

# 7. UGANDA

(16 February to 1 March 2011)

## 7.1. Some Photos from Uganda



Not so lucky free range chickens off to market.



Harry has no idea of his audiences!



This boy's kite is made from whittled twigs and a plastic bag.



A homemade top made to spin by hitting it with a whipping stick.



Kwela Kwela.



The main staple food of Ugandans is the green banana. They are prepared like the potato; roasted, boiled or mashed.



These are the ripe sweet type we know.



God moves in mysterious ways ...



Sometimes we are stopped just for a chat.



Uganda has many tea plantations.



Not all tar roads are created equal!



Near Jinja - on route to the source of the Nile.



The source of the Nile.



The source of the Nile. And we hope to make it to the other side, where it spills into the Mediterranean Sea.



On a ferry to one of the 82 cluster islands in Lake Victoria.



Take-aways on the ferry - samoosas, chicken and fish pieces and fried dough balls.



Fellow passengers on the ferry to a Ssesse Island.



A very proud bike taxi owner also on the ferry.



Here he gladly poses with his passenger.



The road and rainforest on the island.



The water's edge at the far eastern point of the island.



The GPS 'stating the obvious' at the water's edge.



The Ssesse Islands at sunset.



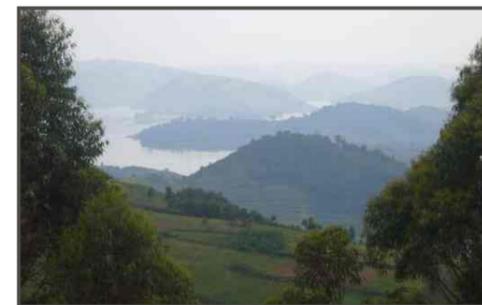
With an armed guard and a guide we set off to track the rare golden monkeys.



The golden monkeys we did get to see feeding at the tops of a bamboo reed forest.



Near Kisoro looking down on Lake Bunyonyi.



Closer to Lake Bunyonyi.



An Ugandan election polling station. This one is on Ssesse Island.



On the road to Kisoro to Kisoro and the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, where Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC meet.



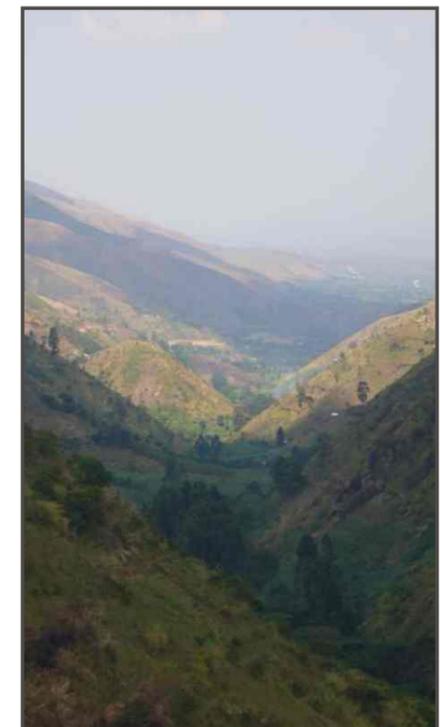
The rich greens of the Kisoro environs.



Sun setting on Lake Bunyonyi.



Men sawing planks from trees felled near Lake Bunyonyi.



The fabled Mountains of the Moon, the Rwenzoris that separate Uganda and the DRC.



Ain't no mountain high enough!



The rich reds of the Kisoro environs.



More of Kisoro.



Kisoro environs.



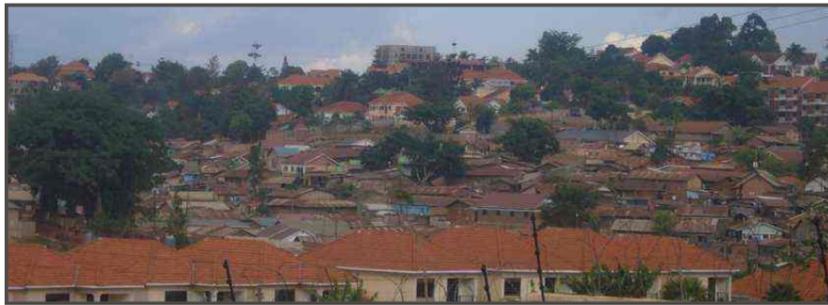
The Gorillas we didn't get to see.



A high valley within the Rwenzori Mountain Range.



Kampala, capital of Uganda, is built on 7 hills (like Rome). The CBD is on the hill in the foreground.



*In Kampala, like many other African cities, the rich and poor live side by side.*



*It's wild.*



*In Kampala these long-horned cattle graze along an upmarket residential suburb.*



*The Tomb site at Kampala for Bugandan Royalty. Kings in the 1800s took wives from each of the 82 clans. How's that for fair representation!*



*The Kasubi Tombs were torched to the ground in 2010. A Somali rebel faction is suspected.*



*'Struggle' is often the 'operative' word in Africa.*



*A Hairdressing Salon.*



*A Butcher.*



*A calling for church on a Sunday morning.*



*We are so often surrounded by genuinely friendly and interested folk.*



*We zig-zag across the equator many times. Here again.*

## UGANDA

### 7.2. Maamaisha's Other Life (Linda, Uganda; February 2011)

Harry & I take a small ferry to Bugala, one of a cluster of 82 islands on the Ugandan side of the expansive Lake Victoria.

It's a joy. Smooth red gravel roads lead us up and down through rain-forests then plantations and then rain-forests again. We reach the other side with little holes in our tummies and find 'Maamaisha's Restaurant' for eats and drinks.

Maamaisha is a joy. She rushes out to walk us in and sit us down. She speaks the Queen's English quietly. She bursts with suggestions for matoke, posho, ground nut sauce, bitter greens and this and that. We are overwhelmed and undecided and she invites us into her kitchen.

Her kitchen sings. The mash rests, the pap stiffens, the rice bubbles, the beans soften, the stew simmers, the sauce put-puts, the greens steam. And from a comfortable spot in the center Maamaisha works her pots and pans. She suggests a little bit of everything in 'english sizes'.

It's arrives in 'african sizes' and we dip mashed roasted green bananas, soft red Irish potatoes, pap and rice in tender beef stew, ground nut sauce, bean salad and bitter greens.

Maamaisha stays to chat. She has 4 children; 3 girls and a boy. Her husband is a truck driver on the island and she has had her restaurant for 4 years. She used to work for 'English' in Kampala as a cook. Then her easy voice tenses and she rushes into a story that obviously still pains .....

Her English employer had invited her, to return to England with him, to take care of his elderly parents. But when the elderly mother passed away unexpectedly the offer was withdrawn. It would have been viewed inappropriately for her to take care of the elderly gentleman without his wife. Maamaisha stays behind but she still has her passport.

She then met and married her husband and moved to live on the island. We gesture towards the island and suggest that life in Britain would have been a lot less pretty and a lot more busy. She smiles and says softly that Europeans always seem to have more money.

We leave a little later. We notice that Maamaisha's Restaurant has become quite rowdy with people and alcohol. We realize it will probably be quite a long, loud and busy night for her, tonight and every other night.



*Maamaisha's Restaurant - see tomorrow's stew on the top step.*



## UGANDA

### 7.3. The Eighth Wonder of the World (Linda, Uganda, February 2011)

There stands a chain of 7 towering volcanoes at the meeting place of Rwanda, the Congo (DRC) and Uganda. Transnational agreements and the 3 linked national parks of Parc des Volcans (Rwanda), Parc des Virunga (DRC) and the Mgahinga Gorilla Park (Uganda) protect these volcanoes and their 'gorillas in the mist'. We get to see 3 of these volcanoes in the Ugandan National Park of Mgahinga, as well as all the smaller volcanoes on the outskirts of the park.

*It's these smaller volcanoes that take my breath away and stop me in my tracks! Just take a look ...*

And this is one of many. These smaller volcanoes all smooth and draped with cloth checked by the toil of generations and generations of Ugandans.

At their feet, we sense the 'environmental disaster' but applaud the enormous 'human achievement'. But for its unintended tragic consequence, it deserves the title of 'eighth wonder of the world'. Surely as impressive as the Great Wall of China, the Great Pyramids of Giza or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. An equal monument shaped by sheer determination and mettle and life-force.

Each block represents ever decreasing parcels of land that are carefully passed down from father to sons. They clear the precious land of lava rock to wall, shape and terrace and to till, plant, tend and harvest. It yields sorghum, wheat, maize, bananas, plantains, potatoes, beans, onions and tomatoes.

But, we are told, it's only the tiny red Irish potatoes that go beyond the local community for export.

Uganda, and many other East African countries, faces an awful dilemma of 'too many people and too few resources'. This distressing predicament is all too evident here. A young Ugandan puts it to us in the plain words ... "in other countries you need money and an idea to start a business; but in Uganda you also need land as it cannot be bought with money".





See 3 of the 7 chain of volcanoes in the distance.



A distant volcano in the Mgahinga National Park with a smooth, rounded and cultivated volcano in the foreground.



Walls made of cleared lava rock with a wheat field in the foreground.



# UGANDA

## 7.4. Central Africa's Ignored People (Harry: Uganda, February 2011)

The border of Uganda, Rwanda and the Congo (DRC) is home to a series of 7 volcanoes as well as the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and forest. It is also home to a perfusion of exotic species of plants and animals, including the endangered mountain gorillas; and until recently (on the Ugandan side) it also contained an indigenous people; the Batwa forest people (also known as Pygmies) of Central Africa.

Linda and I find a local who has the interests of the Batwa at heart. He offers to take us to them for no personal gain. His name is Robert Ndzeye and all he asks is that we buy a few essential groceries for the Batwa extended family we will be visiting. At first we can't understand why we can't just provide the Batwa with the money directly, but it soon becomes clear when we realise just how far the Batwa are removed from the closest village of Kisoro.

First we join Robert to buy the maize meal, salt, soap and school books he suggests we take with us. We then follow Robert on his piki-piki with our bike for an hour on a rough volcanic track to the base of the volcano. Thereafter a long and strenuous uphill walk for at least another 40 minutes.

We reach the extended Batwa family, of about 10 adults and 20 children, Robert has randomly selected for this visit. They are squatting on the fringes of land owned privately and fear eviction constantly. They stay in 4 small huts made from nearby natural materials. Each hut is no more than 5 square meters and houses an entire family (who all sleep on the earth floor) as well as a "kitchen" comprising one pot on a constantly simmering fire. The daily diet is potatoes. Nothing else. Salt is considered a luxury.

Five square meters housing at least 6 people and simmering coals. There is scant protection from the elements either via a door or roof.

The conditions are appalling. Linda and I have never seen such extreme poverty. Robert and the Batwa family invite us to take photos as they believe this will bring awareness to their plight. This is but one of many such displaced Batwa settlements.

The local NGO (with one of the best buildings in town) they feel is of little benefit or consequence to them.

The photos we took follow.



We follow Robert on his pikipiki with the maize meal strapped to the back.



Then it is a good 40 minute walk.



*This is the sum total of their possessions. Is this the local NGO Batwa building in town?*

Please note the figures and some text quoted below have been sourced from various entities and is to the best of our knowledge accurate.

It has also been confirmed by Robert.

The Batwa were the original ancient dwellers of the forest. The first records of pygmies were made by the Egyptians over 4000 years ago. They described short stature people living near the "Mountains of the Moon" extolling their abilities as dancers and story tellers. Homer and Aristotle also made mention of them. They survived by hunting small game using poison tipped arrows or nets and gathering various plants and fruit that the forest naturally supplies. Small temporary huts constructed with leaves and branches served as their dwellings, which are abandoned after a few months when they relocated to another part of the forest in search of fresh supplies of food. Their tools were remarkably pre-stone age. Until recently these people seem to exist in this exotic forest much as they have for the last several millenniums.

The Batwa believe the forest is the source of all abundance, and this is maintained by proper sharing between people and forest spirits. Singing and dancing rituals also ensure the support of spirits to help them satisfy all of their needs. Needless to say this has ostracised them from the conventional "western" religions.

The Batwa have a wide range of specialized skills and knowledge necessary to carry out their forest-based livelihoods, including an incomparable knowledge of plants, animals, medicinal skills, music and dance.

This changed when the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park was expanded in 1991 to provide more land for the mountain gorillas within its confines; in the process the Batwa were forcibly evicted from the park and having no title to land, were given no compensation. At US\$500 (per person per day) to track the parks gorillas it is a lucrative business, of which the Batwa do not receive any proceeds.

The Batwa effectively have become conservation refugees. Forest life for them has come to an end. They lack marketable skills, having neither access to their traditional forest economy nor to any public services. Education, healthcare, land ownership, and equal treatment by the justice system are all less accessible to the Batwa than to the general population. While other citizens are issued birth certificates and identity cards free of charge, the Batwa must undergo an involved bureaucratic process as the government does not consider them as a sector of the general population that should automatically receive rights. Without these identity cards, it is difficult to enroll in schools and receive government-funded health care, which are otherwise guaranteed to other vulnerable people in the country.

Relegated to the status of third-class citizens in their own country.

In the year 2000, Carol and Scott Kellermann performed a medical needs survey on the Batwa and ascertained that the Batwa under five years old had a mortality rate of 38% (compared with a Ugandan average of 18% and a US statistic of 0.8%)

*Four out of every of ten Batwa would not live to see their fifth birthday.*

With a life expectancy of only 28 years and an annual income of US\$25, their very existence is severely threatened. Without the availability of traditional or state resources, the Batwa are vulnerable and easily exploited.

It becomes even more evident when talking to them- their body language and demeanour is one of a people that have been stripped of the last vestiges of dignity.

Their children suffer for malnutrition, are riddled with various ailments and have little hope for the future.

Without the resources of the forests many Batwa now work as day labourers, servants, and in other unskilled menial jobs. It is estimated that 80% of Batwa earn capital from begging. Even those who do attempt to survive in the towns face struggles due to their indigenous ancestry. They continue to suffer ethnic prejudice, discrimination, violence, and general exclusion from society.

When asked what they would hope for the future they answer as one.

Education for their children and a piece of land to enable them to be self sufficient.

A far cry from the begging bowl image that bedevils this continent.

*An ignored people.  
Shame on you, Mother Africa.*