



FLAG EXPEDITION REPORT

Flag Number 89

Journey To Katanga – An Expedition Into The Past The 2009 Congo Expedition To Katanga

Submitted by
Julian Monroe Fisher FI00, FRGS

Submission Date - November 8, 2009

Introduction

I purchased the book 'The Scramble For Africa' by Thomas Pakenham in the Spring of 2007 as I cashed in my remaining local currency in the airport in Windhoek, Namibia. It was the tail end of The 2007 Colorado African Expedition which I also had the honour of carrying Flag 89. Pakenham's book re-introduced me to the rich diabolical history of the colonization of the African continent and specifically The 1891-92 Stairs Expedition to Katanga. My research eventually led me to the royal family of Katanga and to Prince Patrick Munongo who as of this writing still lives in the United States. After thoroughly researching the Stairs expedition and the late Katangan King Msiri over the following year, in the Summer of 2008 I finally received an answer to the countless e-mails I had sent out to Katangan Prince Patrick Munongo. A year later, the project entitled, 'Journey To Katanga - The 2009 Congo Expedition to Katanga', set off from the European country of Austria for DR Congo.

Background

'The 1891-92 Stairs Expedition to Katanga' was a defining moment for the indigenous people on the African continent. Hired and charged by Belgium King Leopold II with the task of acquiring the vast lands of Katanga from King Msiri, Captain Stairs and his expedition were with the lack of any other term, 'ruthless' in executing their approach of achieving the stated goals for The Congo Free State. Equivalent to modern day mercenaries, in light of the reality that no member of the expedition were affiliated with any government, the team travelled inland from the Indian Ocean west across modern day Tanzania and Lake Tanganyika with one goal in mind: acquire at any cost, the reportedly mineral rich province of Katanga for King Leopold's 'Congo Free State'. And sad as it may sound, that really is what the Stairs expedition amounted to, hired killers charged with one task, take Katanga at all cost. In the end the price being, whether you believe the written history of the events from the explorers or the written and living oral history of the Garanganze people Katanga, in the end the life of King Msiri and millions of Africans were sacrificed. And at what cost one might ask?

Indeed the ultimate ramifications of the Stairs expedition continues to be felt by the indigenous Africans some one hundred and seventeen years after Captain William Grant Stairs died within seeing distance of the ship that had arrived on the Indian Ocean Coast of today's Mozambique to return the young Canadian 'British commissioned officer' to what could have been a full post expeditionary life. A life of lectures promoting reflective books detailing his previous expeditions as he marketed his talents for future expeditions. As a young man with credentials that placed him as a ranking officer with Henry Morton Stanley's Emin Pasha Relief Expedition that allowed him to be the first European to hike into the famed 'mountains of the Moon', the Rwenzori Mountains where I led our team during The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition. It should be noted that Captain Stairs was noted during the Emin Pasha Expedition as being the said first European to climb into to Rwenzoris claiming the glaciers in the range were a source of the River Nile; our team during The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition were credited by The Ugandan Wildlife Authority as being the first expedition to follow the water flows down from the Rwenzori glaciers to the Sen'mliki River and on to Lake Albert proving Samuel Baker's theory that the Rwenzori glaciers are indeed, a true source of the Nile River. In the end, what happened during 'the Stairs Expedition to Katanga' remains one of the enduring unresolved mysteries of the 19th century 'Victorian Age of Exploration'. For the true last remaining great mysteries from the Victorian Age of 19th Century exploration surrounds what happened to the decapitated head of Katangan King Msiri .

'Journey To Katanga – An Expedition To The Past', are working with the Garanganze people under global mandate with the Kingdom of Katanga to finally put the pieces together to solve the puzzle. We are together attempting to compare the accepted account of the events as explained in the book by Dr. Joseph Moloney entitled 'With Stairs To Katanga' to the recently collected audio and visual history collected during the Summer of 2009.

History

In 1891, British Captain William Grant Stairs, a Canadian from the town of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and a former member of Sir Henry Morton Stanley's famed 'Emin Pasha Relief Expedition', was recommended by Stanley to Belgium King Leopold II to be, "commissioned by the Katanga Company". Referred historically as, 'The 1891-92 Stairs Expedition to Katanga', the actions and outcome of Stairs and his expeditionary team would forever change the landscape of the African continent. Literally until this day, life in the Congo has never been the same.

As history matters, King Leopold II of Belgium during what is referred to as 'the great scramble for Africa', (see footnote) was desperate to get a financial foothold on the continent. Germany, the United Kingdom and France had acquired their colonial holdings. Belgium, in King Leopold's eyes, was losing out on what he felt would ultimately define the future wealth of Europe for the next century and beyond.

Reports received by King Leopold from Stanley as well as other previously hired expeditions and missionaries proclaimed that the region known as Katanga was rich with natural resources. King Leopold, in order to secure his foothold within Katanga and to consolidate the Congo Free State which evolved from the charter agreed upon during the Berlin Conference, hired young 27 year old Captain Stairs to lead a handful of men to force Leopold's 'will' upon the kingdom of Katanga and her leader, King Msiri.

Financed for what historians have referred to as a mercenary mission, the Stairs expeditionary team traveled from Europe to the island of Zanzibar. By comparative standards for the era, the Stairs expedition to Katanga was quite lean in man power, embodying the team with less than a handful of Europeans.

They were:

- Captain William G. Stairs - Commander of the expedition
- Omer Bodson – A Belgian soldier & second in command
- The Marquis Christian de Bonchamps - A French aristocrat & third in command
- Thomas Robinson - A former Grenadier Guardsman
- Joseph Augustus Moloney - The expeditions doctor from Ireland

That handful of western expeditionary members were supported by a hired contingency of 336 African porters and armed Arab askaris. They walked the distance as expeditions of the day were charged with their porters and armed guards knowledgeable with the Arab slave traders and their routes. Painstakingly they marched days upon end.

Collectively, the expedition trekked across the width of what is modern day Tanzania, then traversed the great lake of Africa, Lake Tanganyika. Upon reaching the western shoreline, they fought through endless swamps and waist deep bogs and reptile infested rivers. 'The Stairs Expedition to Katanga' fought disease and hardship and absolutely the most inhospitable terrain in their quest to reach the then capital of King Msiri's kingdom, Bunkeya.

Eventually Stairs and his expedition arrived with an ultimatum for King Msiri. That being to hoist the flag of 'The Congo Free State' surrendering his kingdom and the rights of the Garanganze people to succumb to the sovereignty of a foreign power. After several days of failed negotiations aimed at persuading King Msiri to concede the lands of his kingdom that had been reduced to a mere fourteen square miles, a frustrated Stairs sent Omer Bodson, The Marquis de Bonchamps and thirty askaris to arrest King Msiri.

When Bodson finally located King Msiri who had sought refuge with one of his many wives in the nearby village of Mune-ma, Bodson attempted to arrest King Msiri. Rightfully defiant, King Msiri refused and raised the sword that the "great chief" Captain Stairs had given him in what Stairs considered to be a veil offering of good will.

Upon King Msiri's adamant refusal to allow himself to be arrested or to condone the raising of the flag of The Congo Free State or to concede the lands of his kingdom just as he had refused previous expeditions and missions sent by King Leopold, Omer Bodson shot King Msiri twice at point blank range, killing King Msiri instantly.

This is the point where the details of the event get quite sketchy. Documents our research have uncovered reflect that one of the askaris on the assault team that day, decapitated the head from the torso of King Msiri.

The historical facts of the events of December 20, 1891, are clouded by the limited written accounts of the events of the Stairs Expedition. The expedition's doctor, Dr. Joseph A. Moloney, is the only person to have written a narrative of the account. In his book 'With Stairs To Katanga', he relies on word of mouth about the events from the moment when Ohmer Bodson shot King Msiri but he does not mention the decapitation.

The Marquis de Bonchamps later mentioned the decapitation to a French journal. In an article published in Paris in 1892, de Bonchamps revealed that having carried Msiri's body back to their camp, the expedition cut off his head and hoisted it on a pole as a "barbaric lesson" to the Garanganze.

Dan Crawford, a missionary at the mission station of the Plymouth Brethren at Bunkeya wrote about the decapitation in his autobiography twenty years later.

Bodson died later of gunshot wounds he received from the contingency of guards present to protect King Msiri so there is currently no knowledge of a written account by him. The only other known account is Captain Stairs' personal diaries which also mention very little about the events surrounding the death of King Msiri and nothing regarding the decapitation.

The Garanganze people acknowledge that when the body of Msiri was returned there was no head. However, their oral history that has been passed down for generations has also clouded the events in traditional beliefs. For in the traditional belief systems of the Garanganze people, as with other Central and Southern African cultures, illness and disease are not caused by pathogens but by magic and supernatural forces. In their belief system as to what happened to the head of King Msiri, a rumor took hold that Stairs had kept Msiri's head and it cursed and killed all who carried it. The Mwami Mwenda chieftainships' history says that the expedition fled with Msiri's head intending to present it to Leopold, but "Mukanda-Bantu and his men caught and killed all the Belgians" and the head was buried "under a hill of stones" in what is now Zambia.

The problem with this position, logic and the understanding of African superstition dictates, that if a head was severed from a body, if located, the head would be returned to the place where the body was buried. Additionally, the Garanganze account mentions "Mukanda-Bantu and his men caught and killed all the Belgians" when in fact we know that Stairs, Bonchamps and Moloney made it to the coast. There Stairs died of malaria, Moloney and Bonchamps returned to Europe.

One account reflects the act of decapitation cursed and killed everyone who carried it and eventually, this included Stairs himself, who died of malaria six months later on the return

Several accounts reflect that the head made it to the coast with Stairs in "a tin of kerosene". Having the head or other body parts from an enemy as a trophy from battle was a rare but not uncommon practice by 19th century British soldiers. Quoting 'Skulls and Scientific Collecting in the Victorian Military: Keeping the Enemy Dead in British Frontier Warfare', "Many nineteenth-century British soldiers serving in the colonies were enthusiastic collectors. Sometimes, after successful military actions, they took weapons and other items from the enemy dead as battle trophies, perhaps from people whom they had personally killed. A popular souvenir of this sort among soldiers in the Eighth Frontier War (1851–1853) against the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape were the ivory amulets worn by Xhosa men [...]. The acquisitiveness of soldiers sometimes extended to the taking of enemy body parts [...]. Other body parts, particularly skulls, were also taken as souvenirs [...]. In 1891 the Belgians sent an expedition to take control of the Katanga region of Congo for King Leopold, under the leadership of a Canadian explorer and soldier, Captain Stairs. One of Stairs' officers killed the local king, Msiri, took his head back to camp and announced: "I have killed a tiger! Vive le roi!" The expedition returned to the coast the following year, bringing the king's skull with them in a kerosene tin, as if it was the trophy of a hunting expedition."

In 1998 Congolese artist Tshibumba Kanda Matulu said: “In all truth, we don’t know where this head went. Is it in Europe, in some museum, in the house of Leopold II, or with whom? Up to this day, we don’t know.”

Now with the help of the current King and Prince of Katanga who are direct blood relatives of King Msiri, our expedition hopes to prove conclusively the whereabouts of the skull of King Msiri.

The Route of The 2009 Congo Expedition To Katanga

I departed Vienna, Austria, on June 23, 2009. By air I travelled from Vienna to Amsterdam, Holland, then on to Nairobi, Kenya, then on to Lubumbashi, DR Congo. I was met at the Lubumbashi airport by team member Katanga Prince Eric Munongo. After obtaining our supplies, our team travelled by 4 x 4 some three hundred kilometres north along dirt tracks to the remote Congolese village of Bunkeya, the de-facto capital of the Kingdom of Katanga and the home to the Garangaze people.

Dates of Expedition

The 2009 Congo Expedition To Katanga spans six research phases from November 2008 through the end of 2010.

Phase One – November 2008 - January 2009

Planning sessions to finalize all issues of logistics, finance and timeline for the project (Online video conferences)

Phase Two - November 2008 - end of February 2010

Worldwide research in available books, papers, articles, original diaries as well as on site in secondary geographic regions, e.g., DRC-Congo, Zambia, Mozambique, Belgium, Ireland, France, Switzerland and The United Kingdom.

Phase Three - June 23 - August 8, 2009,

this is the phase during which I carried the Explorers Club flag

Onsite research in the Katanga kingdom. The team assembled in Lubumbashi, DRC Congo, in late June 2009. Upon arrival into Lubumbashi, I was met by a host delegation sent by the King of Katanga, his highness King Mwami. We then travel overland to the village of Bunyeke, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Katanga. The arrival there occurred in conjunction with the twelfth anniversary of the rule of King Mwami, a very festive time for the indigenous Garanganze people. From the base in the remote village of Bunyeke, we explored all historically significant locations that the Stairs Expedition to Katanga camped in 1891. We visited the exact location where Omer Bodson, a member of the Stairs Expedition, shot and killed Katangan King Msiri on December 20, 1891.

Phase Four – July 2010

Return to Katanga for an archaeological dig.

Phase Five – December 2010

Return for the annual ceremonies re-enacting the events of December 1891

Footnote

„The Scramble for Africa” also known as the Race for Africa, was the proliferation of conflicting European claims to African territory during the New Imperialism period, between the 1880s and the First World War in 1914. The last 20 years of the nineteenth century saw the transition from ‘informal imperialism’ of control through military influence and economic dominance to that of direct rule. Attempts to mediate imperial competition, such as the Berlin Conference (1884 - 1885) between Britain, France and Germany, failed to establish definitively the competing powers’ claims.” That scramble for Africa resulted in the deaths of an estimated ten million indigenous people. The Katanga province of what is today the Democratic Republic of Congo remains the most lucratively valuable geographical region of the Congo, today supplying precious metals including those that fuel our current technological age that allows the world to continue to exploit the impoverished to expend their lives under horrific conditions deep below the Earth’s service in deplorable working conditions void of safety measures much less clean breathable air. In the end they are forced to crawl out of an airless

Phase Six - before the end of 2010

If the skull of King Msiri is located, DNA testing must be conducted. Samples would be taken from King Mwami and/or Prince Patrick Kalenga Munongo, direct blood descendents of King Msiri.

Expedition Team

Julian Monroe Fisher FI'00 FRGS - Initiator & Expedition Leader

Mwami Mwenda-Bantu Munongo Godefroid Mwami, the King of Katanga – DRC-Congo Local Host

Prince Patrick Kalenga Munongo - Co-Expedition Leader

Prince Eric Munongo - Katanga Logistics

Prince Kalasa-Mukanda-Bantu-Jean-Claude – Bunkeye Logistics Officer

John Mukachung-Yav-Kand-Bal, aka, John Daddy - Translator & In-country Communications Officer

Regina Fisher - Expedition Logistics & Communications Officer

Expedition Sponsors and Funding

The expedition was financially self funded with additional support from private benefactors to include the King of Katanga.

The Goals & Objectives of the Expedition

- To determine from the perspective of the Garanganze people the actual events of what occurred during The Stairs Expedition to Katanga, specifically the events that led to the death of Katangan King Msiri on December 20, 1891, and how their interpretation differs from the official account written by Dr. Joseph Moloney in his book 'With Stairs To Katanga';
- To locate the current location of the skull of King Msiri, the former King of Katanga;
- To gather audio and visual Ethnographical knowledge of the Garanganze people, their culture and their intricate belief system;
- To gather audio and visual Ethnographical knowledge of the annual coronation ceremony of a modern day reigning African king.

Expedition Conclusions

We met three of our four stated objectives and we are continuing forward on the remaining fourth objective, our global search for the skull of King Msiri. We have been granted a formal mandate on behalf of Sa Majeste' Mwenda-Bantu Munongo Godefroid Mwami des Bayeke et du Garanganze, the King of Katanga. At this time we are not at liberty to divulge our complete findings since this flag report might be made public via the Internet. We will be happy to send a confidential report on our findings to the flag committee at the end of the project in early 2011.

Museums We Have formally Visited and/or Contacted During Our Research

-Royal Museum for Central Africa

-McCord Museum of Canadian History

-Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences

-Royal Military College of Canada

-Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire militaire- Royal Military Museum

-The Royal Geographical Society(with the Institute of British Geographers)

Why did we selected the particular location and activities?

It was obviously apparent from the beginning of our research that we had to be in-country in the village of Bunkeya to get a true feeling of what local history has to reflect as to the events that unfolded in the Fall/Winter of 1891 and the Winter of 1892 while the Stairs Expedition was encamped in Katanga.

What were our expectations?

Gathering information about the events in 1891 from the perspective of the Garanganze people.

What did we hope would occur?

That we discover new information that would help locate the skull of King Msiri or information that contradicts certain options.

The Expedition Experience

Noted Primates We Encountered Along The Route

For the most part this was a wildlife void expedition. We had encounters with fellow Mammals, for we found them living in squalid roadside camps in makeshift shanty huts constructed of brush weeds and tattered pieces of UN tarps covered with red dust front the endless parade of mining trucks that ran the gauntlets from Lubumbashi to the mines of Katanga. This was the conditions people were living along the paved tarmac less than a handful of miles from the first stoplights in Lubumbashi.

Noted Geographical Locations We Encountered Along The Route

The lack of noted geographical locations define one of the key aspects of the expedition. We had hoped, we had prepared, to locate and examine with ground penetrating radar the 'hill of stones'. This was based upon Garanganze folklore to be where the skull of King Msiri had been buried in northern Zambia after tribesmen had chased down the remaining 'Europeans'. Our expedition proved through conversations with the current King of Katanga conclusively that the said 'hill of stones' was in fact, just that, folklore. This issue will be examined further at a later date.

The Environmental Conditions

The Katanga province of DR Congo has a distinct dry season from May through August. Our expeditionary team did not witness one cloud nor a drop of rain. We do know that along the road from Lubumbashi to the village Bunkeya, the selling of local charcoal from the forests is a huge commercial enterprise. Tremendous deforestation is taking place in Katanga on a large scale

The Cultural Conditions

The Garanganze people in the remote village of Bunkeya in the province of Katanga live a life off grid and for the most part dependent upon what they carve out of the dirt for themselves and their loved ones.

The Political Conditions

At the time our expedition arrived in-country into the tattered airport known as the 'Lubumbashi International Airport', the Congolese civil war was raging in northern Katanga, primarily in the Kivu lake region around Goma and the Ituri Region along Lake Albert.

What Happened When We Took The Time To Go Looking?

We discovered there was more to DR Congo than what the international media happened to be reporting at the time. Besides the civil war and the mines, the country is rich with culture and wonderful people.

The Best Moments

Seeing the children and the elders that gathered upon our arrival into the village of Bunkeya. Witnessing the arrival of the Mwami into the village of Bunkeya on July 4th, 2009. Seeing my own children again when I returned home.

The Worst Moments of The 2009 Congo Expedition to Katanga

Watching the locals take turns urinating into a bottle to be then poured into the cells of our truck battery to allow us to travel on. Along a road far removed from any semblance of a town with a body shop or even a gas station, our truck fell prey to what the locals could offer.

Expedition Techniques

When did you begin planning the expedition?

In the summer of 2007 when I purchased a copy of Thomas Pakenham's book 'The Scamble For Africa' in the airport in Windhoek, Namibia.

Were any special permits required?

A travel visa was required to be obtained in advance for DR Congo which required a personal invitation from a Congolese as well as an international health card proving vaccination against yellow fever.

How was the day-to-day work organized?

Our base camp up-country in Bunkeya had support from local villagers who provided the team with fresh water for cooking and basic body cleansing. For drinking water we relied on bottled water and purifying water with our Steripen water purifiers that already had proven essential during The 2008 Mount Stanley Expedition. Meals were prepared on butane gas stoves. Security was not an issue whatsoever in light of the fact that we were invited guest of the King of Katanga. At all times when we visited the historical sites in and around the village of Bunkeya we had to be accompanied by a local village elder due to the sensitivity of being an outsider visiting culturally important sites.

To what extent did you have helpers?

We were extended every possible courtesy by the Kingdom of Katanga and the Garanaganze people.

Were there techniques that worked exceptionally well for our team?

Patience was indeed virtue from the very moment we landed at the Lubumbashi airport until we departed.

What would our team do differently the next time?

As always, allocate more time.

Do you have any tips for others doing similar work?

As always, the key to every expedition is to not take anything for granted, to listen and to stay away from pre-assumptions. If you think you know what you will find when you go looking, you are doomed to miss the best part.

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

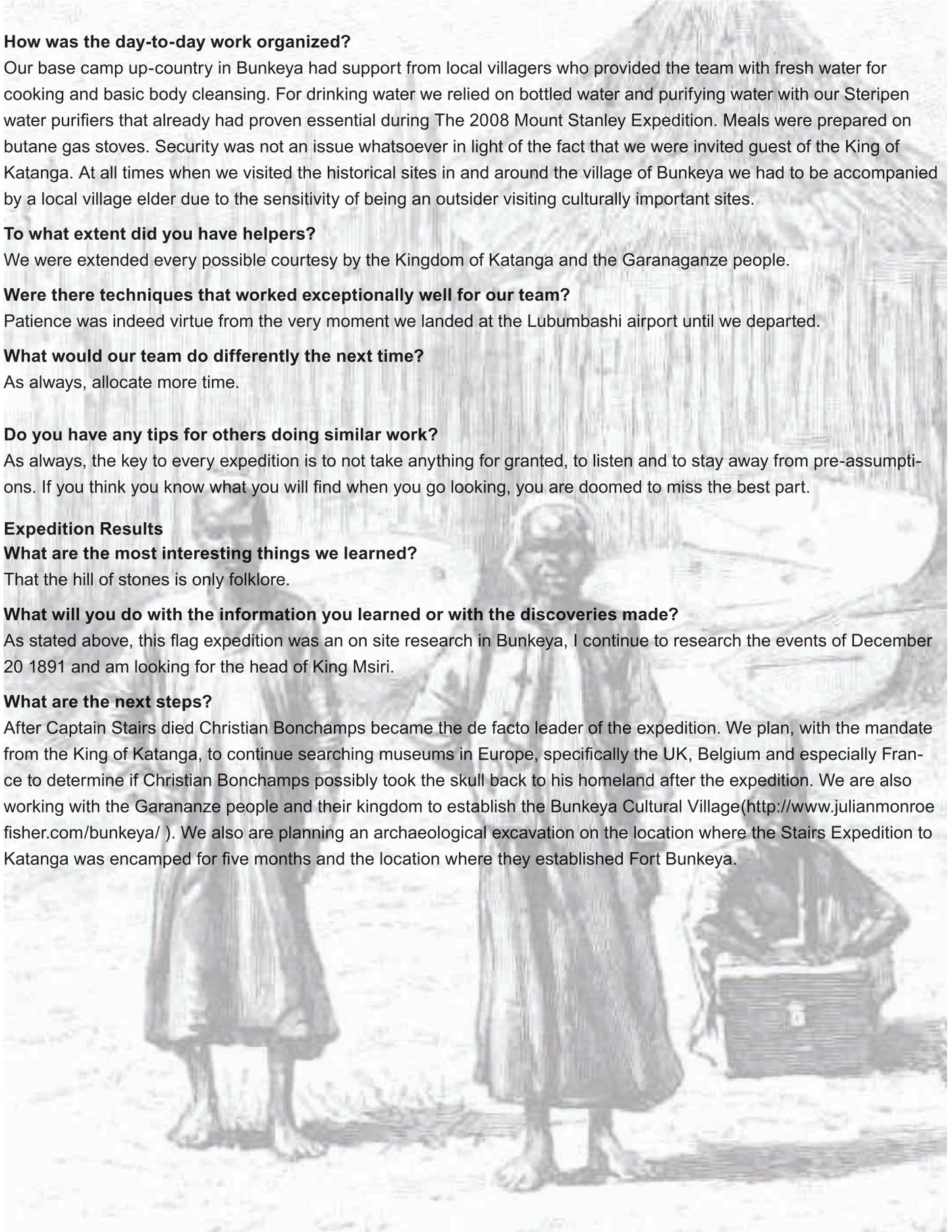
That the hill of stones is only folklore.

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

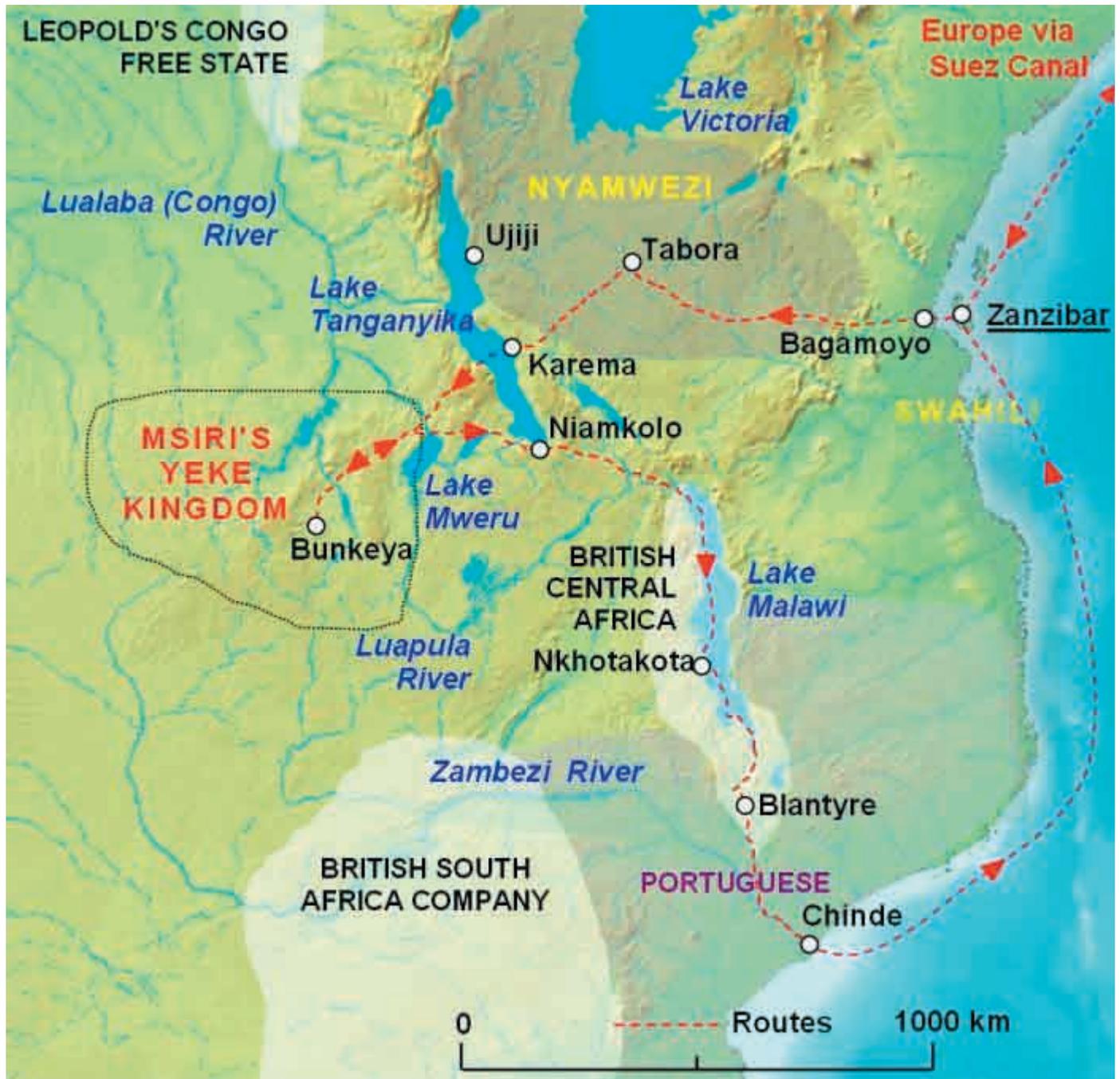
As stated above, this flag expedition was an on site research in Bunkeya, I continue to research the events of December 20 1891 and am looking for the head of King Msiri.

What are the next steps?

After Captain Stairs died Christian Bonchamps became the de facto leader of the expedition. We plan, with the mandate from the King of Katanga, to continue searching museums in Europe, specifically the UK, Belgium and especially France to determine if Christian Bonchamps possibly took the skull back to his homeland after the expedition. We are also working with the Garanaganze people and their kingdom to establish the Bunkeya Cultural Village(<http://www.julianmonroe-fisher.com/bunkeya/>). We also are planning an archaeological excavation on the location where the Stairs Expedition to Katanga was encamped for five months and the location where they established Fort Bunkeya.



Map of the 1891-92 Stairs Expedition to Katanga



The members of the 1891-92 Stairs Expedition to Katanga



Captain William G. Stairs



The Marquis Christian de Bonchamps

Joseph Augustus Moloney



Omer Bodson



King Msiri, King Mwami and historical places in Bunkeya

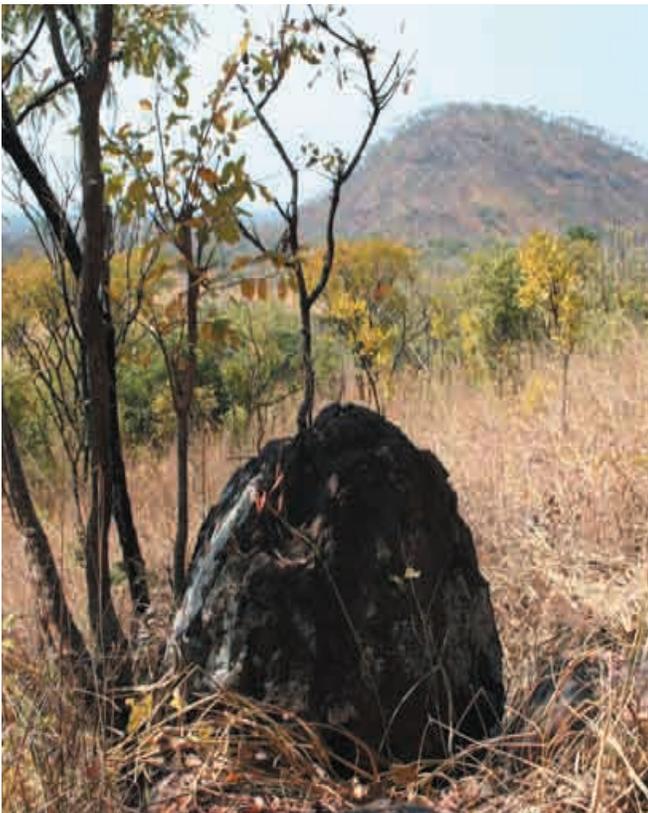


King Msiri (ca. 1830 - 1891)



King Mwami Mwenda-Bantu Munongo Godefroid
(picture taken 2009)

Place where Stairs planted the Congo Free State flag



Omer Bodson's gravesite in Bunkeya



At the celebrations of the twelfth anniversary of the rule of King Mwami in Bunkeya, 2009

