



# Safari TELEGRAPH

## WELCOME...

The end of another year! We really don't know where the time goes, as it seems just yesterday we were writing to wish you a very happy festive season and best wishes for 2010. Our year here has been far better than anticipated and for that we need to thank all of you who have travelled with us.

Once again, we've travelled extensively (some would say too much) to update our knowledge on Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia and Rwanda, and are planning further trips to Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia and Botswana for 2011. We are also interested to see how things develop in Zimbabwe next year – a destination that many of you will remember fondly. We welcome and introduce Jonny Humphreys, who has many years' experience in selling Africa and has joined our sales team, and will hopefully be announcing our brand new website in early 2011, so we have much to look forward to, and we hope you do to. Have a lovely, safe and rewarding 2011.

## FOCUS ON

### Mpumalanga - land of the Kruger and Dragon Mountains

**F**ollowing the success of our drives around Cape Town, we thought we would expand this feature to cover an area of South Africa which is under explored by most - the escarpment region of Mpumalanga.

Here, the Drakensberg Mountains rise off the Lowveld plains, dominated by the huge Kruger National Park and adjoining private game reserves, to form an impressive barrier to the plateau interior known as the 'highveld'. There is evidence suggesting people lived here as far back as 100 000 years ago, and there was a significant mining empire in the region as many as 46 000 years ago. Ruins of Hindu-style temples and astronomical observatories, rock art of the San people, and Nguni rock carvings point to a rich and colourful past, also giving a mystique to the region which gave rise to the legends of King Solomon's Mines and Queen Sheba.

More recently, the discovery of gold in 1873 on the farm Ponieskrantz resulted in a gold rush of significant proportions and the development of



the village of Pilgrim's Rest, near Graskop. Today, although gold has given way to forestry, this town has been painstakingly preserved as a living museum and is well worth a visit.

Of course, the scenery is stunning too. The escarpment is bisected with numerous rivers and spectacular waterfalls including the Mac Mac, Berlin, Lisbon, Lone Creek and the Elands River falls. View points such as those at The Pinnacle, God's Window, Wonder View and over the Blyde River Canyon (the third largest canyon in the

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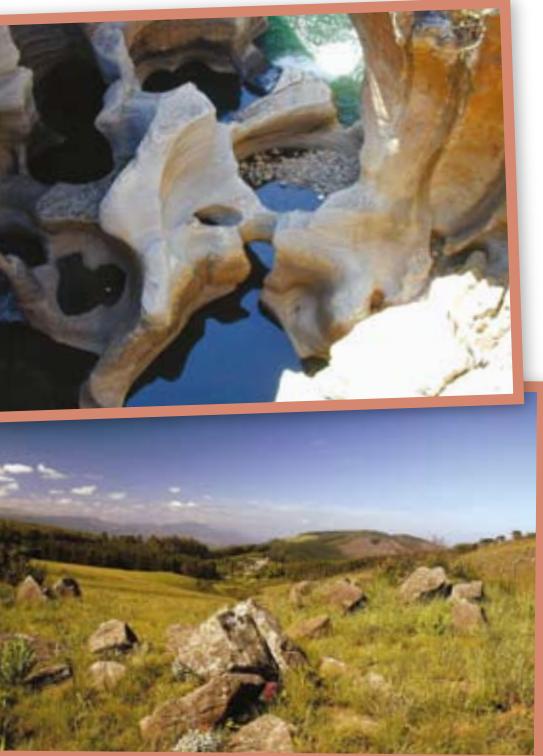
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world) to the Three Rondavels are complemented by the mountain passes of Long Tom, Robber's and Abel Erasmus. The natural water feature of the Bourke's Luck Potholes, and the dolomite Sudwala Caves (oldest known caves in the world), are further examples of some incredible geological formations.

Mpumalanga is also heaven for the adrenalin junky with the Graskop Big Swing, the Skyway Trails (a 1.2kms aerial cable trail), river rafting, quad biking, mountain biking, white water tubing, abseiling and ziplining, paragliding, microlighting, and ballooning all available. Other (more gentle) sporting activities include horse riding and golfing on some internationally-recognised courses.

On the more genteel side, there are some excellent fly fishing rivers, many walking trails, the Lowveld National Botanical Gardens at Nelspruit and some very good bird watching areas to allow you to get the best from this natural paradise. The Elephant Sanctuary near Hazyview, a sister operation to those near Pretoria and Plettenberg Bay, offers the chance to interact with these great beasts and offers a number of excursions including a 20 minute riding option.

And if all that scenic touring or activities were not enough, why not spend an afternoon visiting a number of quality art studios which cover a wide range of subjects including paintings, bronzes, textiles and ceramics. Mpumalanga, the province where the sun rises!



Above top: Bourkes Luck Potholes.

Above bottom: views across the highland plateau.

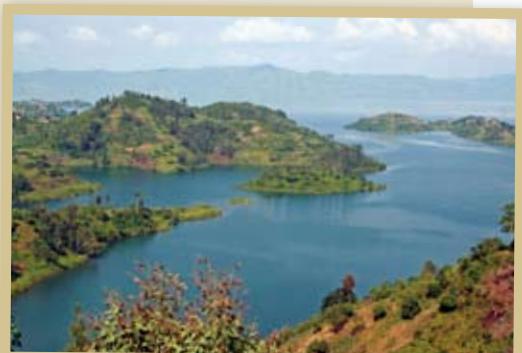
Right top: view over Lake Kivu.

Right: black and white colobus

## Land of a Thousand Hills

Rwanda is predominantly known for two reasons. Firstly, the horrific genocide of 1994 when the Hutu majority attempted to wipe out the Tutsi minority. Thankfully we can report that these days there is no friendlier, more positive and more peaceful country in Africa to visit. Quite unbelievably, the lasting effects of such a negative period are amazingly positive. Secondly, the mountain gorillas of the Virunga Volcanoes, made famous by researcher Dian Fossey and her book 'Gorillas in the Mist'. There is no 'easier' place in Africa to view these fascinating creatures and, with recent statistics showing a 26% increase in gorilla numbers (throughout the Virunga Volcanoes of Rwanda, Congo and Uganda, and Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest), the future of the mountain gorilla, momentarily at least, looks very positive. Many people visit Rwanda purely to spend a few days tracking the mountain gorillas, before heading off on safari elsewhere in Africa. This makes perfect sense if you are looking to combine your gorilla experience with a top quality big game experience, however, Rwanda has other attractions which are well worth considering.

Not only is the country incredibly scenic and culturally fascinating, but in the south-west lies a sleeping giant – Nyungwe Forest. Covering 970 square kms, Nyungwe National Park protects one of the largest tracts of montane rainforest found in East and Southern Africa. Home to a huge diversity of flora, including 200 species of orchid, it forms a continuous forest system with the 370 square kms Kibira National Park in Burundi to the south. The beautiful and little-explored forest is home to 13 species of primate. These range from local specialities such as L'Hoeist's monkey, grey-cheeked mangabey and charismatic Ruwenzori (Angolan) black and white colobus (of which there is the largest group in Africa – over 400 strong), to more



common varieties such as red tailed and blue monkeys. There are also several families of chimpanzee, two of which have been habituated to human presence. The tracking is not as established as some other parts of Africa, and there are no guarantees, but for anyone seeking a truly authentic chimpanzee tracking experience, Nyungwe will suit perfectly.

There are several mammals found in the park, including leopard, side-striped jackal, serval, civet, bushbuck, various duiker, bush pig, giant forest hog and giant forest squirrel. Birding is superb, with around 280 species recorded, including 26 Albertine Rift species (the section of the western rift valley from Lake Albert in the north to Lake Tanganyika in the south). Great Blue turaco, Ruwenzori turaco, Paradise fly-catcher, white-headed wood-hoopoe, mountain buzzard and blue-headed sunbird are just some of the local specialities.

Until recently, accommodation options around Nyungwe were extremely limited and poor quality, severely limiting the appeal of including it within an itinerary. A newly opened 5 star luxury lodge and a soon-to-open 4 star lodge will hopefully open up tourism to this wonderfully remote and enchanting part of Africa – a necessary process in order for the park to fulfil its potential. Nyungwe is by no means a polished destination at present but then, in many ways, that's part of the appeal. The next few years will be the time to visit!





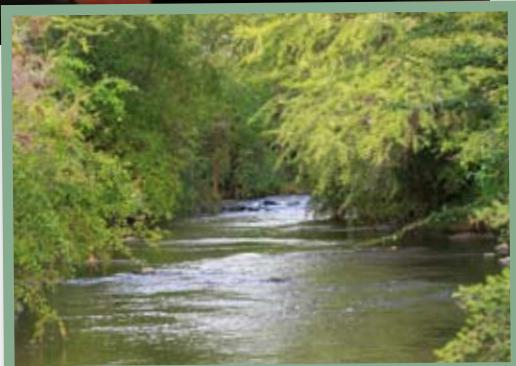
## OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

# KENYA'S MERU NATIONAL PARK

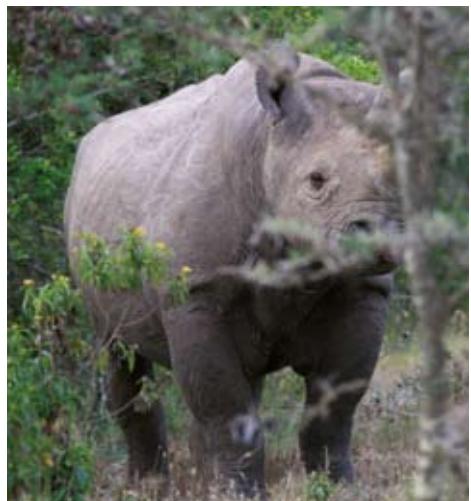
Lying to the north-east of Mount Kenya, Meru National Park has for much of the last 30 years been ignored by the masses who have flocked to Kenya to view the amazing wildlife. The original home of Joy and George Adamson, and Elsa the lioness, the area was devastated by poaching in the 1980s which resulted in tourism to the park all but disappearing for 15 years. Perhaps this was its saving grace when one compares it to the mass tourism which has now infected the (relatively) nearby Samburu Game Reserve. Even today, when a good tarmac road leads directly to the main gate, there are only two lodges and two tented camps to cater for the adventurous few who step into this vast wilderness area. The park, together with the adjacent reserves of Bisanadi, Mwingi and Rahole, and Kora National Park, covers a huge area, in excess of 3000 sq.kms.

Although rainfall is modest, the park is

blessed with nine permanent water courses emanating from the Mount Kenya highlands and the Nyambene Hills which lie on its western boundary. It is these water courses which provide such diversity of habitat, adding palm fringed lagoons and dense riverine forest to the semi arid thorn-veld, mixed woodland and open grassland. Animals represented include those species found only in northern Kenya, the reticulated giraffe, Grevy's zebra and gerenuk, as well as healthy populations of oryx, elephant, buffalo, lion and general plains game. In 2006, a section of the park was fenced off as a rhino sanctuary, the first stage of reintroducing both species back into Meru. There is a programme to constantly increase the size of the fenced section as population numbers grow (currently 45 rhino have already been translocated). The birdlife is quite exceptional with over 300 species recorded.



**Above top:** view over Meru from Elsa's Kopje  
**Above:** perennial river in Meru  
**Below:** endangered black rhino



**SAFARI SNIPPETS**

## Gorilla growth

A census in the Virunga mountains earlier in the year revealed that 480 mountain gorillas now live amongst the volcanoes - an increase of 3.7% on 2009 and over 26% in the last 7 years - good news indeed.



## RHINO REPORTS

One downside in 2010 has been the disturbing reports about the increase in rhino poaching, particularly in South Africa which is said to be losing around one rhino per day, to sophisticated syndicates who have taken to using helicopters. The SA government recently brought in the military to help the wildlife authorities - we hope that they will be more successful than their predecessors were in the 1980s in then South West Africa (now Namibia)! The iconic rhino sanctuary of Lewa Downs in Kenya has also lost rhino, and other conservancies have reported an increase in elephant poaching. If you want to help the fight against poaching, there are a huge number of charities involved including TUSK, the South Luangwa Conservation Society, Save the Rhino and Lewa - contact us for further details or see our website for links.



## Malawi Microloans

The Microloan Foundation is a fantastic charity which helps African women start their own businesses with a 'hand up, rather than hand out' philosophy. Now chaired by long-time Safari Consultants supporter Eggie Kock, they are achieving some amazing results in Malawi. Well worth supporting at this festive time - [www.microloanfoundation.org.uk](http://www.microloanfoundation.org.uk)

**BILL EXPLORES...**

## Mundulea magic

On a recent visit to Namibia, it was a refreshing change to rekindle my boyhood spirit of adventure. We did not quite get around to setting guineafowl traps, but I was delighted to be taken back to an age when food presentation was not the be-all and end-all, and exploring the bush was done on foot.

Such was the experience at Mundulea, a privately-owned conservancy of 13000 hectares just south of Otavi. Owner and exceptional professional guide, Bruno Nebe, embarked on a habitat rehabilitation process of the former cattle station 12 years ago. Mundulea is now home to a wide range of antelope species and black rhino. Bruno guides each stay personally from his comfortable eight-bed tented camp. You're on foot to experience the bush, and while not a 'last bastion of wilderness', the reserve is both diverse and interesting, and made more so by his exceptional tracking skills. In camp, simple but wholesome meals are prepared over the open fire next to the dining table, and not by a fancy safari chef but by Bruno himself, using his own range of recycled cookware! The only thing missing is the original 'shooting for the pot', for which I was thankful but I am sure one of Bruno's San bushmen friends would have been only too happy to provide. This is a great product for those who love the outdoors for what it is.

## DIARY DATES 2011 - SEE US AT

Destinations Travel Show in London, 3rd to 6th February

Suffolk Show, Ipswich on the 1st and 2nd June

Bird Fair at Egleton Nature Reserve in Rutland, from 19th to 21st August

Wishing you all a very happy festive season and best wishes for 2011

Bill, Rob, Michele, Mary, Michaela, Josie, Jonny and Jane

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