

East Africa. Into Rwanda. The land of a 1000 ills. May - June 2010.

This is the 3rd and final instalment of our four part report on our East African Odyssey.

The first and fourth parts are covered under:-

May 2010: Uganda 2010. Part of a longer tour in East Africa.

The Tanzanian Sector is covered under:-

Jun 2010: East Africa 2010 continued. Into Tanzania.

Ground arrangements for this sector were again competently handled by Churchill Safaris of Kampala, Uganda. www.churchillsafaris.com

We entered Rwanda at Rusomo Falls Border crossing which was fuss free and also Visa friendly. We paused to obtain some Rwandan Francs (570/\$) at the convenient Forex and to sample my first Primus Beer. One must get used to the Vin de Pays.

We then set off 'on the wrong side of the road' for Akagera National park and made good time on the excellent surfaced road. Rwanda had scored three early points. Good roads, Good Beer in 700ml bottles and no Visa Fee. A very friendly place so far.

Akagera National park. Entry to the Park proved expensive but easily accomplished. \$50 pppd is steep considering what there is or is not. You have to arrange a Ranger to travel with you each Game drive. The male Rangers, with no knowledge of how long we were staying allocated the job to a nice young woman called Diana who was nice to be with. Another point for Rwanda and a loss to the lazy male Rangers who later tried to oust Diana when they learned it was a four day assignment. They were firmly told 'non merci!'

We were booked into **Akagera Safari Lodge** which is a mile or so from the Gate. Check in was fine and the Lodge looked OK. It lacked competent management. We were on full board terms but still got Menus for lunch, dinner etc showing 10,000RWF a time. That is \$20US a meal. The Lodge was fine and in a great setting although they do have a severe Baboon problem due mainly to daft guests feeding them.



The Park was quiet and the birding was good, best birds were a pair of Hawk Eagles and a Painted Snipe with chick. The level of mammals was low. One day we ventured to the far north where there is more open country and plenty of animals including Eland, Topi and Bohor Reedbuck. On the return drive the Tsetse were horrendous and we had to keep the car closed up tight which was most uncomfortable. The road was virtually impassable in parts although the views were nice.

After our three nights in this Park we drove over good roads via Kigali to Nyungwe in the far south west. We lost count of

the number of Genocide Memorials we passed. We found it most odd that a country should make a tourist attraction out of a Genocidal Civil War.

Nyungwe Forest. Just before reaching our new base we passed a useful sign board by the roadside showing we were on the Continental watershed with water flowing to the River Congo on one side and to the Nile on the other.



This is a Forest Park in mountainous country with many hiking trails including one to the ‘true’ source of the Nile. It seems that Speke & Burton wasted their time all those years ago? It was here all the time if only they had looked! Again the Park Fees were excessive and they were slow to point out the sliding scale of entry fees for longer visits. They also wanted to charge outrageous amounts for activities such as Birdwatching. I am not penny pinching and will pay for the management of larger Mammals but Birds fly free. I do not know how they can charge \$50 entry fee for just birding, when there are NO animals other than Monkeys and Squirrels. Even then we



had to pay a further 'activity' fee \$10 pp just to do a ‘nature walk.’ We also had to take a Ranger whose sole object seemed to be to get us around a trail and back to base a.s.a.p. He even wanted \$5 to get someone to "mind the car". I know, having overheard the conversation in French, that he was telephoned and told not to take us on long trails as we had not paid extra to 'bird'. We did see some very nice **Ruwenzori Turaco** and Raptors but there is nothing in Nyungwe NP that Bwindi does not have and I doubt I shall hurry back. We stayed at the **Park Guest House** which was very nice and friendly even though they wanted to convert \$\$ at a cheeky rate of 500RWF/\$.

After this it could only get better and it did.

Our next destination was two nights in lovely countryside at the Brigg’s recommended **Foyer de Charitie**. A great 'find'. A Religious retreat situated high up on a ridge overlooking

the same lake as the very upmarket Volcanoes Lodge. The view to the Virungas and over the lake was simply stunning. The rooms are newly renovated and, as a retreat, simply furnished but very comfortable inside and out. Dining was at a fixed hour after Evensong with a fixed menu but excellent quality. We loved it and would return. Plenty of Birds in the extensive grounds too. Being as self sufficient as possible the Sisters grow all their own vegetables and it seemed odd to see European produce such as Rhubarb and Beans being grown in Africa. No doubt the cool air at this altitude helped. I did not dare risk asking for a Beer so made do with Adam’s Ale at meal times. It was not too big a sacrifice to make for the privilege of staying in such a nice place.



Then it was time to head back north and through Ruhengire/Musande for the border at Cyanika to get us back ‘home’ into Uganda for another Visa at \$50 but the fuel

was cheaper so it was not all bad news. We are a bit short of photos in this section so a few follow:- L-R. Red-faced Barbet, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler and Regal Sunbird.

From the Rwanda/Uganda border to Kisoro and beyond the roads have deteriorated badly and going was very slow indeed. *ED. It is now a very nice fast tar road over Kanaba Gap to Kabale and beyond.* For the rest of our trip revert to the Uganda Report below.

Sadly my overall impressions of Rwanda are of a country where the main pre-occupation is money both at local and official levels. Everywhere was super expensive and if they could turn a rate to their advantage they would. Nice Beer though but it will take more than good Beer to induce me to revisit.