

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN SUMMARY

RWENZORI MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK (UGANDA)

Summary prepared by IUCN/WCMC (March 1994) based on the original documentation submitted by the Government of Uganda. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the bureau and the committee.

1. LOCATION

On the border between Uganda and Zaire, straddling the Districts of Bundibugyo, Kabarole and Kasese, largely within the western rift valley. Adjacent to the Virunga World Heritage site in Zaire.

2. JURIDICIAL DATA

All terrain above 2,200m was gazetted as a forest reserve in 1941. In 1991 the mountains were gazetted as a national park. Legal protection is now total, although extractive use may be sanctioned by the Board of Trustees, Uganda National Parks.

3. IDENTIFICATION

Covering an area of 99,600ha, 70% of which exceeds an altitude of 2,500m, the Rwenzori mountains comprise an extremely steep and rugged mountain range which includes Africa's third highest peak (Margherita, 5,109m). In the east, the park is contiguous with the Parc National des Virunga in Zaire whose northward extension includes Zaire's section of the Rwenzori mountains (approximately 20%). Although not as high as Mount Kilimanjaro or Mount Kenya, the mountains support a much larger alpine area than either. The Rwenzori are the highest and most permanent sources of the River Nile, and constitute a vital water catchment.

The Rwenzori are well known for their unusual flora which includes many species endemic to the Albertine Rift in the higher altitude zones. Most significant are the giant heathers, ground-sells, ericas and lobelias of the tree heath and alpine zones. Vegetation depends largely on altitude, with five major zones being distinguishable: a broken montane forest zone occurs below 2,400m; a bamboo forest zone occurs (in pure stands in many places) up to an altitude of 3,000m; a tree heath vegetation zone of giant heathers, frequently over 10m in height, extends up to 3,800m; at the same altitude, although on better soils, a tangled undergrowth punctuated by a mixture of small trees predominates; and an Afro-alpine moorland zone upwards to 4,400m. As a result of most effort having been focused on the high altitude flora, only 75 tree species (18% of the country's total) have so far been recorded in the montane forest zone.

The park contains 89 species of birds (27% of the country's total), 4 species of diurnal primate, and 15 species of butterfly (22% of the country's total). Although none of these species are unique to the Rwenzori, many are endemic to the Albertine Rift region (for instance 19 of the birds are Albertine Rift endemics), and a high level of sub-specific endemism occurs, including the Rwenzori colobus monkey, hyrax and leopard. A recent study of invertebrate life forms listed 60 species in the alpine zone, 25 of which were new to science. This is indicative of a much more extensive fauna waiting to be discovered. Although low in number, the following globally threatened animals still occur in the Rwenzori: elephant (V), common chimpanzee (V) and l'hoests monkey (V).

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION / CONSERVATION

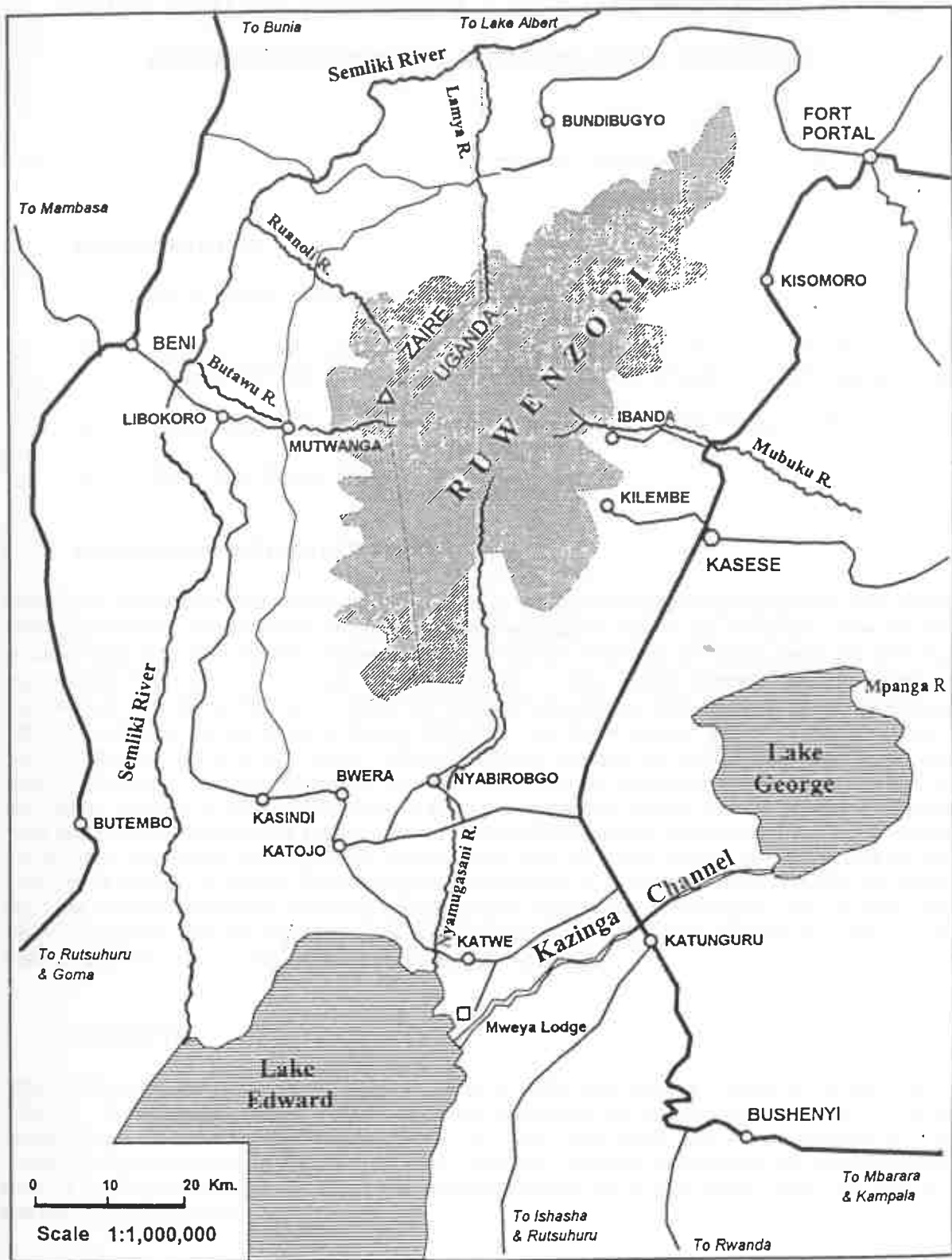
For centuries the Rwenzori mountains have been used by the Bakonzo and Baamba peoples who live on both sides of Uganda's border with Zaire. But following the breakdown of law and order during the 1970s and 1980s, the integrity of the montane forest zone was violated by intensive hunting of mammals for bushmeat (elephant, buffalo, duiker, hyraxes, monkeys). Fortunately, the damage caused by the extraction of other resources has been less severe, although denudation, burning and erosion of the foothills outside the park boundary stand as a reminder of what could all too easily occur as the human population density around the forest grows. The effects of tourism include path erosion, the build up of litter and other mountaineering detritus, and insanitary conditions over many of the central tourist circuit routes. Tourist numbers grew from 226 in 1987 to 1,700 in 1993, and are projected to rise much more in the future.

Great efforts are necessary to involve local communities in all aspects of park management, in order to overcome current fears that traditional use of forest resources will be curtailed. A welcome step towards this goal is the establishment of the Rwenzori Mountains Conservation and Development Project, funded by USAID and implemented by WWF. Phase 1 of the project involves the preparation of a park management plan addressing issues such as zoning, tourism development, infrastructure and community participation. Later phases intend to relieve human pressure on the mountains by engaging in agro-forestry and conservation awareness programmes.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The Rwenzori Mountains National Park nomination, as prepared by the Government of Uganda, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage natural property:

- (iii) **Contain superlative natural phenomena** The Rwenzori mountains, which are known internationally as 'The Mountains of the Moon', are a site of world-renowned aesthetic and scientific value, the most permanent sources of the River Nile, and a vital water catchment area.
- (iv) **Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for threatened species** The extraordinary altitudinal range of the park (1,700-5,109m) is responsible for it supporting an exceptional variety of species, including many endemic species and races, especially at higher altitudes. Also present are at least three globally threatened mammals, plus a potentially large number of undocumented invertebrates and plants.



(Detailed 1:50,000 maps of the boundaries are provided with the nomination)

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

RWENZORI MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK (UGANDA)

1. DOCUMENTATION

- i) IUCN/WCMC. Data Sheet (11 references)
- ii) Additional Literature Consulted: Lush, C. 1993. Cloud Forests of the Rwenzori. in Tropical Montane Cloud Forests. East-West Centre; Kingdon, J. 1990. Island Africa.
- iii) Consultations: Five external reviewers, UNP Staff, WWF Project staff.
- iv) Field Visit: March 1994. J. Thorsell, M. Young.

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Rwenzori is one of some 70 protected areas found in the Afromontane biogeographical unit. Along with Cape Fynbos, Afromontane forest is the rarest vegetation type on the continent. The unit can be subdivided into five regional clusters with the Albertine montane rift group being the one that incorporates Rwenzori. The small remnant forests in this cluster extend from the Itombwe mountains in East Zaire, 500 km north to the Rwenzori mountains. The entire unit is of exceptional biological value for its particularly distinct flora and, to a lesser extent, fauna. Two other World Heritage sites are found in this region: Kahuzi-Biega and Virunga and a third one (Bwindi) has also been nominated. The main distinction of the Rwenzori is the scenically spectacular nature of its high peaks (at over 5000 m, Margherita is the third highest in Africa) and the presence of snow fields and glaciers. The existing World Heritage site at Kilimanjaro has many similarities but Rwenzori is a range of mountains (Kilimanjaro is one volcano) with an alpine area of greater extent as well with higher species diversity. Due to higher precipitation (2.5 m/year), the Rwenzori mountains also have the most extensive area of tropical montane cloud forest in the region. Mount Kenya and the other eastern African mountains are all exceeded in biological and geological variety by the Rwenzori which is in a centre of endemism for the region.

3. INTEGRITY

Active protective measures began in 1941 when a forest reserve was created on all land above 2100 m. After many years of debate the area was given natural park status in 1991 and its conservation has much improved since then. The 1980's saw much civil strife in Uganda and the Rwenzori, like other parks in the country, were negatively affected by poaching and encroachment. Most of the Rwenzori range, however, has remained undisturbed due to steep slopes, soil infertility and inhospitable climate.

Currently the Rwenzori is under threat from two sources: (1) population pressure and agricultural experience and (2) growing tourism. The latter is limited to a narrow strip around the central peaks which some 1700 trekkers walked in 1993. The impacts of these "ecotourists" are relatively small and are being reduced by management. The main threat from human population pressures around the park is the subject of a major WWF/USAID regional conservation project and the success of this is critical to the long-term integrity of the range.

A management plan has been in preparation for several years and is due for approval this year.

In sum, like most parks in Africa, Rwenzori is becoming an island in a sea of subsistence agriculture. There are many infringements along its boundaries and local people are seeking more benefits from the Park. Management resources in terms of trained staff and equipment are limited and great efforts will be needed to ensure that there is sustainable conservation in future.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The Rwenzori National Park borders the existing Virunga World Heritage site along 50 km of its boundary. Over 75% of the Rwenzori and most of the main peaks of the range, however, occur on the Uganda side although the highest (Margharita) is shared with Zaire. Human access is possible from both sides but there is no urgent need for coordinated management. As the values of Virunga World Heritage site are found mainly in its central and southern sectors the Rwenzori National Park in Uganda is more or less a self-contained unit. For this reason IUCN does not consider Rwenzori to be an extension of the Virunga site and would not propose a joint listing as a transfrontier site at this time.

5. EVALUATION

The Rwenzori range of mountains are clearly one of the most important natural areas remaining in Africa. Their recent upgraded legal status given by the Uganda Government as well as the WWF/USAID project in support of the park are commendable initiatives in recognizing that conservation of the range needs greater attention. The area is also of great scientific interest and deserves much greater attention from researchers. Finally, the historic use of the Rwenzori by the Bakonzo and Baamba peoples is recognized and their continual stewardship is to be encouraged.

The Rwenzori National Park meets two natural criteria:

- (iii) it is an area of great scenic beauty and contains superlative natural features. the six main massifs of the central Rwenzori with their equatorial glaciers, snowfields, waterfalls and lakes provide an alpine setting unparalleled elsewhere in Africa; and
- (iv) it contains significant natural habitats and threatened species. The Rwenzori is well known for its unusual flora, which includes many species endemic to the Albertine rift. Most remarkable are the giant heathers, groundsels, ericas and lobelias of the alpine zone. Its large area of montane cloud forest is of additional interest.

The Rwenzori National Park meets the conditions of integrity for both the criteria with various measures underway to strengthen management. IUCN hopes to be able to review the directions given in the management plan if received in time for the Committee meeting in December.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Rwenzori National Park should be inscribed on the World Heritage List under criteria *iii* and *iv*. The Committee may wish to commend the Ugandan authorities for improving the status of conservation of the site over the past three years and encourage them to complete the management plan. Both WWF and USAID should also be encouraged to continue to provide project support to the park.

