Livingstone's Zambezi Expedition: Bringing Together Specimens, Primary Sources, and Journals on JSTOR

Jason Przybylski, Senior Licensing Editor, JSTOR, jason.przybylski@ithaka.org
Deirdre Ryan, Director, Primary Sources, JSTOR, deirdre.ryan@ithaka.org

INTRODUCTION

JSTOR Global Plants includes over 2 million type specimens and 200,000 primary source materials contributed by herbaria and botanic gardens from around the world. While this size makes the resource indispensable to botanists and plant taxonomists, it makes the resource difficult to approach for non-specialists and undergraduates.

Question:

How can we bring together the various materials in JSTOR Global Plants in a new way that will make the resource accessible to non-specialists and introduce the importance of plant specimens to a new audience?

Hypothesis:

By focusing on a specific historic event we can create a resource that better highlights related but difficult-to-find materials and demonstrates the importance of the scientific and cultural objects in JSTOR Global Plants to both specialists and non-specialists.

Process:

Working with JSTOR Labs—a team dedicated to shaping the future of research and teaching by working with partner publishers and libraries to create tools for researchers, teachers, and students—we chose to create a project focusing on David Livingstone's expedition along the Zambezi River and Lake Nyassa in east Africa.

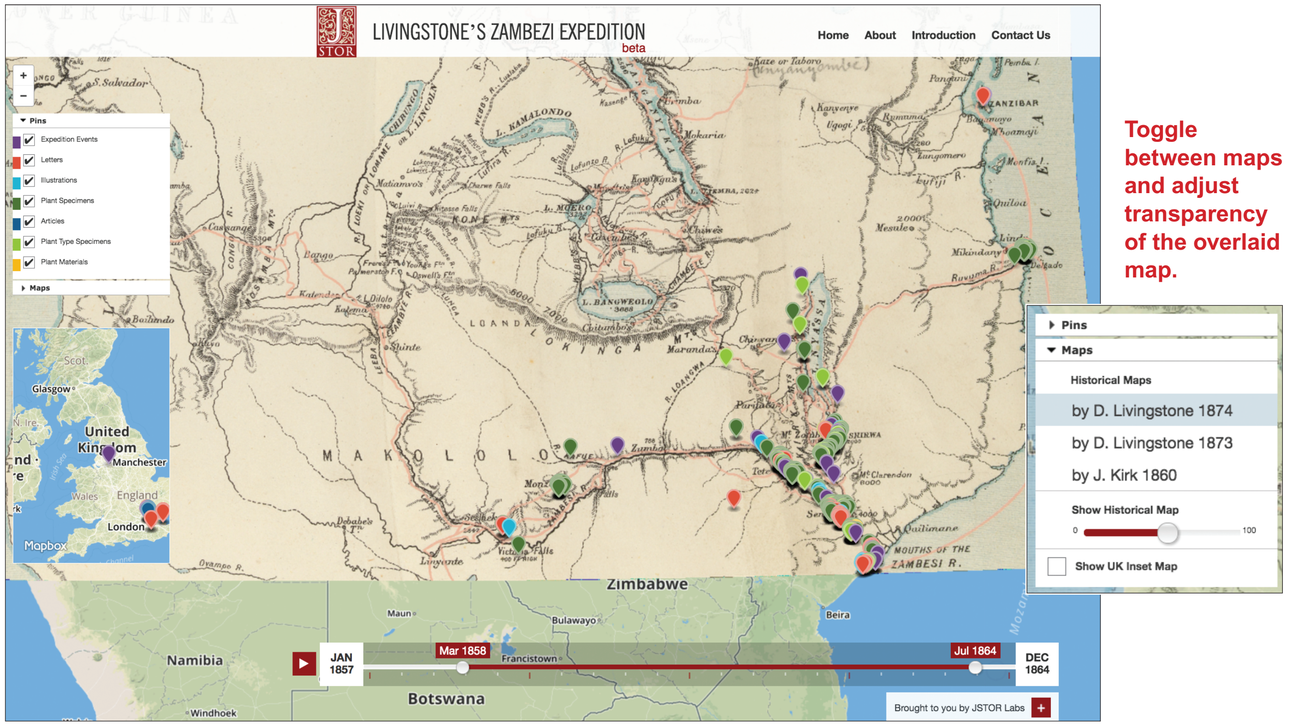
We began by identifying nearly 1,000 items related to the expedition in JSTOR Global Plants and the JSTOR journal archive—including plant specimens, correspondence, botanical illustrations, and hand-drawn maps—and worked to clean the records and add geo-location data.

Inspired by work the New York Public Library did with New York City historic maps, the JSTOR Labs team used Map Warper, an open source tool, to overlay the maps created during the exhibition on a current geo-precise map, on which they then pinned the related content. They also added an animated timeline, enabling the user to follow the exhibition's progress over time.

RESULTS

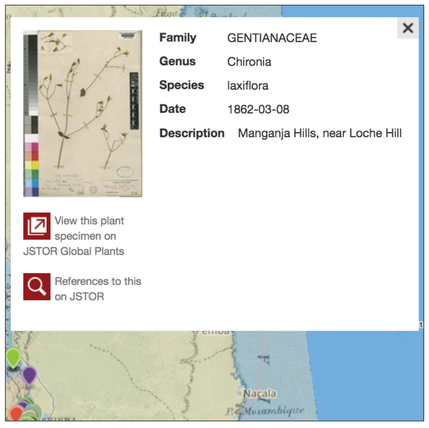
Livingstone's Zambezi Expedition (beta) creates a narrative of the expedition through specimens, primary sources, and journal articles. Visit the site at labs.jstor.org/zambezi.

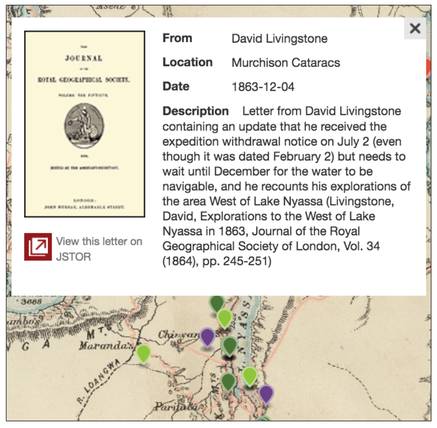
Features include historic map overlay; pins identifying where objects such as specimens, illustrations, and letters were found or created; and an interactive timeline.

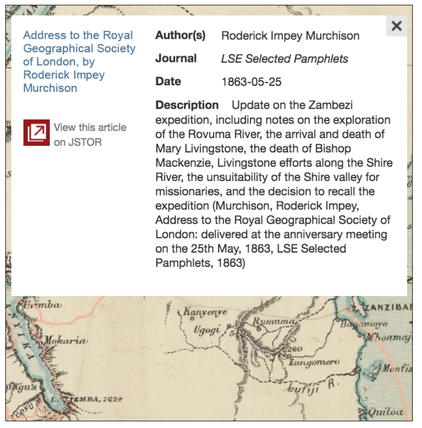


Toggle between maps and adjust transparency of the overlaid map.

A window appears when a user selects a pin, including options to view the full item record or perform a search for related materials in the JSTOR archive.







CONCLUSIONS

Livingstone's Zambezi Expedition (beta) provides a new way to explore the content in JSTOR Global Plants that is accessible to the specialist and non-specialist alike. The resource enables new discoveries by highlighting the stories told through the materials in Global Plants, which are often hidden by the collection's vast size. For instance, the user is provided a window into:

- Process of historic scientific discoveries
- Relationship between Livingstone's expedition and European colonialism
- Personal histories, such as the relationship between David Livingstone and his wife

Next Steps:

Livingstone's Zambezi Expedition (beta) is the beginning of a process for us, not the conclusion. We are building on the experience gained from this project in several interesting ways:

- Plants & Society: JSTOR is developing a new resource that will focus on the historical, cultural, aesthetic, and environmental implications and uses of plants in society. The resource will include primary sources, journals, books, and grey literature, all fully integrated and discoverable through a single platform.
- As part of Plants & Society, with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh we are developing a collection focusing on George Forrest's botanical expeditions to China that will build on lessons learned and further our efforts to make important botanical materials available to a broad audience.

RESOURCES

- JSTOR Labs: http://labs.jstor.org/
- JSTOR Labs Blog (with more detail on this project): http://labs.jstor.org/blog/
- Livingstone Online: http://www.livingstoneonline.ucl.ac.uk/
- Livingstone's Zambezi Expedition (beta): http://labs.jstor.org/zambezi/
- Map Warper: http://mapwarper.net/
- New York Public Library Map Warper: http://maps.nypl.org/warper/

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, who contributed to JSTOR Global Plants a majority of the items featured in Livingstone's Zambezi Expedition (beta). Thank you also to our colleagues at JSTOR who made this project possible: Hannah Begley, Beth Dufford, Alex Humphreys, Jessica Keup, Kate McLoughlin, and Ronald Snyder.