



FLAG EXPEDITION REPORT

Flag Number 89

The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition Into the Mountains of the Moon

Submitted by
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Preface

I would like to thank The Explorers Club for allowing me the honour to carry Flag # 89. The flag was carried in the past by others, to include Colonel Norman Vaughan. Without the support of the late Colonel Vaughan and his wife and fellow explorer Carolyn, I would not be a member of the club. I also might not even be an explorer. For long ago when I met them both at the Alaska State Fair in Fairbanks, without their encouragement, I might possibly have walked off the trail and back into everyday life.

Introduction

In the spring of 2007 as expedition leader of The Colorado African Expedition, a Trans-African overland crossing from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, I first travelled into the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains, the fabled 'Mountains of the Moon'. At the time what led our team into the Rwenzoris was the search for an illusive group of Batwa pygmies that had become marginalized and forced from the rainforest where they had lived for over 20,000 years. The Batwa in other parts of Uganda were removed from their ancestral lands by the government of Uganda and the Uganda Wildlife Authority in order to provide a natural habitat for the diminishing populations of mountain gorillas. Although the Batwa, a hunter and gatherer society, had lived in harmony with their fellow Primates for millenniums and in turn had insured the survival of the mountain gorillas, were forced from their lands. Content gathered by The Colorado African Expedition of 2007 documented the plight of the Batwa and the mountain gorillas in a documentary film entitled 'Primate Questions of Conservation' (see 'Primate Questions of Conservation' on www.julianmonroefisher.com/pages/gallery.htm).

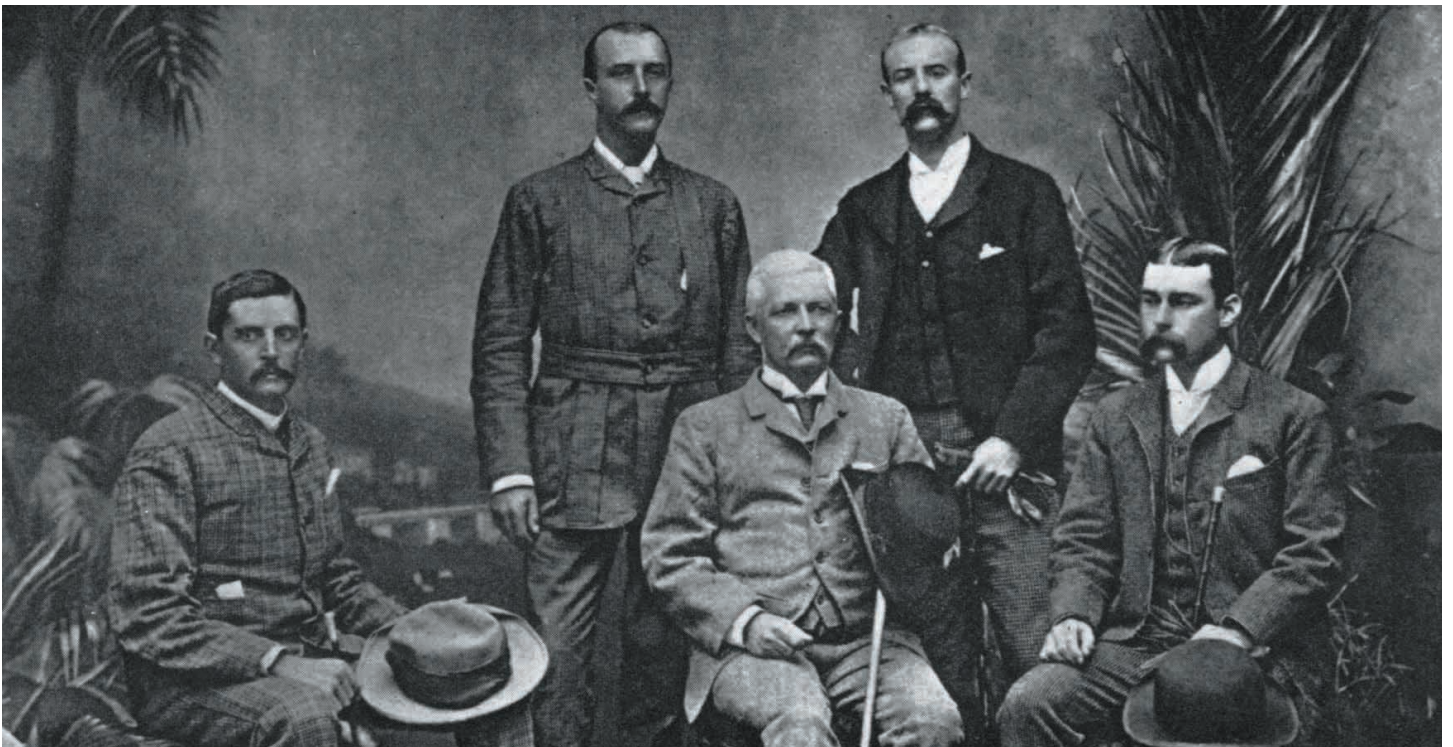


Visiting a Batwa village in the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains during The Colorado African Expedition of 2007.



Upon my return to Austria from leading The Colorado African Expedition of 2007, I began researching the Rwenzori Mountains. I soon learned that the glaciers within the range are under threat from climate change and global warming. During my pre-expedition research I was enlightened by the findings of Dr. Richard Taylor's paper (<http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/~rtaylor/>) from his extensive study of the Rwenzori glaciers in 2003. His study predicts that if the current climatic change continues, the glaciers will possibly disappear within the next twenty years.

The Rwenzori Mountains are locally referred to as the Ruwenzururu, referring to the snow capped peaks shrouded in mystery in the mist of the clouds. Their indigenous name was forever changed to Rwenzori by exploring journalist Henry Morton Stanley who miswrote what he heard from the Bakonzo people during his Emin Pasha Relief Expedition of 1886 to 1889.



Henry Morton Stanley with the officers of the Advance Column of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, taken in Cairo 1890 after the expedition. From the left : Dr. Thomas Heazle Parke, Robert H. Nelson, Henry M. Stanley, William G. Stairs, and Arthur J. M. Jephson [wikipedia.org]

Though Stanley had long been intrigued by the Ruwenzururu and the highest mountain that was later named in his honour, the reality is that Stanley never actually ventured up into the range. He did charge Captain Stairs from the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition with the task. But Captain Stairs only made it to the altitude of 10,677 feet before becoming overwhelmed by the terrain forcing him to turn back.



The Canadian born mercenary Stairs later became known as the leader of the 1891-92 Stairs Expedition to Katanga. In the name of King Leopold II of Belgium and his grand design to steal the vast wealth of the Congo during the scramble for Africa, Stairs was indirectly responsible for the murder of King Msiri of Katanga.

Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, Duke of the Abruzzi (Luigi Amedeo Giuseppe Maria Ferdinando Francesco di Savoia) became the first known European to reach the summit of Mount Stanley in 1906. Under arguably pressure from The Royal Geographical Society, he named many of the peaks within the Rwenzoris after Victorian explorers. The Rwenzori Mountain Range consists of six massifs separated by deep gorges: Mount Stanley (5,109m), Mount Speke (4,890m), Mount Baker (4,843m), Mount Emin (4,798m), Mount Gessi (4,715m) and Mount Luigi di Savoia (4,627m). Mount Stanley is the largest and has several subsidiary summits, with Margherita Peak being the highest point. The true irony is that Stanley, who was to many historians a tyrant during his explorations within the modern day boundaries of Uganda ["The Scramble For Africa" by Thomas Pakenham, p.27ff], amazingly he lives on in infamy within Uganda as her highest peak carries his name.



Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy,
Duke of the Abruzzi [wikipedia.org]

**The Route of The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition**

The route began in Vienna, Austria. From Vienna I travelled by air through Cairo to Kampala, the capital of the East African nation of Uganda. I then travelled overland in Uganda to the western town of Kasese. There the expeditionary team travelled to the staging area in the village of Ibanda. From Ibanda we trekked along what is referred to as the central circuit route of the Rwenzori National Park before blazing a new route north to the Lamia/Lamyra River. Upon reaching the Lamyra River which is the geographical border between Uganda and The Democratic Republic of the Congo, we trekked down near to the Semliki River to the village of Rwangara. From Rwangara we crossed Lake Albert to the village of Kabukanga. From Kabukanga we travelled overland to Murchison Falls, then back to Kampala for the return trip through Cairo to Vienna. (see Attachment I - Maps)

Dates of Expedition

July 7, 2008 - August 12, 2008

Participants of the Expedition (see Attachment II - Team)

Julian Monroe Fisher - FI00 - FRGS - Expedition Leader
Peter Bwambale - Expedition Guide - Expedition Lead Guide
Cornelius Thahimba - Expedition Cook
Gidion Isebani - Expedition Lead Porter & Navigation Officer
Alfred Isebabulya - Expedition Trail Cutter
Elisha Muhongya - Expedition Porter
Erineo Tsomwa - Expedition Porter
Gidion Isembwa - Expedition Porter
SikahwaTragen - Expedition Porter
Stephen Kindenga - Expedition Porter
Tito Sunday - Expedition Porter
Joseph Muhindo - Expedition Head of Security & GPS Documentation
Milton Tumusabe - Expedition Rear Security
Elisha Buluku - Expedition Communications Officer-Uganda
Augustine Muhindo - Expedition Logistics Officer-Uganda
Regina Fisher - Expedition Communications & Logistics Officer-Austria



Expedition Sponsors and Funding

The expedition was financially self funded with additional support from private benefactors. Equipment and transportation for the expedition was provided through partnerships whereas partners received logo positioning on the expedition's official website. They will also receive honourable mentioning within the credits of the proposed book detailing the exploits of the expedition.

The Goals & Objectives of the Expedition

Exploration is the act of searching or traveling for the purpose of discovery, e.g. of unknown people or information. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Explorer]

- To gain firsthand knowledge regarding the impact of climate change/global warming upon the indigenous cultures that live in the shadows of the Rwenzori Mountains;
- To gain firsthand knowledge regarding the impact of climate change/global warming on the glaciers of the Rwenzori Mountains;
- To record temperatures at altitude;
- To record GPS coordinates of the route;
- To pursue Sir Christopher Ondaatje's theory that the Rwenzori Mountains are a true source of the Nile River;
- To commemorate The Uganda-Congo Boundary Commission Expedition of 1907-08.

Expedition Overview:

In July and August of 2008, our expeditionary team trekked into the remote Rwenzori Mountains, the fabled 'Mountains of the Moon', which are located in the remote border region between the African countries Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. The glaciers of the Rwenzori's are estimated to contain 80% of the remaining permanent ice on the African continent and are predicted to melt within the next twenty years. Following our attempt to summit Mount Stanley, the highest peak within the range, we followed a water flow down from the glaciers to the Semliki River and on to the southern shore of Lake Albert. We then crossed Lake Albert where we were met by a support vehicle for the overland journey to Murchison Falls National Park. We then travelled to Murchison Falls, where the Victoria Nile River flows down to Lake Albert which in turn drains into the Albert Nile River.



Photos gathered from Internet reserach pages.



Mount Stanley in 1906



Mount Stanley in 1994

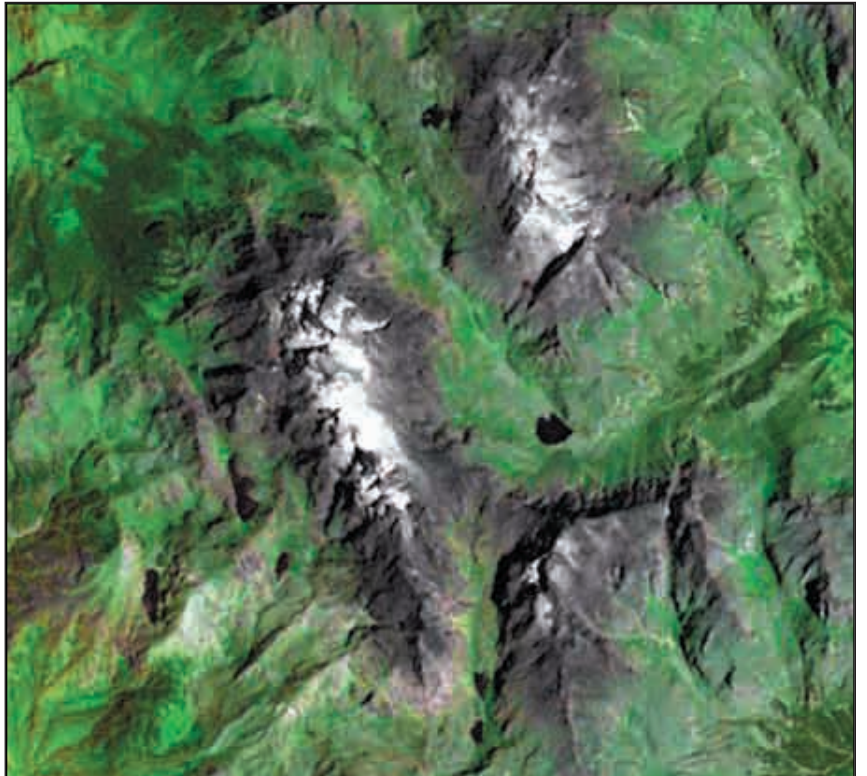


Mount Stanley in 2006



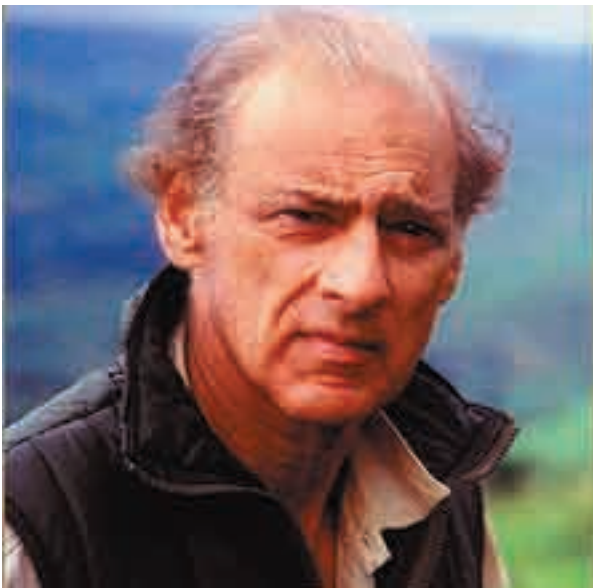
The Glaciers on the Rwenzori Mountains
in 1987...

...and then again in 2005





The idea for the journey was derived from a theory of Sir Christopher Ondaatje. He wrote in an online article in February, 2007, which was based on his travels in 1996 and his written account in the book 'Journey to the Source of the Nile', "...while on the west side of the Ruwenzori range the Butawu, the Lunsilubi, the Rualoni, and the Lamyra rivers flow into the Semliki River. If (explorer) Samuel Baker had continued all the way around to the south end of Lake Albert and found the river, he might well have argued that the Semliki was the source of the Nile...". Sir Christopher Ondaatje was referring to Samuel Baker's first expedition to Central Africa in 1861, "to discover the sources of the river Nile, with the hope of meeting the East African expedition under Captains Speke and Grant somewhere about the Victoria Lake."

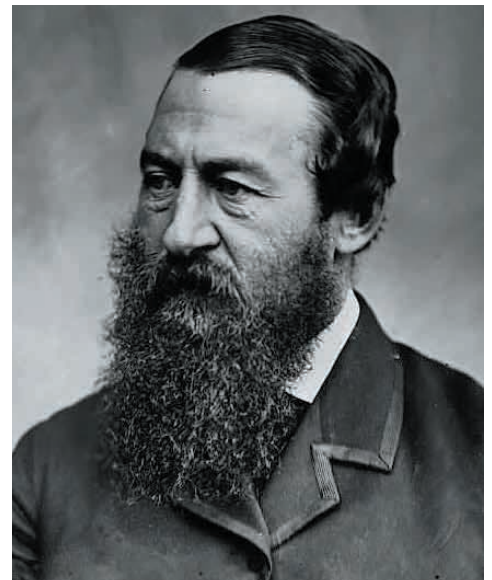


Sir Christopher Ondaatje [ondaatje.com]

After a year spent on the Sudan-Abyssinian border, during which time Baker learned Arabic, explored the Atbara river and other Nile tributaries, and proved that the Nile sediment came from Abyssinia, he arrived at Khartoum, leaving that city in December 1862 to follow up the course of the White Nile. Two months later at Gondokoro he met explorers John Hanning Speke and James Augustus Grant, who, after discovering what they believed to be the source of the Nile, were following the river to Egypt. Their success made Baker fear that there was nothing left for his own expedition to accomplish. However the two explorers gave him information which enabled him, after separating from them, to achieve the discovery of Albert Nyanza (Lake Albert).

Baker first sighted Lake Albert on March 14, 1864. After some time spent in the exploration of the lake, Baker determined that the Nile River flowed through the Albert Nyanza, Lake Albert.

Sir Christopher Ondaatje theorized that if Baker had continued south around Lake Albert he might have speculated that instead of Lake Victoria being the source of the Nile, in actuality it was the Semliki River being fed by numerous water flows down from the glaciers within the



Sir Samuel
White Baker



It was the contention of The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition that Lake Victoria is obviously a rain water reservoir, as Sir Christopher Ondaatje alludes to in his book. Though Lake Victoria contributes significantly to the White Nile River, there are other sources to the Nile. We believe that the obvious highest source of the water flowing eventually into the Nile is a truer source, that being the glaciers of the Rwenzoris. We feel that the most distant sources most recently traced to Rwanda do not truly represent the truest source of the River Nile. By following and documenting the actual maze of tributaries from the Rwenzori glaciers by our team as well as future expeditions, such theories will eventually confirm the true source of the Nile. Other journeys by our team in the years ahead from the Burundi Highlands and the Katanga province in DRC Congo will add to the advancement of our theories.

The arduous journey of The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition led us to trek up to Mount Stanley. The mountain is comprised of nine peaks, the highest being the summit of Margherita at 5,109 meters/16,763 feet, the third highest on the African continent. We were not consumed as most alpine expeditions to stand upon a summit for a photo opportunity, for our collective goal was to follow the water to Lake Albert and into the River Nile.

Therefore we trekked from the glacier region down to the Lamyia/Lamia River. The river's origin lies in the region of Mount Gessi. The Lamyia/Lamia River is the actual geographic border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda as defined by The Uganda-Congo Boundary Commission Expedition of 1907-08. The DRC-Congo side of the border is currently controlled by rebels fighting the government forces from Kinshasa and United Nations Peace Keeping Forces. The Ugandan side of the border is currently controlled by the Ugandan Defense Forces and by the Uganda Wildlife Authority. Once we reached the Semliki River which is a continuation of the actual



The park was named by Samuel Baker for Roderick Murchison, one of the founders of The Royal Geographical Society and its President in 1843-1845, 1851-1853, 1856-1859 and 1862-1871.

Our team has been credited by The Ugandan Wildlife Authority for establishing a new route that is supported by geographical GPS coordinates gathered by a park official expeditionary team member during The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition. As an Explorers Club flag expedition, we feel our achievements greatly enhanced the image of our club within the global community of exploration.

Sir Roderick Murchison, the noted Scottish geologist



Expedition Conclusions

Why did we select the particular location and activities?

Following Sir Christopher Ondaatje's theory of 'what if' Samuel Baker had ventured to the southern shoreline of Lake Albert required that we travel to this specific region.

What were our expectations?

To be challenged as an expeditionary team both physically and mentally.

What did we hope would occur?

That we would successfully achieve our objectives and return safely to our family and friends.

Noted Primates We Encountered Along The Route:

Each other as well as the Bakonzo tribes men on the team and the inhabitants of the small villages and towns in the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains in western Uganda and across Uganda.

Noted Geographical Locations We Encountered Along The Route:

- The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition is accredited by the Ugandan Wildlife Authority for establishing a new route in the north end of The Rwenzori National Park;
- The glacier on Mount Stanley at an elevation of over 5,000 meters;
- The remote Lamyia/Lamia River that is currently the respected border between the country of Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- The point where the Semliki River flows into Lake Albert;
- The point where Murchison Falls flows down from the Victoria Nile River:





Top and bottom photos by Thomas from Germany.



The Environmental conditions

If the climate change and global warming environmental conditions continue unchecked, the glaciers within the Rwenzori Mountains are predicted to disappear within the next twenty years. This is well documented by Dr. Richard Taylor's study in 2003 and final report in 2007 [www2.geog.ucl.ac.uk/~rtaylor/rwenzori.htm]. However, based upon the conditions we encountered during our expedition, the amount of moisture created within the unique Rwenzori ecosystem we feel will insure continued useable water supplies for the indigenous people. Our assumption is based upon the ample water flows we witnessed down through the network of rivers and streams via the eastern valleys of the range and the bogs and lakes throughout the alpine region. It is our belief that the unique Rwenzori ecosystem will insure that the indigenous people will have adequate water for their continued survival. This however should not diminish the importance of putting into effect the proper checks and balances to protect the region from the effects of climate change. With the advent of a new environmentally conscious United States President that will embrace working with the current and future Ugandan and Democratic Republic of the Congo governments, we feel that progress can be achieved much sooner than later.

The Cultural Conditions

The Bakonzo indigenous people that live in the foothills and valleys of the high peaks of the Rwenzoris we believe will be affected by the loss of the glaciers since their cultural identity to arguably is tied to the snow capped peaks. The issue of deforestation has and will continue to have an impact upon the Bakonzo if the current trends of climate change/global warming are not drastically reversed.





What Happened When We Took The Time To Go Looking?

The memorable moments of an expedition are countless, for the opportunity for an explorer and the team to venture into often less trodden spaces of our planet is indeed an honour in and of itself. It is often hard to explain to the indigenous people that you encounter while travelling into such remote and often inhospitable regions the motif. This was especially true along the 'no man's land' that defines the region along the Ugandan-DRC Congo border where war, famine and disease have ravaged the area for decades. Though we ventured into the subject area not as cultural invaders but as a team seeking knowledge, all the same we were offlanders looking for answers that we hope might impact the future of the locales as well as our own. In a land where most live off less than a dollar a day, we hope that our research will benefit them first and foremost.



The emotional roller coaster of The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition ranged from being told upon departure at the airport in Vienna, Austria, that our gear did not meet certain requirements and would not be allowed on board to arriving into Entebbe Airport at 3am in the morning to be met by our support vehicles with the information that they were without sufficient fuel to reach Kampala some thirty miles away.





The Best Moments

Personally for me the most memorable moment, as we dropped down through the Bamboo forests that lace the Rwenzori range after so many days in the bush without any contact to other humans, was the moment when we began hearing drums in the distance. We then knew we were slowly being reeled back into the forces of civilization.

On the final morning when we awoke at our last camp, I realized the porters were changing into their home clothes from their bush clothes. It was a subtle announcement that we were returning to the lives we had left at the trail head.

As we finally found our way out of the bush towards the village where we hoped to find transport to a town estimated by our Ugandan Logistics Officer to be two hours away, I reflected as to how hard it had been trekking eight to ten hours per day. I thought about having struggled through the lower range going up and then coming down through the Bamboo forest where we had to literally cut our way through the thick, a foot at a time. And now as we descended through the clouds, we were collectively so taken back by the sounds of distant drums that pulled our team down from the mist after our challenge 'into the Mountains of the Moon'.





Expedition Techniques

When did you begin planning the expedition?

I began vigorously planning the expedition in March 2007, fifteen months prior to our arrival to the staging area in Uganda.

Were any special permits required?

The Ugandan Wildlife Authority, the Rwenzori National Park and the Ugandan Defence Force (military) were all involved in reviewing our request. An initial request was flatly denied due to the insecurities within the region, i.e., Congolese rebel activity, mine fields that laced both sides of sections of the proposed route. We provided a letter of support and introduction from Explorers Club President Dan Bennett that gave credence and legitimacy to our objectives. However not until I personally met two days prior to the scheduled start of the expedition in-country with Mr. Nelson Guma, Senior Warden for The Rwenzori National Park, were we granted the required permits to enter the northern region of the park.

How was the day-to-day work organized?

Our expeditionary team was split into four groups.

- The advance team that cut a trail
- The porter team that carried gear from camp to camp and insured fresh water for the camps
- The research team that gathered temperature readings, GPS reference points and photographic content
- The logistical support team coordinated vehicular transport between the key non-bush locales



**To what extent did you have helpers?**

We had as outlined several support teams that were imperative for the success of the expedition. The key was to have trails bushwhacked prior to the teams advance and to insure that food re-supplies met up with the team. Proper armed security was also required to maintain a comfort level for the team members, for we were at minimum four days walk from the closest road to evacuate in case of an emergency.

Were there techniques that worked exceptionally well for our team?

Delegation of duties, i.e., insuring that the trail cutting team was always one day ahead of the main expeditionary team, insuring that the daily advance base camp team was in place with a lit fire with hot tea upon arrival of the main expeditionary team, insuring that the members of the team were confident of the expeditions goals and purpose and that said objectives were realistic.

What would our team do differently the next time?

Allocate more time for the in-country expedition and add an additional trail cutting team.

Do you have any tips for others doing similar work?

When attempting an expedition in the remote border region between the African countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, be prepared for plans to deviate. For it is a difficult region to navigate, very few persons are familiar with the remote areas including the indigenous people. Security is first and foremost to insure that a team can get in and out safely. Allocate as much time as possible. Lastly, be prepared for things to go wrong.

Expedition Results**What are the most interesting things we learned?**

That we could challenge ourselves to the fullest and allow the indigenous members of the team to venture into areas that even they had never ventured into.

What will you do with the information you learned or with the discoveries made?

I have been conducting museum and university lectures with slide show presentations, writing articles and writing a manuscript detailing the expedition. I speak to any one interested hearing about the expedition.

What are the next steps?

Completing a manuscript detailing the expedition and pitching it to publishers.

Attachment I - Maps



Attachment I - Maps



Attachment II - Expedition Team



Alfred Isebabulya
Expedition Trail Cutter



Cornelius Thahimba
Expedition Cook



Elisha Muhongya
Expedition Porter



Erineo Tsomwa
Expedition Porter



Gidion Isebani
Lead Porter & Navigation Officer



Gidion Isembwa
Expedition Porter



Joseph Muhindo - Head of
Security & GPS Documentation



Milton Tumusabe
Expedition Rear Security



Peter Bwambale
Lead Guide



Sikahwa Tragen
Expedition Porter



Stephen Kindenga
Expedition Porter



Tito Sunday
Expedition Porter

Attachment II - Expedition Team



Augustine Muhindo
Expedition Logistics
Uganda



Elisha Buluku
Expedition Communications
Uganda



Regina Fisher
Expedition Communications &
Logistics, Austria



Trying to find the route after we got lost on the way to the Lamya River required a team effort.

Attachment II - Expedition Team



The Expedition Team at trail head (above) and trail's end (below).



Attachment II - Expedition Team

At trails end, in appreciation for thier support, Julian Monroe Fisher presented a Eureka tent to the expeditions guide Peter Bwambale, a Eaton hand crank radio that provided the team with BBC radio reports in the bush to the expedition's cook Mr. Cornelius Thahimba and a Sterling Rope to the Ugandan



Attachment II - Expedition Team



The expeditionary team would like to thank Ms.Dianne Bulman,
Ms. Christa Kaufman, the Ugandan Wildlife Authority,
the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services, the Ugandan Defense Force, Mr. Tom Stacey,
Mr. Augustine Muhindo, Mr. Elisha Buluku, Ms. Eunice Mahoro, Mr. Nelson Guma, our guides,
porters, security guards, the people of Uganda, and equipment suppliers for their support of
The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition.

“Dream big and dare to fail”
Colonel Norman Vaughan