

RHODESIA
BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA
COMPANY



1892 to 1908

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The British South Africa Company (BSAC) was established by Cecil Rhodes through the amalgamation of the Central Search Association and the Exploring Company, Ltd., receiving a royal charter in 1889. Modeling the BSAC on the British East India Company, Rhodes hoped it would enable colonisation and economic exploitation across much of south-central Africa, as part of the "Scramble for Africa". The company's directors included the Duke of Abercorn, Rhodes himself and the financier Alfred Beit.

The company was empowered to treat with African rulers such as King Lobengula; to form banks; to own, manage and grant or distribute land, and to raise a police force (the British South Africa Police). In return, the company agreed to develop the territory it controlled; to respect existing African laws; to allow free trade within its territory and to respect all religions.

The company recruited its own army, and attacked and defeated the Matabele and Shona north of the Limpopo river. It was the first time in history Britons have used the Maxim gun in combat (five Maxims to five thousand Ndebele casualties). The company carved out (and for the following three decades administered) a territory which it named Zambezia, and later, Rhodesia, and which now covers the area occupied by the republics of Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In 1914, the royal charter was renewed, on condition that settlers in Rhodesia were given increased political rights. In 1922, the company entered negotiations with the government of the Union of South Africa, which was keen to take over the territory - a plan foiled by the colony's settlers, who voted against incorporation with South Africa. In 1923, Britain chose not to renew the BSA Co's charter, and instead accorded 'self-governing' colony status to Southern Rhodesia (today, Zimbabwe) and protectorate status to Northern Rhodesia (today, Zambia).

The BSAC was not able to generate enough profit to pay its shareholders dividends until after it lost direct administrative control over Rhodesia in 1923. In 1933, the BSAC sold its mineral exploration rights south of the Zambezi to the Southern Rhodesian government, but retained rights over Northern Rhodesian mineral rights, as well as the company's vast interests in mining, railways, real estate and agriculture across southern Africa.

The flag of the BSAC was raised in the Matabele capital of Bulawayo on 4 November 1893 after the Company's forces led by Major Patrick Forbes drove the native Ndebele from the town. The flag consisted of a Union Jack emblazoned with the BSAC badge in the centre. The badge comprised a yellow lion holding an elephant's tusk and standing on a red and yellow wreath or torse; under the wreath were the letters B.S.A.C. in black. The badge was derived from the crest of the arms granted to the British South Africa Company twenty years after it received its royal charter.

