season launch service came to an end. The 1930 P&T report included: "It has been possible to effect an acceleration of three days in the transmission of mails ex the Lagos Express steamers to the offices north of Itu on the Cross River, by means of a revised launch service inaugurated by Messrs. Elder, Dempster and Company from the 1st November 1930."

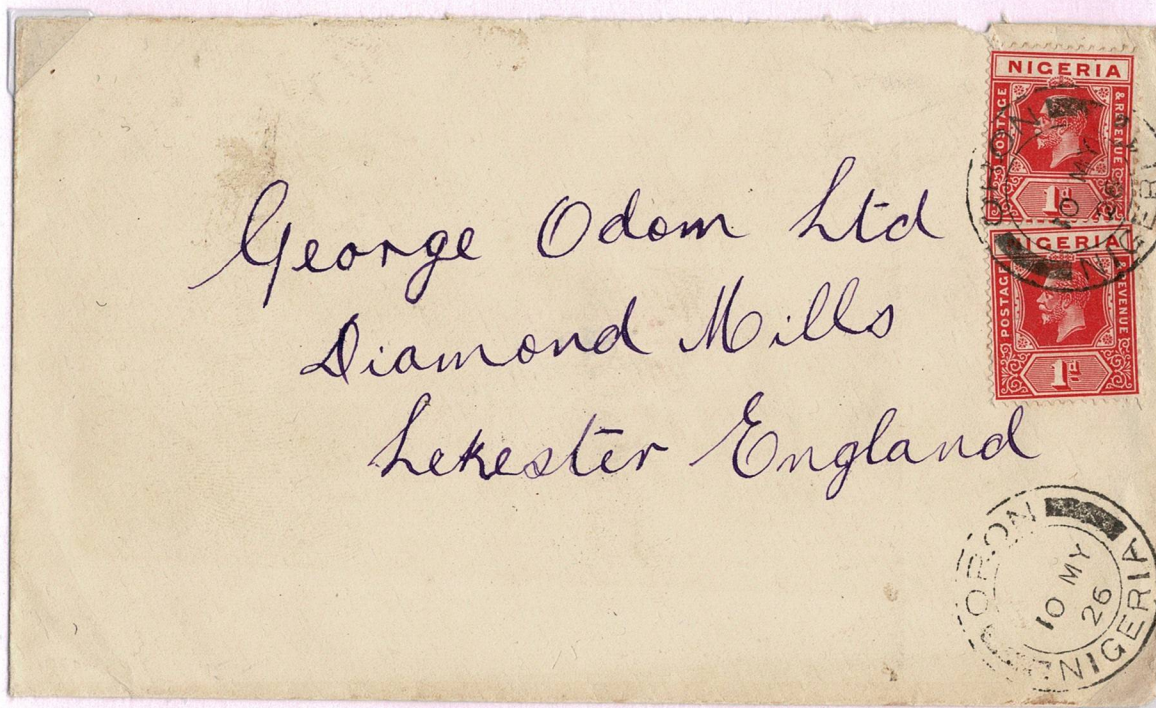
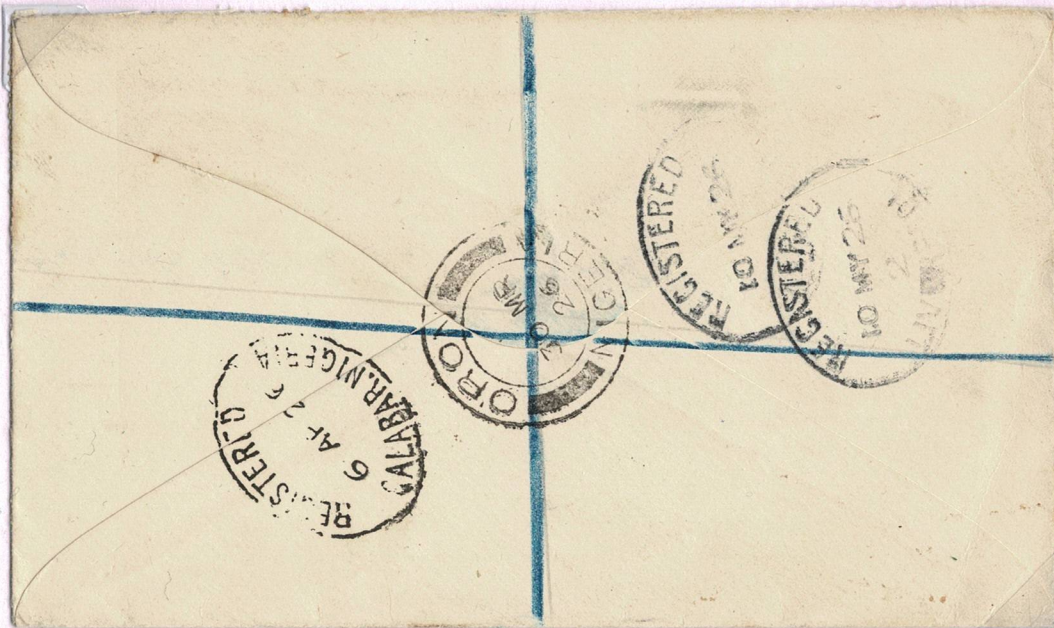
The Government's river launch service ended on 31 October 1930 when the P&T Annual Report said:

"It has been possible to effect an acceleration of three days in the transmission of mails ex the Lagos Express steamers to the offices north of Itu on the Cross River, by means of a revised launch service inaugurated by Messrs Elder, Dempster and Company from the 1st November 1930."

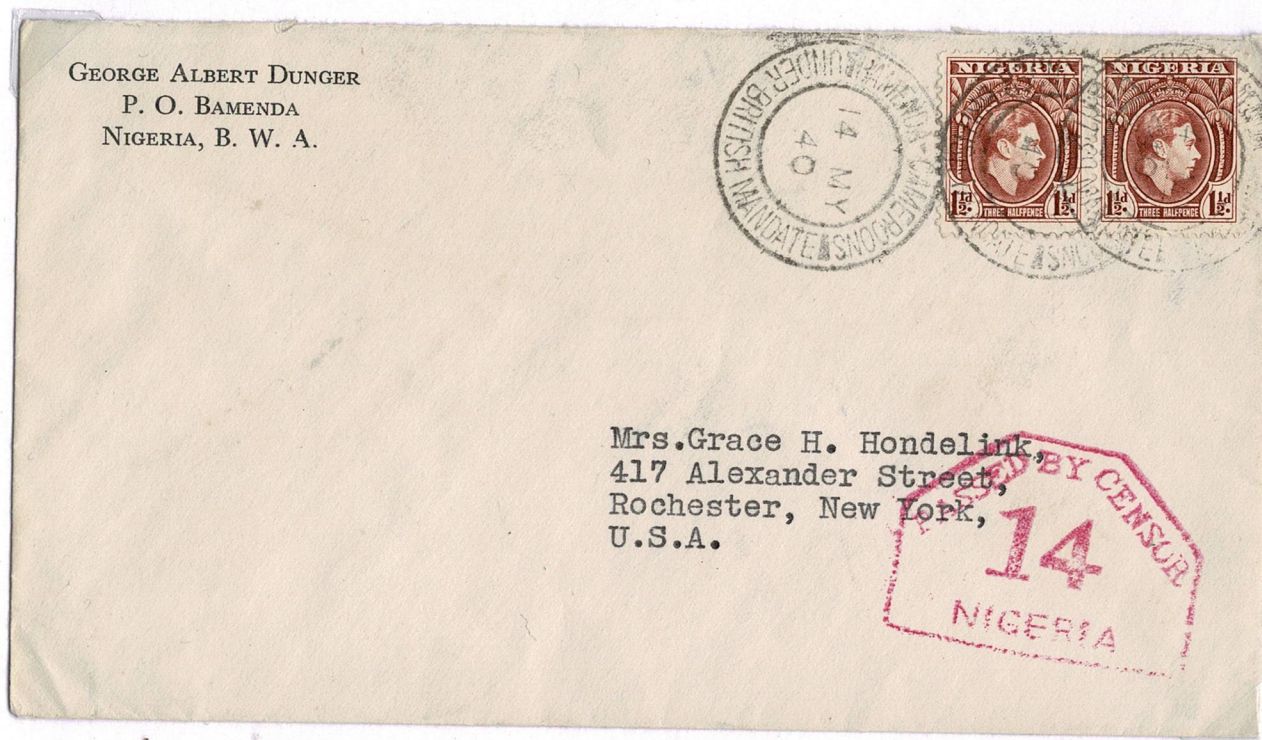
This registered cover to Vienna from Ikom, on the Cross River, sent on 24 JU 1931, is backstamped only at Port Harcourt on 29 June 1931. Five days is a noticeably quicker transit time than before. It is also apparent that this cover was not handled as a loose letter at Itu or Aba; it must have been carried in a sealed bag by road between those places, then by rail from Aba to Port Harcourt.



Oron is on the west side of the estuary of the Cross River and was linked to Calabar from 1920 by a twice daily 17-mile ferry service run by Elder Dempster. This service continued after independence. Oron was also connected to Ikot Ekpene and Aba (then onward to Port Harcourt by rail) by a motor mail service from 1924. These two 1926 covers from Oron show both routes. The 30 March cover was taken by ferry to Calabar on 6 April to catch the monthly steamer from there. The 10 May cover was taken by road to Aba and by train to Port Harcourt on 11 May to catch the fortnightly steamer.



This cover, correctly franked 3d for surface mail to the USA was posted at Bamenda on 14 May 1940. There are no back-stamps, which would normally mean we could not identify the route taken to the sea port. In this case, however the front of the cover is struck with the hexagonal censor mark for censor 14, which is known to have been applied only at Port Harcourt. This cover probably was taken by road to Mamfe, then carried down the Cross River from there.



Censor 12 was based at Lagos. This cover at \$1 rate was sent from the USA by airmail on 3 Aug 1940, after the fall of France but before Pan Am FAM 22. The only back-stamps are Enugu on 18 Sept 1940 and Bamenda on 28 September. There is no UK transit marking but by air to the UK, then by sea to Lagos and by rail to Enugu seems the most likely route.



This registered cover from Mamfe, Cameroons on 4 December 1940 was backstamped at Enugu and Port Harcourt a week later, both on the same day – 11 DE 40. Strangely it was not passed through a postal control station at either place and then was carried to the UK directly from Port Harcourt. It is unusual for WW2 mail from Nigeria to escape both postal control and censorship.

The mail route taken could have either been down the river from Mamfe to Obubra by launch, or parallel to the river by a runner relay to Obubra. There was a motor mail service from there to Enugu, then by rail to Port Harcourt. There has been no documentary evidence yet found to establish when the Elder Dempster Cross River service ceased during the war. It is quite likely the dry season link from Mamfe to Obubra was by road. That was the only option after the war, all year round despite the damage inflicted on this laterite road by motor traffic during the wet season.

