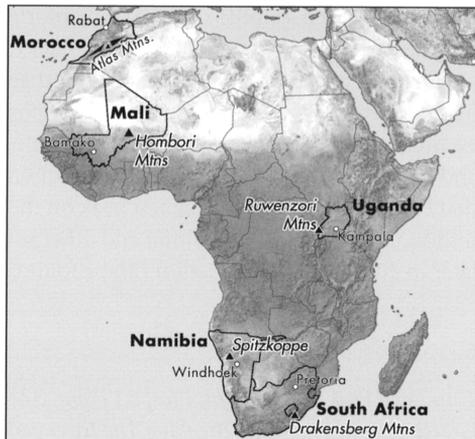


Africa

MOROCCO

Atlas Mountains, Taghia Gorge, Les Rivieres Pourpres and Sul Filo della Notte. Visiting the remote Taghia Gorge in Morocco this October, Rolando Larcher, Maurizio Oviglia, and Michele Paissan established the stellar 12-pitch Sul Filo della Notte (V 5.13a; 5.12b obligatory) on the immaculate red limestone of the Tadrarate. Though climbers have been active here sporadically since 1974, the gorge's location in the Atlas Mountains, two hours from the nearest decent road and above a village with no electricity or telephone, had thus far kept development to a minimum. Nevertheless, this is an area to keep an eye on, with a handful of one-pitch routes up to 5.13c, Sul Filo della Notte, and the nearly 2000-foot 5.12b route Les Rivieres Pourpres put up in May 2003.



Adapted from www.rockandice.com

UGANDA



Approaching Bujuku Lake, with the southern peaks of Mt. Stanley on the left and the northern peaks of Mt. Stanley on the right (Alexandra and Margherita). *Ralph Baldwin*

Ruwenzori (Ruwenzori) Mountains, Mountains of the Moon, an historical overview and recent ascent of Mt. Stanley (Margherita Peak, 5,109m.). Ruwenzori Mountains National Park is located on the border between Uganda and Zaire. It contains six major glaciated massifs of over 4,600m less

than one degree from the equator (0°11'N, 29°47'E). Little climbing has occurred in this range over the past three decades due to the tyrannies of Amin and Obote, then the guerilla war on the mountain by rebel insurgents. The most recent closure was from 1994 to 2001.

Our group included Douglass Teschner, an American working in Kigali, Rwanda; John Skirving from Vashon, Washington, and myself from Wasilla, Alaska. We made an ascent of Margherita Peak, Africa's third highest peak, and a 60km approach and return over nine days, July 30–August 7. Although not as high as Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya, the Rwenzori comprise an alpine zone significantly larger and far less traveled than either. The first full season since reopening, 2002, saw only about 200 visitors, few of whom were climbers. Rwenzori Mountains National Park measures roughly 100km by 40km at the 1,500m level.

The wettest months are March to May and August to December. Rains can be very persistent and heavy on the trails with some monthly averages reported at 19 inches. We considered ourselves lucky to have had rain only on the last day. The thickly vegetated rock slopes of the approach and return as well as the deep mud of the high altitude bogs pose serious obstacles even in the supposedly dry season.

Ptolemy, the great Greek geographer, writing in ca A.D. 150 first suggested the source of the Nile River to be two large lakes whose waters were fed by snow melting on the "Mountains of the Moon." The European explorer, Henry Stanley called these mountains Rwenzori, after a local name meaning "hills of rain," when he "discovered" the range in 1888. The Rwenzori today are recognized as a vital water catchment, feeding the economically important lakes Edward and George, and constituting the highest and most permanent sources of the River Nile.

Intrepid explorer and climber, Prince Luigi di Savoia, the Duke of the Abruzzi, made the first comprehensive exploration and ascent of major peaks in 1906. H.W. Tilman and Eric Shipton visited the Rwenzori in January of 1932 and made the third ascent of Margherita Peak as well as several other major ascents. During the 1960s and 1970s, expatriates based out of Kampala and members of the Mountain Club of Uganda made many ascents and installed a hut system along the primary trails. These huts and their replacements are in use today. Rwenzori Mountains National Park was established in 1991 and recognized by the United Nations as a World Heritage Site in 1994.

Our climb began with the recognition that Teschner's job assignment in Rwanda provided an excellent base for a trip into the Rwenzori, an object of fascination for us for some time. Skirving and I traveled to Nairobi and then on to Kigali to meet Teschner. From Rwanda, we headed north by public bus, probably the most dangerous element of the entire expedition! The bus lurched around precipitous mountain roads at breakneck speeds with the driver leaning on the horn most of the time.

At Kasese, we made last minute purchases in the market, met representatives of Rwenzori Mountain Services (RMS), an NGO controlling access to the park, and booked into the Hotel Margherita for the night. In the morning, a taxi took us the final 20km to Nyakalengija at the end of a dirt road. Local Bakonjo people whose families have served as porters and trail guides for generations were lined up outside the park headquarters hoping to be hired as we arrived.

The Uganda Wildlife Authority administers the park and RMS is the sole concessionaire. Following the incidents at Bwindi National Park (1999) and Murchison Falls National Park (2001) in which rebel insurgents kidnapped and murdered visitors, trekking and peak ascents are tightly regulated. An armed ranger escort is mandatory as are guides and porters. RMS insists that all visitors be guided up all peaks. The guides proved useful in route-finding through

the forest and on the glacier, but they need training in technical mountain skills. Our proposed trip required prepayment of US \$600 cash per person including peak fees.

We reached the high hut, Elena (4,540m), on the fourth day after following the lower reaches of the Mubuku river and then the Bujuku river to its source. As we ascended, we passed through montane forest, thick bamboo stands, and dense thickets of tree-size heather. The giant grouse and lobelia plants in the alpine zone reached 8 meters! Bujuku Lake (3,977m) at the head of the drainage is surrounded by three main massifs: Mt. Stanley to the west, Mt. Speke to the north, and Mt. Baker to the south.

The Stanley Plateau is about 1km by 0.5km and lies at 4,800m. We ascended Moebius (4,919m) to the final three-meter summit block, an easy third-class scramble and a good vantage point. The east face of Elena Peak (4,970m) looked to be a possibly interesting rock climb of about 200 meters at intermediate standard. However, the glaciers and snows are melting at an accelerated rate and rockfall can be a serious hazard in this area. Back at the hut, a clearing in the sky afforded a view of two large tower-like peaks guarding the entrance to the Coronation Glacier, Kitasamba (ca 4,863m) and Nyabubuya (ca 4,863m), deities to the local Bakonjo.

Our summit day started shortly after dawn in a snow squall that dropped six inches of snow on the Stanley Plateau. At the north end with the weather clearing, we dropped down a rocky gully at the foot of the east ridge of Alexandra Peak to connect with the Margherita Glacier. From a col, we climbed a short rock cliff to gain the east ridge of Margherita. The first 20 meters requires low-level fifth-class climbing over rock streaming with water, but RMS has installed a fixed rope to which one can clip. We were amazed to see our guides pull themselves up the rope hand-over-hand without clipping in.

Five and one-half hours from the hut, we topped out at the summit of Margherita Peak, highest point on the border between Uganda and Zaire. Depending on the weather conditions, route-finding can be difficult. However, we had a relatively easy time of it thanks to our mandatory guide, John Mudenge. In 1932, Tilman and Shipton camped on the Stanley Plateau for four days before the mists cleared sufficiently for them to climb Margherita.

The next morning before descending to Scott-Elliot Pass (4,370m) to complete our circuit back to Nyakalengija, we decided to make a short rock route. Teschner led four pitches (5.5) on cliff escarpments above the Elena hut. The rock was solid but slippery due to heavy moss cover in places. By observing photos and diagrams from Osmaston and Pasteur (1972), it is obvious that the glaciers have receded tremendously over the past 40 years exposing more rock, creating new route options, and making old ones longer. Osmaston is a good reference for established routes, but retreating glaciers have changed conditions, and glaciers may be gone in 20 years. Best new route options in the Rwenzori may involve longer mountaineering routes (300-900m), primarily on rock. If current park administration will permit easier access to the high peaks, there is great potential for new routes in this exotic range. The Mountain Club of Uganda, based out of Kampala, may have the most complete records of routes done to date.

The trek back to the trailhead took three and one-half days during which we passed the Kitandara Lakes, source of the Butawa River which flows westward down into Zaire. Scorched hillsides could be seen across the lakes where fire reportedly set by rebels had worked its way up the valley. The descent took us over Freshfield Pass (4,280m) and by Bujongolo, the large cave from which the Duke of Abruzzi launched his assault in 1906.

Our last night on the trail, we joined the porters and guides for supper and discussed the current political situation in Uganda. Rwenzori Mountains National Park is an exquisite African

mountain wilderness with no infrastructure at this time other than a crude hut system. Major development is planned and increased visitation expected. Hopefully, the Bakonjo who have lived on this land for generations will be a part of the decision-making process. There is a very real need for training of local guides in mountain craft, and the organizing of guides and porters into entities that can ensure their well being.

Useful contacts: Rwenzori Mountaineering Services, P.O. Box 33, Kasese, Uganda; The Warden in Charge, Rwenzori Mountains National Park, P.O. Box 188, Kasese, Uganda; and U.S. Department of State (<http://usembassy.state.gov>). Useful references: Else, D. (1998) *Trekking in East Africa*, Lonely Planet Publications; Wielochowski, A. (1989) *Ruwenzori* (trail map); Osmaston, H. and D. Pasteur (1972) *Guide to the Ruwenzori* (out of print); and Tilman, H.W. (1938) *Snow On The Equator* (out of print).

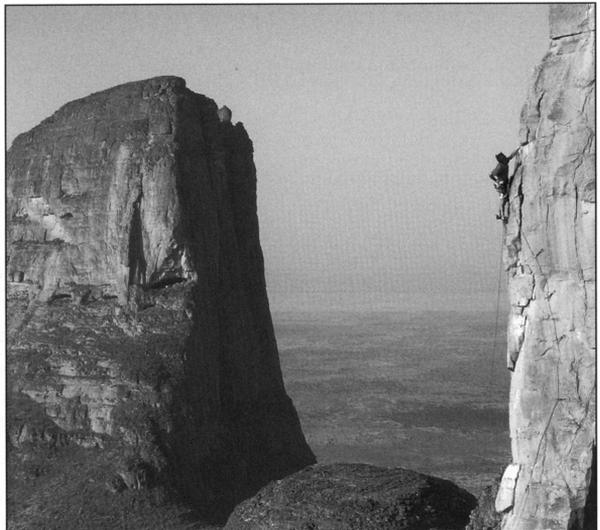
RALPH BALDWIN, AAC

MALI

La Mano de Fatima, Kaga Tondo, Forsakala Bimbaso. Adventure and unexpected situations guided a group of Czech climbers during their trip to La Mano de Fatima. In spite of very high temperatures, four of them, Pavel Jonak, Vasek Satava, Petr Piechowicz, and Milan Benian repeated the route Harmattan Rodeo on the tower Kanga Pamari. The hardest pitch has a difficulty of 7c+/8a. Because of very high temperatures they repeated the route only in AF style. The first ascent was made by Paul Piana and Todd Skinner and rated 5.13a. The Czechs Tomas Zakora, Radek Tilnak, Ludek Slechta, and Tomas Bien climbed a new route on tower Kaga Tondo. They christened their route Forsakala Bimbaso (13 pitches, 7a AF).

JAN KREISINGER, *Czech Republic*

Hand of Fatima, first complete link-up (in a day). From mid November to mid December, I had the extreme pleasure of being part of a North Face-sponsored expedition during which we explored the surreal sub-Saharan dream-world of Mali as we ventured towards the legendary five fingers of the Hand of Fatima. We landed in the apocalyptically industrialized capital city of Bamako and left as quickly as possible via three Land Cruisers. Along for the ride were videographer Kevin Kau, sound man Andrew, and the legendary still photographer Jimmy Chin,



Kevin Thaw on Kaga Tondo, The Hand of Fatima. Jimmy Chin