

C/o The Assistant Superintendent,

Sumprabum,

Upper Burma.

6.1.39.

Dear Mr. Parker,

I sent off a third tin of snakes and oddments from Sumprabum on December 26th by car. It should have arrived in Myitkyina on the 28th, and in Rangoon on the 31st; so, with a little luck, it ought to reach the Museum sometime early in February. I enclose the list of the 58 specimens in it. I could have got in some more, for there was plenty of room; but I was leaving Pangnamdim for at least six months, so I packed up what I had ready up till then. I wish to God I was a bit more of a hand at this soldering game! It takes me all day to do one up and fix all the holes which appear at the last minute!

I don't think there's very much of interest in this tin. There are three more of the snake I've tentatively labelled Dinodon flavozonatum?, of which I sent one in Tin No.1. These are Nos. 188, 196 and 219. There is one which I take to be a Coronella -- No. 200; a brace of Amblycephalids -- Nos. 215 and 227; a giant T. monticola, No. 213; and a final batch of a dozen of that mysterious (to me!) T. jerdoni?. As I told Dr. Smith in the letter I sent with Tin No.2, I shall not collect any more of this species (or variety) unless I hear from you that you want them. In any case, if they're very local in distribution as I think, I probably shan't see any more until I go back through Pangnamdim in May or June next.

I'm now in a grand bit of Upper Burma called the Triangle. It's in the angle between two big rivers, and cut off at the top by some fairly high hills and more large rivers; and as no collector has ever been into it yet I'm full of hope that there may be some things worth having. It's a poor time for snakes, though, at the moment; and since I got in here about a week ago I've only got one -- a Ptyas korrc which was shot by one of the locals with an arrow as it was swimming in the Mali Hka. The trouble with all these places is that this year of grace is a good deal too late for any of the really exciting reptiles. I was talking to one of the chiefs yesterday, and he told me that his great-grandfather (or it may have been great-great) slew a massive snake in the jungle near here, which had teeth a good 18" long, a girth like an oversize barrel, and three separate tails. He proved the story by exhibiting two polished stones which he carried as amulets, and which had been taken one out of the skull and the other from the root of the tails of this monster. But there you are! No one has seen another for quite a number of years (so I'm told) and it's even rumoured that they may have left the neighbourhood for good; so I'm out of luck again. I should like to send something like that to the Museum.

You sincerely
Ronald Kaulback

hwp/emg

3rd March, 1939.

Dear Kaulback,

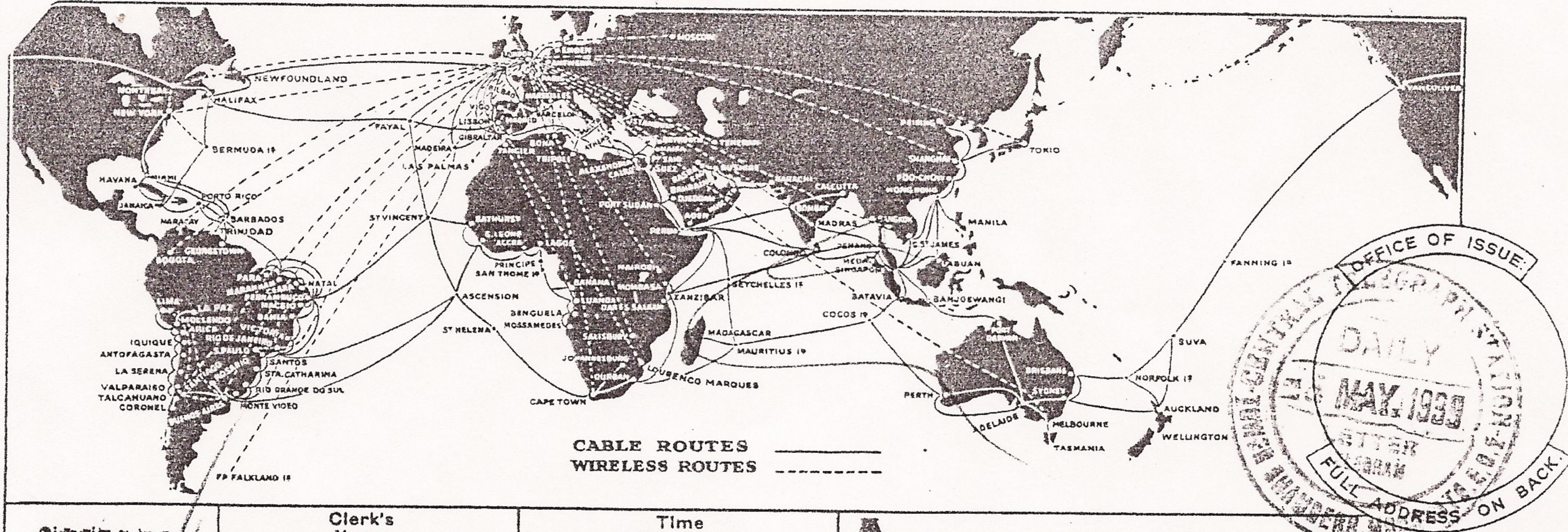
It was like a breath of air to get a note from you, especially as I had just been spending a very pleasant evening or two getting inside your book and I enjoyed it fine.

The collections are all turning up in first-class order and Smith came in to me the other day not quite sure whether he was right in his head or not. He had been having a look at one of your collections and found a bigger percentage of new species than he dreamed possible. So carry on the good work even if you do burn your fingers soldering the tins up. I do not know what sort of apparatus you have got for this soldering business. I know it is not easy but I find that with the aid of Baker's soldering fluid I can solder damned near anything.

Great-grandfather's story sounds like excessive indulgence in native beer, but I should certainly like to see one come wandering back to the Museum here. In view of the fact that only last week they trawled a fish off the Cape which was believed to have been extinct since the cretaceous, I am quite prepared to see you come back with a couple of pterodactyls and an odd dinosaur or two in tow. If there is anything you want, let me know.

Meantime all the best,
Yours sincerely,

Ronald Kaulback, Esq.,
c/o The Assistant Superintendent,
Sumprabum,
Upper Burma.



Q W Z

Time
Received.

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DLT 537

L422 SUM PRABUM 14 4 1040 =

DLT = PARKER NATHISMUS LONDON =

PLEASE SEND REPTILES LABELS 501 TO 1000

AIR MAIL = KAULBACK

Start. 500-1000. by land:

9/5/39
9/6/39

C/o The Assistant Superintendent,
Sumprabum,
Upper Burma.
25.7.39.

Dear Parker,

Thank you very much (a) for your letter, and (b) for sending off those labels so quickly. They arrived just in time, when I was down to about three; but for all the interest I've been able to get into this last tin which I've just sent off, I might just as well not have sent it, or worried whether I had labels or not! After my time in Pangnamgim I've rather begun to expect new things now and again; but unless there is something exciting among the lizards (the Varanus, No.510, is oddly coloured, but it's a young one) there isn't a damn thing worth looking at in this lot, and the only ray of light in my darkness is that I've got one or two snakes which I haven't had before. They're all well-known though, such as Naja hannah, Blythia reticulata (?), Natrix percarinata (?), Natrix piscator, Elaphe radiata, and Oligodon dorsalis (?). Apart from them there's a Trimeresurus which looks like albolabris, except that the nasal and first upper labial ~~are~~ completely divided on both sides; and that's all. Incidentally could you please let me have the description of Trimeresurus gramineus, and of Natrix vennigi, if you've got any loose ones knocking around? I enclose the list of the last tin, by the way. It ought to get to you sometime about the end of September; and I only hope the old Museum is still standing by then. Judging by what news I've been getting lately it doesn't look as if it will be.

And talking of news, there isn't much from here these days. The floods have risen, oh Lord: the floods have lift up their voice; but except for the rain life is much the same as it was six months ago. No, there's one startling difference. Driven to desperation, I sacked all the servants in May, in one fell swoop, and took on another bunch; and the new cook is almost up to Carlton standard. It's incredible to be having real good food after the filth we've been fed on since last June ('38, I mean), and my heart leaps up whenever I behold the table laid for the next meal. After all, I doubt if there are any pleasures in life to compare with the purely physical ones, like eating, drinking, and a few others. I had the worst fright of my misspent life the other day, when I was suddenly and violently charged by a large boar from five yards, when quietly pursuing my vocation in the jungle. I admit I could see its point, as I'd just landed it one in the kidneys; but that didn't alter my horror at its behaviour. It made good eating though, in atonement.

God knows how long I shall be in this here land. I'm getting to the stage now when I can't afford to pay my way home! Anyway we shall be going through Pangnamdim again next year sometime, so will you let me know if you want any more of that new Trimeresurus? You've got 48 specimens so far; but most of them are hatchlings. As a matter of fact it will probably be about April when we're there, and there may not be anything moving around anyway; though I expect there will be, as it's always pretty wet there, and it will be hot enough by then. What I want more

If anything is to get a specimen of a black pit-viper, which ought to be hanging about about twenty miles north of Pangnamdim. I had two as pets in 1933, in the days when I wasn't much interested in snakes; and recollection of them is that they were an uniform black all over -- much darker and without the patterning of even the darkest monticola. Beside they hadn't got the vicious nature of monticola, and I was always able handle them quite safely from the first. The fact that there is no sign of them at Pangnamdim doesn't depress me, because the reptiles in that area seem to be amazingly localized. Ten miles west of the Nam Tamai valley you get T. albolabris and stejnegeri in plenty; but there's never a one in the N.T. valley itself, where conditions appear to be exactly same; and as for T. kaulbacki (that famous snake) it doesn't seem to extend further down the valley than 8 or 9 miles, or up more than about the same distance. It's a strange place altogether.

The Triangle is proving a big disappointment in the rept line. You remember I said in an earlier letter that I thought it ought be good, as it was so completely cut off? There doesn't seem to be much excitement in it after all. We'll give it a full year, so that it has chance; but I'm not very hopeful nowadays. The only thing which has braced me up about the place is that I've been able to collect several hundred stone and bronze implements; and (more localization) this appears to be the only place north of Myitkyina where they're found at all. This is to say I've sent word round well outside the Triangle that anything of the sort will be a sure source of income to whoever brings it, and nothing whatever has turned up. In that connection, if you've got time one day before I get back, could you possibly get in touch with whoever it is that deals with archaeology in the Museum and find out whether they would like them in the first place; and, if they're any good, whether they would consider buying them for what they've cost me to get? You see, it isn't a matter of excavating to get the things: the whole country is very eroded and covered with pretty thick jungle, and so far I've neither seen nor heard of any prehistoric tumuli. All the implements nearly (I've picked up a couple myself) are found by the natives when digging their fields, and are treasured by them as having been made by spirits and thrown down from the sky for use as War Amulets. So it means buying them for varying prices (bronze axes are pretty dear, while I can get stone ones upwards from a couple of bob), and I've already spent about £50 or £60 on the lot. I can't afford to go on getting any more (or, for that matter, what I've handed out already), but it was a fair gamble, and if the Museum can't afford it either then I'm just out of luck, and will have to give them free. But for God's sake don't tell them that! And anyway I'm fully prepared for a raspberry from you over this. It's not your job to act as agent, and you've got a packet of work of your own; so if you tell me to bugger off I shan't feel wounded. A very large proportion of the stones by the way, are jadeite.

What a life! We're held up at the moment by a stream, which is proving truculent, and heaven knows when it will see sense. The cook alone is a comfort to me.

No more now. Let me do some work in peace.

P.S. My salams &
Yours ever
Ronald Kaulback
Dr. Smith without fail!