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THE

RISLEY

NATIONAL PARKS OF UGANDA

UGANDA is by far the smallest of the three East African countries, possessing great charm and a distinction of its own.

It is a land of lush green vegetation, of great lakes and swamps and rivers and magnificent tropical forests—in fact, it is the link between the great forests of the Congo and the more arid countries of the East Coast.

There are three National Parks: the Queen Elizabeth, the Murchison Falls and the newly-established Kidepo Valley Park. There are also a number of Game Reserves, but it is not proposed to write about these for most of these are now open to controlled hunting—a logical corollary to the development of National Parks.

The first two Parks were set up in 1952, when the Uganda National Parks Ordinance was passed into law and the first Director was Ken Beaton, a great East African character who sadly died in 1954 just after the visit of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. He was succeeded by Mr. R. M. Bere, CMG, a retired Provincial Commissioner with a deep interest in wild life and in turn he handed over in 1960 to Colonel C. D. Trimmer, DSO.

But there are two other names to be remembered with profound gratitude—first, Captain C. R. S. Pitman, CBE, DSO, MC, for so long Chief Game Warden of Uganda, whose foresight and devotion made it possible later to set up Parks; and Mr. R. L. E. Dreschfield, CMG, QC, whose drive and determination as the Attorney-General of Uganda finally brought the Parks into existence.

As elsewhere, the Parks are administered by a Board of Trustees, answerable to the Minister.

THE MURCHISON FALLS Park, astride the Victoria Nile and bounded on the west by Lake Albert, is the largest Park, with an area of just over 1,500 square miles. To the north of the river is Acholi District, while the southern half lies in the Kingdom of Bugoro. The African local governments of these areas are entitled to half the entrance fees paid by visitors—and received £3,324 in the financial year ending June 1963.

Until about 1912, this country was fairly densely populated; but the very heavy and rapidly-increasing death rate from sleeping sickness led to the entire human population being moved to healthier parts of the country.

From then, until its declaration as a National Park in 1952, the area was a Game Reserve.

The Warden in charge of the Park is Roger Wheeler, assisted by former police officer Abondio Odur, with more than 10 years' service in the Parks, and another ex-policeman, Alfred Labongo. John Savidge is the Scientific Warden.

The Park has a force of 60 Rangers, split up between Headquarters and the 10 anti-poaching outposts. This park attracts the most visitors and, in the year ending June 30th 1963, 20,026 visitors paid to enter.

For the most part, the Park is rolling open grasslands; but much of it, particularly in the south, must have been heavily forested, though of this little now remains other than isolated patches and riverine stretches, still the home of one small surviving group of chimpanzees.

John Savidge, engaged in research on this sudden forest disappearance says that, the damage would appear to be the wholesale ring barking of trees by the very large elephant population (estimated to vary seasonally from four to eight thousand in this section of the Park) and the devastating annual fires which sweep through the long dry grass, preventing both the survival of partially damaged trees and any possible natural regeneration. In consequence, the elephant of the Park and even those who come in from the forests outside are now almost entirely grass eaters.

The Headquarters of the Park are at Paraa ("the place of the Hippo") on the north bank of the Nile and here is a somewhat unimaginatively designed full-service lodge, accommodating 54 persons. It is proposed to double the accommodation and to open a new lodge in the Chobe area at the eastern end of the Park—a distinct advance, for comparatively few road circuits have been opened up so far.



ELEPHANT browses beside Lake Albert, with the Congo Republic in the background.

(Photo: E. Risley)

Paraa Lodge appears to hold a peculiar fascination for local elephant. First was "The Lord Mayor"—a full grown bull who, becoming used to being given fruit from cars, subsequently took to turning them over if no fruit was forthcoming and, in consequence, had to be shot in 1959.

Next came "Bunyoro", another bull who had to be shot earlier this year, for his bent was to remove the roofs in the African housing areas in search of food. Now there is a cow—leader of a herd of six—who has become too demanding, standing at the Lodge's kitchen door with queesting trunk.

Death is a sad reward for confidence in man, but it is inevitable, for these are wild elephant and the Park Wardens cannot risk an accident which must sooner or later occur when tourists walk out to feed them lumps of sugar!

Murchison Falls Park has great attractions—the Falls themselves, with the Nile roaring over; the launch trip up to the Falls from the Lodge. This is a seven-mile journey in wonderland, an experience not to be missed at all costs.

The bird life, the great numbers of crocodile and hippo, the monkeys, elephant, buffalo, waterbuck, kob and even an occasional black rhino, seem different from a launch than from a car. One is travelling along the Nile, one of nature's great masterpieces and not that dusty artificial creation—a motor road. It inspires a more intimate feeling of being at one with the beauty and wild life all around.

Spinning for Nile Perch is permitted in the fast-swirling water at the foot of the Falls and, with fish of up to 200 lbs. to be caught, gives the most exciting of such fishing in Africa.

The main motor circuit is a circular one, to and along the shores of Lake Albert known as the Buligi circuit. Buligi is the Swahili for bugle and it derives its name from the old legend that along this part of

ERIC RISLEY

continues his review of East Africa's National Parks and Game Reserves.

the shore could be heard the bugles blown in Emin Pasha's camp at Fort Magungu on the western shore.

Much of the papyrus swamp on the Lake edge was washed away in the 1961 floods and with it went the whale-headed storks. But the variety of water birds to be seen is still prolific. One is certain to see elephant, buffalo, Uganda kob and Jackson's Hartbeest and, with luck, may see White Rhino.

The natural habitat of the White Rhino is to the west of the Nile but, two years ago, 10 were captured by roping. Nine have been released in the Murchison Falls Park; the tenth, Obongi, a young cow calf—is flourishing at Paraa and still awaits a young husband before release. Of the 10 white rhino brought over the Nile, two died at once, while a mother and small calf and a young bull soon disappeared and must be presumed dead. However, a fine cow and her well-grown bull calf and two other young bulls flourish and are often to be seen.

In common with their counterparts in all other East African Parks, the Warden and Rangers wage constant battle against poachers, both on land and water. Were they to relax their vigilance, none of the many crocodile one sees from the launch would live

long for, with the price of crocodile skin at Shs. 10/- per running inch of belly-skin, the profits are great.

Unfortunately, crocodile are easily killed, whether with snares or baited hooks, or—most commonly and easily—by dazzling them with torches at night, while a canoe is silently paddled up and the crocodile speared.

This last method is used by the villagers from Lake Albert who, on dark nights, sneak up the Nile right to the very foot of the Falls and kill crocodiles. Despite the constant vigil of Warden and Rangers, Colonel Trimmer has reported that the number of crocodile has been very seriously reduced.

Other poaching in the Park is by parties of up to 70 spearmen, who "run down" and spear the weakest in the large buffalo herds. Hippo are also speared from canoes.

But by far the most commonly used method for getting meat is by that cruellest of all devices, the wire snare. Roger Wheeler reports 600 snares picked up in the Park in the last three years; but just outside the Park, as many as 1,000 wire snares a month are sometimes found. Almost invariably, then, visitors to Murchison Falls Park see at least one elephant who has lost a portion of his trunk after being snared.

THE QUEEN ELIZABETH National Park lies in the extreme west of Uganda, at the foot of the snow capped Ruwenzori Mountains—the famed "Mountains of the Moon", whose highest peak rises to 16,763 feet.

The area of the Park is about 750 square miles, including the Uganda shores of Lake Edward and the Kazinga channel connecting the latter to Lake George.

It has much variety, for in its north-western corner are a number of old volcanic craters—often of exciting

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A hippo finds muddy solace amongst buffalo in a wallow.

(Photo: E. Risley)

UGANDA'S NATIONA

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beauty, with their steep heavily-wooded slopes and lakes at the bottom, the waters of some of which reputedly have great healing properties.

The Maramagambo Forest traverses the Park, dividing the euphorbia studded grasslands of the northern section from the acacia parklands of the Kigezi or southern sector.

Away to the south can be seen the large, ancient and mainly-extinct volcanoes on the Congo border; but the smoke plume clearly shows that one of them—Nyiragongo—is still active.

There are no rhino, giraffe, zebra, or Hartbeest in the Park; nor—surprisingly—are any crocodile to be found in Lakes Edward and George or their waterways. But the Park has lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and hippo—the last three tame to a degree which is almost

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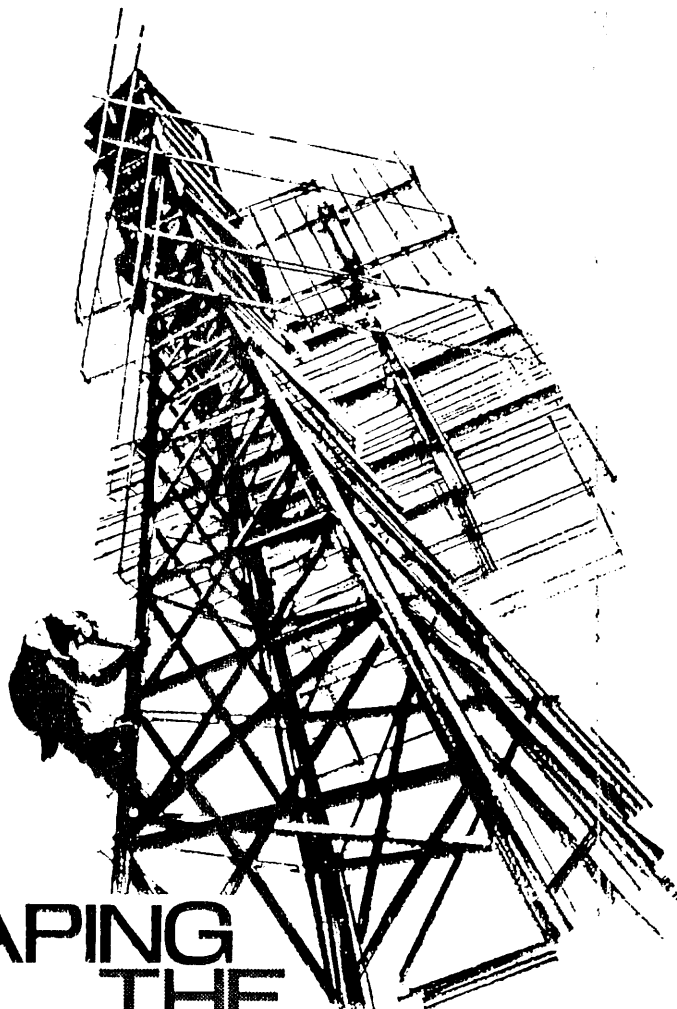
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SHAPING THE FUTURE

Telephone trunk routes are the arteries through which flow the business and social traffic which is the life-blood of a modern community. In East Africa this traffic is carried on overhead wires and underground cables and on high frequency and very high frequency radio systems. Special transmission equipment

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tions and, by making use of technical developments and taking part in the work of the International Telecommunications Union, is ensuring that East Africa's telephone trunk system will continue to measure up to the standard required for further participation in the closely integrated world system.



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scientists and well equipped laboratories—is providing scientific information of the greatest value, information which can be put into practical effect in the Park.

The research programmes provide for an initial study of the hippopotamus in relation to its environment, expanding later to include other species of mammals.

This cropping of hippo in the Park began five years ago and approximately 1,000 hippo have been shot each year. It is estimated that this cropping will probably have to continue for another two years, whereafter culling will suffice in preventing a build-up of the numbers again.

The Nuffield Unit estimates that 20 hippo to the square mile provides about the right ratio for satisfactory use of the land with other grazing animals; there is a population in many parts as yet uncropped, of 80 to the square mile.

So far, the cropping has been done largely in the Lion Bay area of Lake Edward, the Kazinga Channel and the Mweya Peninsular, and the results have fully justified the predictions of the scientists. Hippo are grass eaters only and, where cropping has been done, the large eroded patches of bare soil regenerate, and populations of other grazing animals build up.

An outstandingly clear example is the Mweya Peninsular, right in front of the Lodge, which today—three years after cropping—is again a well-grassed area carrying three times the number of buffalo, waterbuck, bushbuck and other animals that it did before the hippo were cropped.

The cropping is carried out in the most efficient and humane manner; it provides not only material for study by the Nuffield Unit team, but a good source of income, for the carcasses are sold to a contractor at good prices and fresh meat is re-sold in the neighbouring towns and villages.

Captain Frank Poppleton, Senior Warden, has for long been in charge of the Queen Elizabeth Park;



EXPRESSION OF SATISFACTION on the face of this Bohor Reedbuck may reflect his feeling about life in a National Park. (Photo: John Savidge)

his very high standards of Park Management and wholehearted collaboration with the Nuffield Team should be obvious to all who enter this beautiful and well-run Park.

The Lodge at Mweya is a full catering lodge for 54 persons, but is about to be rebuilt, with doubled accommodation. There is also a self-service camp on the Ishasha River—the Congo boundary at the southern end of the Park.

UGANDA's newest National Park is the KIDEPO VALLEY PARK, in the extreme north-east corner of the country, having a common boundary with the Southern Sudan and Kenya. This Park has not yet been opened to the public, but it is hoped to do so towards the end of 1964 when a self-service camp will be ready.

This is a Park quite different from any other in East Africa, for it lies in one of the wildest and least-known bits of East Africa to the extreme north of Karamoja District—an area made famous by the old elephant hunter, W. D. M. Bell.

The Park headquarters are being moved from Opotipot to Opoka. It seems sad to abandon any place with such a delightful name as Opotipot, but Opoka has considerable advantages and overlooks a swamp in which much game can be seen, at any time.

Access will be either by air or by road from Moroto—a route to be recommended to those who do not know the area, for it travels up through the country of wild nomadic tribes, whose men still disdain clothes and seek their fun in raiding their enemies for cattle.

(Continued on next page)

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Photo: Tony Irwin

UGANDA PARKS

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The Warden developing this Park is Peter Pegg, a young man who took a degree in biology at McGill University. Away in his lovely but lonely kingdom, he is building the new camp, making the roads and stopping the poaching. But he has another task—namely, to see safely through his Park the steady stream of Didinga and Mening refugees fleeing the Sudan with their herds of stock.

This Park will be a treasure to visit before it becomes too well-travelled by the tourist. Its 480 square miles straddle the Kidepo and Narus rivers, with their dry acacia bush country. It is ringed by high mountains, Morungole near the Kenya border thrusting its densely-forested peak to an altitude of over 9,000 feet.

The "Big Five" are all here; so, too, are Greater and Lesser Kudu, Jackson's Hartbeest in large numbers and rean are to be seen. The Warden reports that, in the year since he and his ranger staff of 28 took over, the game is increasing steadily and becoming much tamer.

These, then, are the National Parks of Uganda—the young Kidepo Valley Park and the two other Parks fascinating not only for their scenery and wild life, but also for their history in Man's long search for the source of the Nile.

The Uganda National Parks are among the "musts" for visitors and, indeed, for residents of East Africa. These Parks are extremely well administered—virtually-free educational tours for schoolchildren are regular features—while their contribution to the resources of the local African authorities (in whose lands the Parks lie) and, above all, their progressive approach to problems based on scientific research and advice, give them a standing for which due tribute should be paid to Colonel Trimmer and all who have been associated with their development and progress.

A WHITE RHINO, captured west of the Nile and brought into Murchison Falls National Park. (Photo: E. Risley)

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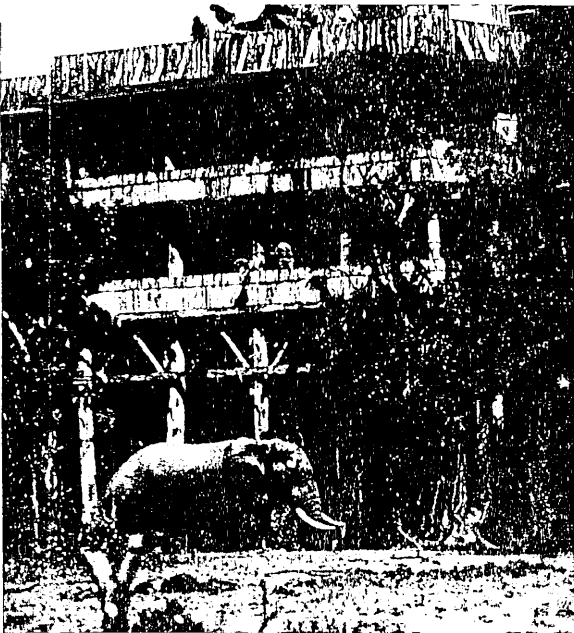


Photo: G. Mason Smith

From the elephants' point of view