I work my way slowly through clumps of tall savannah grasses and begin the ascent of a steep hill. Not a whisper of air stirs the dry grass or the leathery leaves of the scattered, fire-scarred Parimari and Annona shrubs. A midday, tropical sun bears down mercilessly from a hazy, cloud-free sky, and warm, humid air envelops me like a furry cocoon. My breathing is labored. Perspiration runs in little rivulets down my neck, back and legs. The steel handles of a six-foot soil auger and a battered "sharpshooter" spade bite deeply into my shoulder.

As soon as I reach the top of the hill I drop my soils equipment to the ground and seat myself wearily on a brown, schisto-sandstone knob that juts from the hill's crest. From this commanding perch I gaze long and intently at the panorama of the Stanley Pool Plain.

Several miles away to the north, the nearly level savannah terraces break sharply along steep escarpments to drop some 100 feet to the fresh water swamps below. This tangled maze of aboreal palms, soft spiny aroids, stilt-rooted trees and hydrophilic grasses occupies the active flood plain of the mighty Congo River. These extensive swamps provide the southern boundary of the famous Stanley Pool.