

See ‘Uganda May 2010 for the start and finish of this trip..

Recap. We are on a round trip from Kampala and back via Western Uganda, Western Tanzania and Rwanda. We being myself and Elizabeth plus capable driver and dear friend Emmy Gongo.

We pick up this tale at the Uganda/Tanzania Border on 28th May having spent an enjoyable few days at Lake Ngagabo near Masaka with Ether Kyambadde (nicknamed Mama K by me since her marriage). We are now headed for Minziro Forest and Rubondo Island at the south west corner of Lake Victoria.

We had contacted William Rutta of Kiroyera Tours www.kiroyeratours.com of Bukoba on a recommendation in Phillip Briggs’ “Bradt Guide to Tanzania” and he had very competently done all the ground arrangements in Tanzania for us. William had originally simply been asked to find us a place near Minziro Forest but he took it upon himself to recommend a trip to Rubondo Island National Park. We are delighted we took his advice. Having driven over the border from Uganda and into Tanzania at Mutukula we were met by Hamza Razal of Kiroyera Tours. Due to TZ red tape Hamza took over the driving thus “relegating” Emmy to the role of passenger/guest and very competent Guide. We were also pleased to be joined by a birding friend Marcell Claassen who had driven over from Rwanda to come and bird Minziro with us.



After having checked in to the salubrious **Katekere Comfort Motel** in sunny downtown Kyika (the nearest habitation to Minziro) (and paid my respects to a road sign with a familiar name) we decided to visit the Reserve and make contact with our mandatory local guide to plan the next two days. This turned out to be interesting. The guide lived in the Forest and to get to him we had to drive through the Forest. Of course we stopped to look at things on the way. We got arrested and taken to the local Police Station

“for looking at things without a permit.” Quite how we could get a permit without entering the Forest to reach the Office got lost in translation. Things got interesting. Was Whiteknuckles Safaris to lose clients and their driver overnight? However as my friend Emmy frequently refers to me, jokingly, as “His Excellency”, this mark of respect was picked up by the Police and “Diplomatic Immunity” was conveyed upon us all. We were sprung and got back to base in time for dinner where Lady M. had been patiently waiting under the impression we had found Owls or Nightjars. For a more detailed account see TR above *“When being ‘your excellency saved the day!’”*

LODGINGS.

Kiyika/Minziro Forest. The forest was excellent birding and worth visiting. We found many items of interest including White-thighed Hornbill and Rhinoceros Viper, both of which were previously unknown to Tanzania. Excellent views of Green Malkoha and Yellow spotted Barbets. You will need a guide. (just remember not to look at things before picking him up.) As stated our Lodgings were in the only Hotel in town, about 30 minutes drive from the forest. It would have been OK except the place was in need of maintenance. The food was hit and miss and we sent out for better supplies.

After two days birding and yet another Police Station visit (the local priest had dinged our car) we left Kyika and proceeded towards Bukoba. Birding on the way at a small damp patch we found



Rufous-Breasted Heron and were all busy admiring it when a normally very elusive but beautiful Papyrus Gonalek popped up for a share of the action. Never have I had such long and clear views of this elusive phantom of the Reed Beds.

In Bukoba we stayed at William's Beach Bandas.

These are quite charming and rustic in their own way. A little too public for my tastes. There are only three Thatched Bandas or 'mushonge' (Grass Huts) and the Toilet /shower block was some distance and open to the



public. Food was OK and well prepared by Peter the Pizza. This pleasant little place has great potential if developed correctly. It is owned by William of Kiroyera. This was only an overnight before setting off down the 'coast' of Lake Victoria to the place where we would catch a boat to Rubondo Island. The road was mainly excellent and having stocked up with supplies (self catering) we bade Marcell farewell as he was returning home to Ruhengire and proceeded south alone.

We arrived at a small busy fishing port and loaded our provisions on the TANAPA Launch which was waiting for us. We had arranged to leave our car at the local church whilst on the Island. A short crossing and small game drive got us to the

TANAPA Bandas on Rubondo Island. One word. Idyllic! Clean and tidy, well managed. This place has an interesting history as during the dark post independence days much wildlife was being poached/slaughtered and Prof. Grzimek (Serengeti shall not die!!) got permission to use this Island as a sort of Ark to hold stocks of animals as a nucleus to re-stock when matters improved. There are Giraffe and Elephant around and some 'rehabilitated' Chimpanzees either captured or re-possessed as unwanted pets or from Zoos. Of course the Birdlife is prolific and the Island is one of the few places where sightings of the rare **Sitatunga Antelope** and the Spot-necked Otter are virtually guaranteed. **Sitatunga** grazed the lawn outside our lovely Banda each evening and morning and we saw five Otters on one boat trip.



This was a lovely place just to laze about and let the wildlife come to you. We dined well as William had provided an excellent cook. On our boat trip to the outer Islands we snagged our prop on a poachers fishing net and hauled in over 40 nice fat and fresh Tilapia averaging around a Kilo each. We dined well that night. There are a lot of trails to walk and an upmarket, but empty, Tented Lodge

but for us the Bandas were just ideal. We could have stayed there a week and done nothing but look at the view and read books.





Sitatunga grazing our lawns.

All too soon it was time to return to the mainland and as the wind had strengthened this was an interesting trip in a small boat on the second largest lake in the world.

We retraced our steps to the tar road and continued our drive to Biharamulo and the Rwandan border at Rusumo Falls. The road deteriorated and progress was slow but we did find time to bird in the Biharamula National Park. (Tanzania is not just the Northern

Circuit!) We picked up nice views of Narina Trogon, Arnott's Chat and my first Rufous-breasted Tit. Lifer's for Emmy too.

Then more tar and a fast road to the border where we left Tanzania and entered Rwanda. The border between the two countries is at Rusumo Falls on the Akagera River, claimed by many as the true source of the River Nile, so we walked over the bridge to record the auspicious occasion. The Immigration offices for both countries were linked by this bridge which is in 'no man's land' before we could enter Rwanda.

Edit. Now, in 2018, both countries share a common 'One stop' Border facility on the Rwandan side of the river so you don't get to walk the bridge anymore..

We continue this report under "Rwanda Land of a thousand ills 2010. above.