

## Travelogue

### 1. The Prehistory

In the context of an assignment for the Senior Expert Service e.V. (<http://ses-bonn.de>), I am working as an IT expert at UIRI (<http://uiri.org>) for three weeks at the beginning of 2013.

Before returning to Germany I would like to spend another week in Uganda. Using a well-known Internet search engine, I end up more or less by chance at the "community based organization" (CBO) "Mpora Rural Family" (<http://www.ugandahomestay.com>), which runs an orphanage, a primary school and a vocational school in western Uganda near Fort Portal - and all without electricity.

There I meet the former orphan Robert, who offers me to be my guide even provide me with a mountain bike for tours in the surrounding area.

### 2. The Idea

As the second chairman of the ADFC Vogelsberg, as managing director of a Ltd., which is active in the field of renewable energies and as an IT expert the three aspects "no electricity", "no computer" and "bike" didn't leave me in peace, and I started to develop fantasies:

- I organize a multi-week bike tour through the national parks in western Uganda.
- With the revenue of the trip, I buy and install a photovoltaic system on the vocational school of the Mpora Rural Family.
- I collect used laptops and bring them to school
- I advise the head of the Mpora Rural Family to ask SES for sending me to work voluntarily at the vocational school in order to set up a network and give computer lessons at the vocational school.

### 3. The Preparation

runs almost on schedule. In collaboration with Robert and the local tour operator Kabarole-Tours the itinerary is determined. After publication, the trip is fully booked within a week. The foundation of a German solar company sponsors the PV system. There are only transport and installation costs to pay, which are pre-financed by me. My assignment is approved and the flights are booked. Sufficient used laptops and other hardware are collected.

### 4. The Implementation

On 14.4.2014 I fly with 8 laptops, printer and scanner to Uganda. After a day's stay in Kampala, I am picked up and driven to the location. The PV system is mounted on 17.4.. After Easter, the 4-week computer lessons begin, for which 16 teachers and students have registered. From the beginning there are problems with Ugandan and German time management. If you have a long way to school, can not afford rain gear and no sturdy shoes, anytime, incipient, rainstorm-like tropical rainfall and slippery roads are the barrier to appear punctually - on the one hand. On the other hand, an announced 10 minute break is an exact statement for a German, but only a rough guideline for an

Ugandan. So sometimes it is difficult for me to teach clearly structured lessons. Nevertheless, at the end of the course everyone, including myself, is very satisfied with the achievement. Everyone gathers for a farewell dinner and a gift for me on the last day, and nearly everyone thanks me personally with a little speech.

During this time I book hotels, take care of bicycles and rent the accompanying vehicle for the bike tour in August.

## 5. The Highlight - the Bike Tour

As UIRI had requested me for an energy audit, I flew on Thursday, the 7th of July 2014, three weeks before "my" travel group. Again I had donations from my relatives and friends - hardware and this time also babies' and children's clothes - in my luggage. A note from SES to the lady at the check-in desk of Turkish Airlines about the social purpose of my excess luggage of about 40 kg made her roll her eyes, but my luggage went without additional payment on the plane.

At home another more than 140 kg of donated goods were still waiting for transport to Uganda. After an official request with Turkish Airlines these could also fly without additional payment together with my travel group to Entebbe on 31.7.

At around 4:00 am on August 1, I picked up the participants at the airport in Entebbe along with William, our driver for the next three weeks. The rented 12-seater minibus almost proved to be too small due to the many boxes of donated goods. After we had everything stored in and on the minibus, we went on an hour's drive to Kampala to our first accommodation, which we reached around 5:00 clock.

Despite the long night without sleep, the first ones sat at the breakfast table at 11:00 clock. By now, William had gotten a tarp, and after the boxes were packed watertight on the roof of our mini-bus, we went on a five-hour drive to the starting point of our bike tour in western Uganda.

The orphanage of the Mpora Rural Family, which was the recipient of our donations, is situated about 20 km north of Fort Portal. It's "bandas" were our accommodation for the next two nights.

### 2.8.

The next morning Robert brought our bikes, which were checked again before the first trip. Then we went by bike to the Amabere Caves, a small piece of jungle in the midst of cultivated farmland, with waterfall and a stalactite cave and after that to the foot of a volcanic cone called "Top of the World", which could only be climbed on foot. A beautiful view of several crater lakes, more volcanic cones and the Rwenzori Mountains compensated for the effort.

Afterwards we went back to the accommodation for lunch. In the afternoon, I checked to see if my laptops delivered in spring were still working, while my tour group was visiting the other projects of the Mpora Rural Family - a eucalyptus plantation and a fish farm – in the vicinity.

### 3.8.

On the third day of travel we finally went by bike to the first big stage of about 60 km. The aim was the Semliki National Park with its hot springs in the western part of the East African Rift Valley. At

first it only went downhill, but after about 10 km there was the first interruption - with a loud bang the rear tire of my bike burst. So I had to enter our support vehicle, and then in the next town to buy a new coat and hose and let it mount.

The rapid descent was over, and we had to cross the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains to reach the valley of the Semliki River. In the early afternoon we finally reached the Bumaga Camp of the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), which is located about 2 km southwest of the entrance to the National Park. After we got our simple Bandas (self contained!), we went on foot (no one wanted to sit on the bike again) to the next village to buy some more fruit. The road was longer than expected, and there was no fruit on the market. Since no one wanted to walk back, for the delight of the locals we embarked on the adventure to go back with motorcycle taxis, called Boda-Bodas - two passengers on a Boda-Boda, which is not allowed, but is common. The fare was about € 0.60 for about 3 km.

4.8.

At 7:30 clock departure was announced without breakfast. Our guide took us on winding paths through the lowland rainforest to the hot springs in large clearings. In particular, the so-called female spring impresses with the play of colors of their sediments and the tiny creatures in the hot water, threads of white algae. We boiled some eggs and were able to have a quick bite. At 11:00 we were back in the camp. Robert and William had meanwhile fastened our wheels to the roof of our support vehicle. After the late breakfast we went back to Fort Portal. On the way we marveled, which climbs we had mastered on the way there.

Robert and William unloaded our bikes again, and after a little refreshment we went biking towards our next destination, the Kibale National Park. After 21 km of ups and downs, we reached our stopover, the Crater Valley Kibale Resort on the shores of Lake Nyabikere (Lake of Frogs). All our rooms were self contained and had a small terrace with a picturesque view of the lake.

5.8.

We had to defend our breakfast against intrusive monkeys. After a short walk along the lakeshore with bird watching, we started our next stage by bike. It was 20km uphill and downhill until we reached Chimp's Nest. Here we stayed in three cozy cottages and a tree house on the edge of the Kibale Forest National Park. There was even warm water, which was heated in a storage in the evening with a wood stove. After dark we did a night walk with a guide, but unfortunately none of the promised animals could be seen.

6.8.

TIA is the abbreviation for "Thanks in advance" means in Internet forums and blogs. It changed to "This is Africa" for us, so we took it with humor that the night before we wrote down what we wanted for breakfast, but in the morning the food served did not match our orders.

In the morning we drove about 5 km to the village Bigodi and the resident KAFRED project (Kibale Association for Rural and Environmental Development, <http://www.bigodi-tourism.org/1701.html>), a CBO founded in 1992. Their goal is to preserve the local environment, raise the standard of education and improve the economic situation of the community. The women, especially the widows, are weaving and selling baskets especially to tourists, and 20% of the price is going to the local Primary School. A spring was caught and a lead was laid to the village to support the community with clean water. Another source of income is tourism. For example, for a fee you can take a tour of the village,

visiting the various facilities of the project and finding out about the founder of the project at a lunch with local dishes in his house. This was our program for this morning. The project also supports the conservation of a wetland, the "Bigodi Wetlands" and its animal and plant species, and also offers guided tours there.

After lunch we went back by car to the starting point of the chimpanzee trekking. Unfortunately, it started to rain now. Despite the uncomfortable weather, we soon met a chimpanzee family, in which excitement prevailed for reasons unknown to us. Several times there was a great shouting. Suddenly a chimpanzee climbed down a tree at great speed and raced at breakneck speed through our group. He almost knocked over one group member, and her heart almost stopped when it came to proper body contact with her. After a short while he came back at the same speed and this time so close to me that I could have touched him.

7.8.

Today we started with a so-called "nature walk" through the above mentioned "Bigodi Wetlands", where we were able to watch 5 of the 8 native primate species.

Then we went with our minibus to Kasese and stayed overnight in the "White House". With us was a large group of students – with the result, that in the evening the water pressure for the showers was no longer sufficient in our rooms on the second floor. So we had to use canisters and washing bowl - TIA. Also it was noteworthy that the master card of one group member was swallowed by an ATM. Luckily, there was a local banker who could manage the re-issue of the card, so we did not have to watch the machine all night.

8.8.

Today we were able to get on the bikes again, and on a flat stretch we went through the savannah landscape of Queen Elizabeth National Park. On the way we already saw the first waterbucks and Uganda kobs. Since we did not want to be "food on wheels" for the lions of the National Park, we got back in the minibus before leaving the main road heading for the "Kazinga Channel".

There, the next highlight awaited us - a cruise on the channel that connects Lake George with Lake Edward. We saw a variety of bird species, crocodiles, African buffalos and hippos on the shore and in the water.

9.8.

Unfortunately, without documentation by a photo, I encountered a hippopotamus on the way to the toilet behind my cottage. You should never be out without a camera in Uganda!

Before sunrise we went on safari. After a long drive we met Uganda Kobs, waterbucks, buffalo, vultures and lions and were able to observe them from a short distance.

The afternoon was at leisure and used individually for animal and bird watching, such as the warthog family resident in our lodge.

10.8.

Again with the minibus we drove (or were driven) about 80 km to the so-called Ishasha sector of the national park. On the way we met a whole herd of African elephants.

Our accommodation, @theRiver Camp, was picturesquely situated in a river loop. Unfortunately, the afternoon sank in the rain, so that there were no group activities.

### 11.8.

The next morning began with rain, and for the second time our minibus had to be pushed because of decrepit battery. Nevertheless, we drove back into the national park. The Ishasha sector is famous for the atypical behavior of its lion population. Only in two places in Africa you can find lions that climb trees, and only on one particular ficus species. According to our guide, for some time no propagation of these trees takes place for unknown reasons. Now it is curious if these lions get used to other trees or change their behavior. As you can see on my pictures (<https://uganda-erfahren.de/index.php/en/fotogalerie>), our safari was a success. The breath stopped when our driver strangled the engine at a mud hole, but luckily it started again despite decrepit battery and accordingly slow speed of the starter.

In the afternoon we took a bike ride to the next town called Kihiki. As always, when we came cycling through villages, children came out of every corner, welcoming us with "How are you, Muzungu (the Bantu word for whites)? or the short version "How are zungu?". Felt 1000 times we have answered on our journey with "I'm fine" and got to hear it with our counter question, sometimes in chorus.

Reportable are also two glitches:

Once again a Mastercard was swallowed by an ATM and, as in Kasese, spit out again after a restart of the machine.

A front brake quit service and could not be repaired in the town. Thanks god that I insisted on taking a spare bike after the first breakdown, which was now used.

Our driver also drove into town after convincing him to buy and install a new battery.

### 12.8.

Our next stage took us - again by bike - to Butogota, a larger town, but curiously not shown on Google Maps. But in the meantime we had some old-fashioned maps of Uganda, so that we reached Butotoga without any problems.

The goal was the project "Nyundo Valley Hill Project" (<http://n-vhill.hpage.com>), which promised traditional accommodation. However, my group had not imagined it that traditional. There were 2-bed bandas of clay and thatched, latrines and again water for washing out of canisters and wash bowls.

But compared to the majority of rural dwellings, this was still luxurious. We were given hot water, and for a while there was light and electricity from the generator.

After Herbert, an early retired government employee, had presented his initiative to us, it was all a pity that despite the rustic accommodation, we only stayed one night and could not examine his individual projects.

There is a small computer center; Jewelry made of paper-mâché by orphans processing old newspapers is being purchased. You can visit women, watching the traditional production of millet bread and ghee, or even join to cook traditional dishes.

### 13.8.

This morning, a visit to a Batwa (Pygmy) village was on the program. This was discussed controversially. Some said it would be something of a zoo visit. If you only look at the aspect of "look

how small they are", it is not without reason (although the size differences are not that big). For someone who is interested in a culture that may be declining, perhaps in the near future, things are different. It was fascinating to watch how the Batwas made fire without a match or lighter and saw their forest huts and traditional dances. Afterwards, the fact that the visitor center and the leadership are run by "normal" Ugandans provided material for more discussions. So the question arose as to whether and how much of the sizeable entrance fee really mattered to the Batwas.

Unfortunately we had too little time as we had a long trip in our car to our next accommodation, the Nkuringo Gorilla Camp on the edge of the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. We were now at about 2000 m altitude, and it was very cold. At bedtime, therefore, everyone got a hot water bottle to bed.

14.8.

The absolute highlight was coming now - the trekking to a family of the few, still living mountain gorillas of our earth. We were assigned a family and had to expect a 6-hour trekking through the rainforest. The rainforest lives up to its name. It rains almost daily, and the partly steep trails are very slippery. Therefore, at the starting points of the trek, you can hire helpers to carry the rucksacks and hand in difficult spots, which a part of us did.

Around noon, it was time for "our" gorilla family to have chosen a quiet spot to rest and eat, to which the scouts guided us. Now it was time to leave the trail and hike up the steep path through the thicket. Our effort was rewarded. We were able to observe an entire family consisting of two silverbacks, several females and kids at a distance of about 5-10 m for 1 hour. So far, the rain had spared us. But on the way back we still had to unpack our rain gear.

At 16:00 we went back to our accommodation with our hot water bottles.

15.8.-17.8.

Since we already knew a lot of the way to our next destination, Lake Bunyonyi, we did not take the final step on the bike, because of the hefty climbs that would have awaited us.

Around noon we reached the village of Bunyonyi near Kabale, from where a motorboat took us to the island of Itambira, where another interesting project was waiting for us - the Byoona Amagara Island Retreat. For the description of our sleeping accommodation I miss the words. The operators call them "Geodome". You sleep in the open, but protected by a thatched dome, with a wonderful view over the lake. It was the almost an ideal place to end our trip in the next two days.

The retreat is part of a larger project. From the revenues and with the help of sponsorship money, school meals, school fees, a library, the transport of students by boat to school are financed.

The kitchen of the retreat was excellent, especially the freshwater crayfish caught in the lake were enjoyed by us in various variations.

To total verdict "quite ideal" for this place was missing pleasant water and outside temperatures, especially at night. Nevertheless, almost all of us jumped into the floods at least once. And in the evening we sat packed in thick while eating.

18.8.

For today, the return trip was planned. Everything was packed, and we were ferried back to the

mainland. But our driver did not arrive at 10:00 as agreed but only at 18:00. TIA again. Since no one was in the mood for a night trip, I decided to book a new accommodation and canceled the actually booked hotel in Entebbe.

19.8.

Meanwhile, we were so adapted to African conditions that we managed to stow in a car for 8 people 9 people and our luggage and finally headed to Entebbe, the final point of our trip, in a good mood.

Toward evening we arrived at the African Roots Guest House and were able to enjoy our dinner in the garden now again with pleasant temperatures.

20.8.

The last day was actually at leisure; nevertheless, the whole group stayed together and was led by a student with impressive knowledge of native fauna through the botanical garden of Entebbe.

At noon, I rented a minibus (which should actually drive us back after dinner). We all went to Kampala again and bought the last souvenirs in the African Village. For the farewell dinner, I booked a table at Copper Chimney, my favorite place in Kampala, the best Indian restaurant I know (and I know some in different countries in the meantime). All participants also enjoyed it very much. And since my wife had announced that I am a passable hobby chef, the group equipped me with their farewell gift (an apron and kitchen gloves) properly.

But after that we experienced TIA again. The driver of the minibus rented in the morning seemed to have made enough money with us, so he did not respond to my phone call, which I made to tell him to pick us up for the return trip.

The manager of the restaurant ordered two normal taxis to take us back. To make matters worse, my taxi was involved in a rear-end collision. Despite a minimal damage, the driver insisted the damage taken by the police and temporarily detained the driver of the opposing vehicle as guilty. Fortunately, the return flight was not until 3:50, so we came back in time for the guest house and also had a shower for each time.

Since I had yet another work assignment for the senior expert service in front of me, I said goodbye to my group, which landed safely back in Germany, and took the taxi back to Kampala.