

Rwanda and Uganda Diary



Rwanda and Uganda Pre - departure

Part of the adventure of travel is the anticipation. The idea of going to Rwanda was conceived this time last year when Jean, Sheilagh, Beth and I were travelling together in Namibia. At the time we were three monkeys and a tiger, and had a very special time exploring areas of Namibia and its amazing wildlife through Beth's fantastic organisation. Having Sheilagh living in Rwanda, we hoped to do something similar this year. Jean decided not to come as she has major travel plans for later in the year, so it is just two monkeys and a tiger this year.

Reflecting on the group, we all go back rather a long way now. I met Jean in Sumatra in 1978, Beth in Tokyo in 1983, and Sheilagh in Istanbul in 1986. Naturally it is living and working overseas as well as travelling which has kept the bond over all these years, and we have shared many adventures in different countries.

Africa is still rather new for me, and having both Beth and Sheilagh working there has been an incentive to get to know more. One great advantage is that flying south there is very little time difference, and it takes nowhere near as long as going to the Far East! A very slight disadvantage is the need to get a Yellow Fever jab and take malaria tablets. Another real bonus is having Humberside Airport close by with KLM providing the shuttle to Schiphol which is such a hub for the world.



Let the adventure begin!

Rwanda and Uganda Day 1 October 1st 2016

Where to begin? Well, here we are, not in Rwanda but in Uganda on an island called Itambira on Bunyoni Lake, one of the deepest lakes in Uganda. We are the only people



staying at a place called Seeds of Hope. The owner is away giving talks about growing mushrooms, so the name is obviously significant. We have a small wooden chalet right on the lake, and are sitting on the balcony watching dugouts and otters as well as seeing our first birds. This is the life!

After a very stormy night - as we landed around 7pm yesterday the lightening was all around and it was pouring with rain. Sheilagh met me - the airport is tiny, not much bigger than Humberside, and it was a 15 minute drive through the city to where she lives. I could not see a great deal as it was dark and wet, but first impression was hilly and low rise. The roads are good and lots of new official buildings.

Sheilagh's house is more of a mansion with large balcony, and lots of wings, some secure for her position as Director of the British Council of Rwanda. There is 24 hour security, but more importantly, there are five dogs, who were all there to greet us. Coco and Siggy, who Sheilagh rescued and brought from Sri Lanka, then there is Ben more of a black retriever who she got here, then Lassie and Leila who she acquired when a colleague moved to Jordan, and is looking to rehome. The last three live outside, whereas Siggy is in the living room and Coco in Sheilagh's room!



Daniel the dog walker with from the left Coco, Siggy, Ben, Leila and Lassie

This morning we took them all for an hours walk around the neighbourhood, which is like a leafy suburb, with not a lot of traffic, and I could get a feel for the views and the flora which is very tropical, with lots of jacaranda trees, bougainvillea and many unrecognisable ones. There are lots of birds of prey, and although we could not use binoculars with five dogs on leads, we saw bulbuls and smaller sweet singing birds.

On return we packed for Uganda, and were able to set off around 11:30. We first got petrol, then Sheilagh drove the wrong way through the bus station to find a money changer to change some money into Ugandan Shillings. The journey to the border was quite pleasant through hilly country, lots of rice growing and cultivation being done mainly by women, then we came to tea country being cultivated in the valleys, which anyway are quite high. The road was good, with not much traffic - more motorbikes and bicycles carrying enormous loads of milk churns or sacks of vegetables. The border was chaotic, very reminiscent of crossing borders en route to India in 1975!

The technology was there in places - there was only one traditional ledger being kept, but we had to go from one office to the other to leave Rwanda, and then the same again as we drove into Uganda. What was really crazy were the trucks and parking. Between the two countries you swap driving from on the right hand side in Rwanda to on the left hand side in Uganda, so they all take to opportunity to drive all over the place and block everyone else in. We did get through both borders in about an hour, and suddenly were on our way. The Ugandan immigration team were very warm and welcoming which bodes very well.

Still in the hills we had about half an hours drive before we turned off onto dirt roads heading for Lake Bunyoni. Sheilagh had good instructions of where to park and who to telephone in order for Hilary to bring a boat to pick us up for the 5 km trip across the lake. We did get to see two Grey Crowned Cranes at close quarters- these are the national bird of Uganda and of Rwanda.



Lake Bunyoni, Uganda

So we have arrived at our first destination, and relaxation.



The thatched huts are quite spread out, and we were the furthest away though the trees on the edge of the island with just reeds below us. The path was a little muddy, so we had to be careful where we trod. The first cottage we came to was called Marigold Cottage we are in one called Zinnia, and the restaurant is called Salvia.

Dinner was simple rice and vegetables, which we downed with a bottle of Nile beer brewed in Uganda. The bad news was that there was a Wedding Party on the top of a hill on the mainland which had very loud music carrying across the water. The only other sound had been the swishing of dugouts and the cranes flying in. Sadly the Wedding Party went on the entire night, and we could hear it loud and clear. It was so difficult to sleep, so it was a night for just dozing. It was only slightly drowned out by the rain when it finally came. It must have stopped around 3 or 4 am there is no peace for the wicked as my Mother used to say.

Uganda Day 2 Sunday 2nd October 2016

I woke to peace and just the sound of traditional drums and the swish of dugouts at 8am - it is 2 hours ahead of UK time here in Rwanda. The fact is that everyone must be fragile today, because if they were not at the Wedding Party, then they would still have heard it!

A Pied Kingfisher just flew by and I can hear unusual bird song in the trees - this is a day for birdwatching and walking. Indeed, after a very hearty breakfast of tropical fruits, juice, omelette, toast and coffee, we set off with Hilary for a day in the boat around a few of the

29 islands in the lake. The water was so calm, and we passed a few dug outs, and heard drums, which apparently call everyone to church. The first island was the largest, and had been a leprosy colony for people from Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and even further afield. It now houses a school, and hospital run by a consortium of the government and Slovenia, and is all free for the local people. We started our bird watching in the reed beds around the island and had some wonderful sightings. Hilary was a good spotter, and we were aided by the Birds of East Africa guide book.

We rounded the smallest island, where pregnant girls used to be imprisoned before landing on Bushari Island, where we had a wonderful hike through Eucalyptus groves up to a restaurant. The birds on this island were amazing as we walked around various camping areas. It began to rain, and so many varieties came out to catch flies- it was such a feast for the eyes. None of the birds were phased by us, so we had fabulous sightings at close quarters even without binoculars. We sheltered from the rain for a couple of hours over a Ugandan coffee - quite thick and chocolate in flavour, it very pleasant. As the rain fell steadily we were able to spot more birds, and to make our list. Like Seeds for Hope where we are staying this is another project island with agriculture and growing trees promoted to help the local communities.



Waiting for the boat on Bushari Island

As the rain eased we set off again, with Hilary bailing out our little boat. The last island we visited was owned by the governor of the Bank of Uganda, who lived in Kampala. On the island he had introduced zebra, antelopes and water buck, and we were lucky enough to

see some at quite close quarters. More exciting for us this time was seeing two malachite kingfishers, which are rather shy.

Back to our island to relax and catch up before dinner. The bird list for today:

Bunyoni Lake

Common buzzard
Teal
Great cormorant
Swallow
Augur Buzzard
Pelican
Yellow weaver bird
Grey crested crane
Little Bee Eater
Pied Crow
Pied Kingfisher
African pied wagtail
Purple heron
Swamp flycatcher
Black-headed weaver
Swamp warbler
Blue sunbird
Mousebird
Yellow warbler
White-browed Robin chat
Ring necked dove
Blue headed coucal
Tropical boubou
Common bulbul
Yellow whiskered green bulbul
Mackinnons fiscal
Little weaver
Olive thrush
Baglafecht weaver
Paradise flycatcher
Black and white manikin
Winding cisticola
Malokite kingfisher
Hadadi ibis
Egyptian goose

Animals! Antelope, zebra, water buck

Uganda Day 3 Monday 3rd October 2016

A very peaceful night, with just the sound of rain on the thatched roof! We dined on lentil curry, rice and chapati, which slipped down nicely with the Nile beer!

This morning we were up bright and breezy to pack, and have breakfast at 7am and off in the boat with Hilary at 8am having said our goodbyes and paid the bill, and figured out the tips, we set off across the lake in the little boat, grateful for no rain. Our car was in tact, so we packed up and set off by 9am on our journey north.

We were heading for the Queen Elizabeth National Park, and had been given some directions for a five hour journey north (it is quite refreshing travelling without a guide book, and just going with local knowledge and a road map.)

Our route took us through agricultural country, lots of bananas, and up higher into the hills with big tea plantations run by the same group as the one Sheilagh had been to in Rwanda. For the first four hours the roads were amazing - they have been built recently by the Chinese, and wind through the mountains very smoothly. There was very little traffic, mainly around the main towns of Ntungamo and Ishaka, and the villages we passed through were just linearly developed along the road - it was so like driving though Pakistan, Afghanistan and India back in the 1970's, with everything happening along the roadside. The main transport for all the produce is bicycle, but now motorbikes are slowly taking over with four people easily carried and no helmets!

We descended to the National Park with views over Lake Edward and Lake George, and the traffic became less and less with the road becoming worse and worse! Amazingly as there are tourists coming in here, the National Park Centre and gate are incredibly low key, and the road is pretty bad.



We paid our daily fees in dollars, and proceeded into the National Park, seeing baboons, wart hogs and antelopes on the way as well as a Nile monitor. We had been told about a place out East called Mweya, so we headed out there and found some simple cottages by the lake for a couple of nights.

We headed for the little cafe overlooking Lake Edward, and had the most incredible bird and hippo and crocodile sightings from here just over a cup of tea. The most exotic bird was the Black headed goneleck which has the loudest call and an absolutely crimson breast. We were joined by a young lad who helped identify so many of the things we were seeing, but it was Sheilagh who spotted the hippopotamus on the bank beyond, and we watched a whole herd over the next couple of hours. As the light fell, we had a beer and listened to the birds and grunting hippos!

Bird sightings just here included:

White-headed saw wing

Hammerkop

African fish Eagle

Lesser masked weaver

Coucal

Black headed Goneleck

Ring necked dove

Blue spotted wood dove

Maribou stork

Pelican

Northern black flycatcher

What a fabulous place to experience wildlife, and what forethought people had in protecting this whole area in the 1950's. At this point we are close to the Congolese border, and equally as close to the equator about 10 km



Wonderful spot for birding and viewing animals across the water at Mweya, located in the Queen Elizabeth National Park on the northeastern shores of Lake Edward at the point where the Kazinga Channel joins the lake.

We stayed and ate rice and vegetable curry in our wonderful spot before retiring around 8:30pm. We were just in shower mode when the power went out, so we madly tried to

locate our torches. So to bed to the sound of scrambling in and on the roof



Uganda Day 4 Tuesday 4th October 2016

Just after midnight we heard the honky snort of a hippopotamus right outside our room. We were up and out of our mosquito nets like a shot, and there was an enormous hippopotamus right outside the window! There were probably more outside the door, but we did not open the door - I wonder why? How exciting to be so close to such an amazing wild animal! There were wart hogs and water buck around as well, and we thought maybe mongeese on the roof after the rats, but the most exciting was the hippopotamus.

We had set the alarm in time to get up for a 6:30 Safari, but unfortunately were on Rwandan time, so when we woke to a dawn chorus around 5:30, thinking we had plenty of time, we suddenly were late. Throwing on our clothes we drove up to the visitor centre for 6:45, and were welcomed the system here is that you can self drive and a ranger comes with you for \$20, which is a very good deal. Our ranger was excellent. Her name was Petra and she had previously been a high school history and religion teacher, but for the last 9 years she had trained and become a ranger. Not only did she really know the birds and animals but also she was interesting on a range of subjects, so we learned a great deal and saw a lot.

The morning light was excellent as we drove to the northeast of the park and the Savannah. We had views of the glacial Rwenzori mountains on our left, some of which have snow all year round. The highest mountain is Mount Stanley at 5109m, and they form the northern part of the Albertine Rift Valley, which passes right through Queen Elizabeth National Park. As Sheilagh drove out on the road to the north east of the park we had the Kazinga Channel on our right, and were in scrubland seeing Crested guinea fowl, Red-necked Spur Fowl, Red-billed Quelea, and lots of cactus trees. These are poisonous to animals, but store water, which helps the surrounding bushes to survive. Another thorny bush which had pink flowers is only eaten by elephants and has been spreading around because of the elephant, changing what was savannah into bush, which is of detriment to the grazing animals, and means an expansion of the elephant population here, and a loss of habitat for the grassland in the last 50 years.

We saw Red-breasted Francolin (we had seen these in Namibia), Grey-backed Shrike, Ruppell's long-tailed Starling, Yellow-fronted canaries, the spectacular Palm nut Vulture, and on a crater lake some flamingoes. meanwhile we already were beginning to see animals, with herds of Water buck, which is the largest antelope in the park, the male having spectacular striped horns, and then a marvellous sighting of a herd of elephants on both sides of our dirt road. I think what has begun to strike me here is how close we are to all the animals and birds and how little fear they have of us. The buffaloes here are completely wild, and although they look similar, they are not relatives of the Asian water buffalo we know so well which have been domesticated. Here they occur in large herds, and we saw them all over the place. More birds included the Yellow-throated Longclaw, Bateleur (an eagle relative), Senegal plover, White-browed Coucal, Temminck's Courser and Crowned Lapwings.

We went through an entrance into the Kasenya Plains, where we had to show our papers, and immediately after that on the savannah we began to see herds of Ugandan Kob, the national animal of Uganda. It is a medium sized antelope, and each male gathers a harem of females. In the park - we immediately began to see these herds, but what very quickly became the excitement of the day was an excellent sighting of four lions. There are only 100 lions in the whole park, so this was special for Petra as well as for us. She had not seen any in the last month. We watched them for quite a while as there were two males and two females. They moved around a little bit, so this was even more interesting. Interestingly enough in comparison, there are 5000 elephants in the park.

Around the animal sightings we saw more birds, including the African Harrier, Hammerkop and Kiplet's Plover, the African Thrush (Genet) Black shouldered Kite, Black Kite, Long crested Eagle, Black bellied Bustard, Laughing Dove, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Brown Snake Eagle and Pin-tailed Whydah.



We drove out to a mud pool which was very small, it contained 16 wallowing hippopotamus, and we were right next to it!

Not quite as spectacular were three monitor lizard and a group of striped mongoose. We stopped at a crater lake where they are still extracting salt - each pan is owned by a family, so a small scale industry. This was a bit of a tourist spot with all the safaris stopping there, and some souvenirs for sale. Amazingly Sheilagh bumped into a chap she knows from Rwanda who had brought a group of Taiwanese - he used to be married to a Taiwanese lady. He is Ugandan and works for DFID in Kigali.



At this point we asked Petra if she would mind us driving up to the Equator as we were so close. This we did, and she took our photos there. On the way we encountered a threatening elephant on the side of the road, so hung back for quite awhile as she detected that it was not happy and could charge. It was rather handsome with huge tusks, so we respected her decision!

We actually got back around midday having had no breakfast, not even a cup of coffee or a drink of water but what a great experience. We headed straight for our little cafe for a coffee and egg roll, which is an omelette wrapped in a chapatti, which was excellent.



The view from our hilltop table could not have been more exciting as elephants came down to the water where we could already see buffalo, and hippos in the water. We had a brief spell where we went and took a shower and then came back to find a herd of 33 elephants down by the water, with a mixture of very young being protected by the females, and young males showing their prowess in the water and chasing some of the buffalo. This lasted around an hour before they slowly made their way back into the scrub.

Time to catch up with the diary and reflect on this amazing day.

Uganda Day 5 Wednesday 5th October 2016

We hung out last night till the rain drove us to the covered area, and the hippopotamus had begun to come on land on the opposite bank. The crocodile in the mid-channel was ever present, but never appeared on land. We had more vegetables and rice for dinner, and retired to read our books passing the Marabou Stork settled for the night on a telegraph pole. We read for a long time and chatted, then the noise of what we have come to understand are Genet began in the roof, scratching around. Later the hippopotamus came snuffling around, and indeed we also have Water buck, Wart hogs and mongeese in the compound.

We chatted to a young Cambridge PhD student who was in her first year of research on the mongoose group at Mwye. This is a project which has been ongoing for 20 years. The Ugandan chaps with her have been gathering information for most of that time. There are only 33 mongeese in the troop, so that is a lot of data

We took breakfast at the restaurant including the thick Ugandan coffee, scrambled egg and toast, and set off around 9am, first giving a young Ugandan we had been chatting to a lift, then at the gate we picked up a high school student and her Mother, so we were a careful heading out of the peninsula for the Main Gate of the national Park. We dropped all of them there to try and get public transport - this is quite remote, so they may have had a while to wait. We turned left and headed up to a village where there are two crater lakes. The first of these was covered in pink flamingoes which come from Tanzania and Kenya at this time of the year. It was a wonderful sight, and we wandered as close as we could get. We were accosted by a local 'official' and ended up donating 10000 shillings for the local community. We also met some interesting men who were working on conservation of the 3200 flamingoes that come each year and in educating the local people not to kill them! They see also helping with the other crater lake where salt was harvested. 30 years ago a German company built a factory here to help process the salt, but the wrong metals had been used, so the factory was now redundant. Sheilagh gave them the name of the GIZ which could possibly help them with dismantling or rebuilding it.

We now set off on the days adventure, which was to drive the 78 miles south through the park to a different area called Ishasha at the southern end. The graded road was pretty good, and the landscaped changed from wood to scrub to savannah, so we had a chance to see the grazing Ugandan Kob as well as Water Buck, Baboons, monkeys and some Elephants we hardly saw another soul the entire way.

We got to Ishasha, and investigated various possible places to stay. The first area on the border with Congo had a good camping area if we had our own tent, and some very simple Banda (huts) which were rather remote and very basic, so we headed off on our own game drive, thinking of heading out of the park further south. We did get rather lost as our map was pretty basic, and we did see some elephants which were rather aggressive, so we shows them some respect and reversed away.



The tracks were where people go to look for tree climbing lions, so we were hoping to just come across them, but that was not to be. The tracks got rougher and rougher, and were

somewhat muddy in places, so we were somewhat relieved to find the gate to exit as the rains came down.

The next part of the journey took us back to villages and people, tea country, muddy roads, and we had quite a long drive to find somewhere suitable to stay. At one point a tree had blocked the road, so we had to divert through a building site in the middle of a village. The rain, the mud, and the lack of suitable accommodation when we were tired and a little hungry brought us to the village which is the starting point for gorilla expeditions in the Bwindi impenetrable forest National Park.



After a few false starts we found a place to stay in a tented camp, which was right in the forest. We were just relieved to have a place to lay our heads, and to have our vegetables and rice....

Uganda and Rwanda Day 6 Thursday 6th October 2016

Our tented lodging in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park proved to be very comfortable, and of course dark in the forest, so we slept till 7:30! The mist was rolling around, and it was very atmospheric.



The Buhoma Community Rest Place where we were staying were very helpful, and even changed money for us - we had US\$, but needed Ugandan shillings as we were very low on petrol. We had to back track a little to get some petrol as there would be none on our journey through the edge of the forest. It is funny how everything looks different when you drive in the opposite direction and the sun is shining. The dirt road was less muddy, and we were soon back finding a petrol station (not quite as we would picture). We had to remember that all along here we are right on the Congolese border, and close to the Rwandan border. There were different looking people, some are the local aboriginal people who are in all of these areas, some would be Tutsi and some would be Hutu. Likewise the gorillas are in these mountains, so some people go in to see them on the Ugandan side some like us from the Rwandan side, and some from the Congo.



The road today was really spectacular, and on the whole the dirt was stable and the RAV4 coped, even with some rather muddy deep places. We climbed very high into the mountains, often well away from villages and cultivated land, but then we would get glimpses of well cultivated terraces with bananas and sometimes tea. Around any villages the children were always on their way too and from school in their various uniforms, always clean and neat looking. In primary there can be up to 200 in a single class, and the high school student we gave a lift to earlier had 81 in her class for all her lessons

The journey through to the top of the mountain was about three hours, and miraculously just over the top was a tiny tea house overlooking the valley beyond. So, we were able to rest awhile before going on down the other side. This was unusual as we have not seen any roadside cafe anywhere! The land is heavily cultivated on difficult slopes, but there are cows and crops, we believe people have a healthy diet as they grow their own, the family size however seems to still be very large. The women are all doing hard work in the fields, more often than not with a baby on their back, and still if you see a man and a woman walking, the man is in front carrying nothing, and the woman will be behind with a baby on her back and something like a whole stand of bananas on her head!



We chatted to three Germans at the tea house, and they were completely amazed that we were travelling on our own with no driver, and just a map. They had been to see the gorillas in Uganda and were going on to do the same in Rwanda a few days later.

We carried on down to the valley and villages, and for the first time in four days we hit a tarmac road! It was a good road and we headed for Kabale and then on to Gatuna the border town.



The crossing looked as chaotic as when we came north with loads of queuing big trucks, and both sides of the road blocked, but we followed the example of a car further up and blundered forward until we found a way through to park. We had to do various things for the car and ourselves to leave Uganda, but we already knew where all the different offices were, so got through that part fairly easily. We then drove through the mystery no mans land with also parked trucks, and got into the Rwanda side, where we had to go through similar proceedings. I had to pay for another visa as they are only single entry, but never mind, we got as far as the final gate and the chap did not want to let us through because of a car paper, but eventually he got fed up with us showing him all the papers we had and waived us through.



Immediately in Rwanda the roads are wonderful, the villages are neat and there is a sense of order and cleanliness. I took a photo of a poster at the border which suggests that people take back the attributes to their own country. One of the first is that you are not allowed any plastic bags

We drove down, down through the mountains to Kigali (about 2 hours), and got a glimpse of the few high rise buildings on one of the hills there. Sheilagh knowing her way around negotiated the city and we headed up another hill to her house and such a welcome from the five dogs. The security guard was there and the gardener, as well as Olive and her two month old baby Joshua, who looks after the house.

Busy with hair washing and unpacking, then diary and internet, before a little relaxation and out to dinner when the storm subsides.

Rwanda Day 7 Friday 7th October 2016

Last night we walked around 15 minutes up the hill after the rain. It is perfectly safe to walk around here. We came to a 'boutique hotel' called Urban Blu in Kiyovu. We ate on the roof with fantastic views of Kigali spread out below. Sheilagh had a tofu dish and I had fish from the lake or river which was quite delicious. By the time we were home and had adjusted our watches back an hour, it was time for bed.



Olive, Sheilagh's housekeeper and her two month old baby Joshua

This morning was leisurely with the dogs and washing and sitting out on the terrace before heading out around 11 am for some jobs in town, having caught up on internet stuff with a good connection! Beth arrives from Namibia tomorrow morning at 7:50 and we are heading out for a tea plantation, then on to Lake Kivu for our Rwandan adventure..

Downtown we fixed the transfer of money for gorilla trekking at the bank and got Sheilagh's ipad fixed at the apple dealer.



Just as everything was going smoothly we discovered that we had been clamped where we were parked as it was raining, Sheilagh went off to the police station in a taxi, and I sat in the car! Sheilagh arrived and a little later the police (two cars). Sheilagh had charmed the superintendent, and with much apologising, someone was ordered to unclamp, and Sheilagh was giving the British Council address to offer English lessons for the police if the government would pay!

Next, I was dropped at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, where I spent a sobering hour and a half, ending with a cup of mint tea in their cafe. The memorial is the burial site of over 250,000 people killed in a three month period during Rwanda's 1994 genocide. Interestingly it was created and managed by the U.K. Based Aegis Trust (a non-sectarian, non governmental genocide prevention organisation). I believe they have done the holocaust memorial in Nottinghamshire. Aegis operates a rebuilding lives programme to help widows and orphans of the genocide, and a peace building education programme educating a new generation about dangers of prejudice and helping to establish trust

between the children in of survivors and perpetrators.

The memorial was very well organised, very moving, and for me enhanced by the headset giving background to each part of the exhibition. There were various movies with survivors speaking of their experiences, their loss, and the sheer awfulness of genocide. Possibly the thing that struck me most was how young the survivors talking were - many of course were quite young in 1994, so it is only 22 years on. Sheilagh was just telling me that one of her colleagues who I just met only this year had her Mother's bones identified by DNA, so that she could give her a proper burial. Rwanda has really moved forward so quickly since then, and development has been rapid under Kagame.

Sheilagh picked me up at 4 pm and we went to have the car cleaned inside and out - wow, what a difference, and a thorough job was done ready for our next trip up country. We then went to her new office briefly, before heading home to the dogs!

We went out to meet two of Sheilagh's friends at an Ethiopian restaurant which turned out to be a lively evening. Tanya works with Sheilagh at the British Council, and Phillipa works for the Save the Children. Both have worked all over the world, and Phillipa moved here in June from Myanmar and knew an old friend of mine from Japan and Taiwan days called Barbara Luksch, who has just moved to Kuwait - small world!

The food was delicious- you eat everything with your hands using a pancake like substance called injira. There were lots of beans and vegetable dishes on an enormous shared platter - I don't think I have ever had this before.

Late home

Rwanda Day 8 Saturday 8th October 2016

Beth's imminent arrival was on our mind, and we made it out to the airport about half an hour after her flight was due to arrive. It took Beth a while to come through, but we were so pleased to have her here but unfortunately her luggage did not make it here. She had flown from Windhoek via Johannesburg and Nairobi, so it could be anywhere.

No matter we will manage, and it will catch up with us. We came back and sat out for a leisurely breakfast. Then packing and preparing for our trip. It is a glorious morning.

We finally left around 2pm with no news about Beth's baggage. They have promised it will catch up with us, however remote we are. We headed up and out of Kigali heading North West and climbing high up into the hills for about three quarters of an hour up a ridge, looking left and right down steep well cultivated-hillsides, and passing through lots of small villages where life was going on along the roadside. It felt different as it was a Saturday. There were more people around with bicycles, and carrying things back from the market. Ahead of us were several army vehicles, and some had bicycles hanging on behind to get them up the hill. We saw this before, of course totally dangerous, but you can understand how helpful it would be!

We turned off the main road in a busy market village and headed up on dirt roads into the Sorwathe Tea Plantation 19 kms inland.



We passed so many people along the road going home from the market carrying everything from food to mattresses and even beds on their bicycles. To me one of the main features was that every other women had a baby on her back. Apparently post

Genocide 40% of the population is under 14. The big challenge is schooling and more important teachers. I made a mistake yesterday in that Phillipa works for Save the Children Fund, not Red Cross, and last night over dinner we were discussing the issues that face Rwanda. Much money has been put into buildings, not into teachers.



Unloading new tea bushes

We got held up briefly with a truck unloading young tea bushes ready for planting. There was a real flurry of team activity helping, so we stopped to have a look more closely. Onwards and indeed upwards we went with tea covered hillsides till we reached the factory and guest house at the very top. It is a fabulous setting and the views out are tremendous.



View from the tea plantation lodge

We were greeted by Francis who will cook for us, and we have two amazing suites with several rooms, a fire and dining table in each. We chose the rooms, and were then invited for tea overlooking the mountain ranges to the West. We had both green and black tea from the plantation to sample, and could hear the distant sounds of the villages below, with cattle and children's noises floating upwards. This is such a fabulous and peaceful spot - a great getaway for Sheilagh for a weekend, and a haven for us on Beth's first night here.

Francis made us the most amazing meal up here with all the fresh vegetables. He built a charcoal fire in a terracotta pot with holes which glowed with the fire. He brought this to the table under the canopy, and we ate outside. We had soup to begin with, and a dessert afterwards made of creamed avocado with a little mint. It was all delicious with fresh vegetables and a rather healthy feast.

After all this we retired early, and all had ten hours sleep!

Rwanda Day 9 Sunday 9th October 2016

Well rested, we woke to a clear view over the volcanoes which form part of the Virunga Mountains, which is a range of nine volcanoes, six extinct and three active which straggle Rwanda's borders with Uganda and the Congo. It is here that we will go to see the mountain gorillas that straggle these ranges. The morning view was clear over the tea plantation, and we tried to identify which volcanoes we were seeing. We had a wander

down to the tea factory before breakfast and took a photo of a steam train it was mounted on a plinth and did not seem real. Apparently they have just laid a corner stone of a new railway to be built all across East Africa by the Chinese, this will probably take awhile to be finished.

Breakfast overlooking the volcanoes was fabulous starting with a fruit compote served in a knickerbocker glory glass. There was passion fruit, pineapple, papaya and banana, and an accompanying avocado. omelette and toast followed, there was a toaster with a long lead on the table! There was plenty of tea and coffee served in flasks, so we sat a long time enjoying the ambience.



Morning view over the tea plantation with the distant volcanoes in Virunga National Park where we were heading to see the mountain gorillas

Sheilagh called Rwanda Air to learn that Beth's bag had arrived in Kigali, but then it took a while to find out when and where they could deliver it as we are upcountry. They do not work on Sundays, so tomorrow it will be delivered (we hope) to our lodging in Musanze from where we will go canoeing in the afternoon, and the following day go to see the gorillas.

We left around 11 am for a fascinating 3 hour drive to the north and west and the Congolese border on Lake Kivu at Gisenyi. This being Sunday, and a very Christian country, almost no-one was working anywhere. Instead people were parading along the roadsides either going to or from Church in their Sunday best. This applied to our first 19 kms on dirt road, but even more so when we hit the tarmac heading north through the

mountains. I already knew that Rwanda was the most populous country in Africa, but the entire route of three hours there were people walking along the roads. The women all were wearing their long wraparound, but some were very beautiful with matching tops and hats - the men often wore suits or shirts, and nearly everyone was on foot, just a few pushbikes, mainly around small villages.

Rwanda is also the land of 1000 hills, so we wound our way up and down mountains, mostly heavily cultivated, with bananas, tea or vegetables - there were eucalyptus trees along the way, and tantalising glimpses of the volcanoes every so often. Around 2 pm we descended to the edge of Lake Kivu which runs along the Congolese border for 90 kms. It is part of a string of inland seas that submerge the - Albertine Rift Valley from Sudan to Zambia. The hills come down to the lake, and there are a few small islands which make it very attractive.



View of Lake Kivu from our tent at Inzu Lodge

Sheilagh had scoped out a tented camp to stay a little to the south, so we landed at Inzu Lodge (Inzu means home in Rwandan). This place would be equally at home in Bali, with aesthetic thatched rooved cottages and our covered tents, all set in lovely gardens overlooking Lake Kivu.

We felt very much at home. There are simple shared toilets and showers and we have two tents which look absolutely comfortable. Time for tea and a relaxing read.

Rwanda Day 10 Monday 10th October

Dinner of Quesadilla and salad was a great change for us. On the way here we had seen many carrots being packaged for market, and we had lots of grated carrot in the salad. We were not late in retiring to our tents under the mosquito nets which made life very cosy. The simple drop toilet was close by!

We were awake before 6am, and the local army were out on exercise doing their chanting. Having the Congolese border in the middle of the lake, and reading a lot of the recent history of this region brings it all into perspective. Breakfast was a feast with lots of tropical fruits including the tree tomato, and I had homemade waffles and honey, which brought back memories of my trip around America in 1970!

We had a wonderful sighting of the Long-crested eagle perched on a telegraph pole, and other birds were different from those we have been seeing, though we could not necessarily identify in detail apart from sunbird or bulbul!

We had a lovely trip down to the market - some boats had just come in and there was a huge market. This was colourful and chaotic and probably had more bananas than anything else, but there were pineapples, charcoal, onions, pineapples, tomatoes, cabbages and many other items. The women were colourfully dressed, and of course there were many babies on backs! This was a great photo opportunity.



Morning market on Lake Kivu



Most of the women had babies on their backs





We left around 11 am and drove up away from the lake to Musanze about an hour and a half away. There were again people all along the road, but this time they had a purpose and were either going to or coming from market, or the fields or to school. We took awhile to find the new guest house begun by a former colleague of Sheilagh and her Rwandan partner. Neither of them are there at the moment, so Isaac's sister was running the place. She was very welcoming, but had very limited language, so there were a few misunderstandings. At the same time Beth's suitcase was due to be brought there from Kigali, and Sandrine the lady from Kingfisher canoes arrived with two canoes. Everything fell into place around 1:30, and we were off with the canoes to first pick up our gorilla passes for tomorrow, and then to head to the river Mukungwa which flows out of Lake Ruhonda, which is renowned as a good birding sight.

Once we were in the canoes, which in itself was a bit traumatic, going down a very steep muddy slope - I managed to fall in the canoe head first! Beth and I were sharing and Sandrine and Sheilagh in the other. Initially the river was calm, and we had the most amazing bird sightings, including the Maribou Stork, the Hamerkop, the Glossy Ibis, the African Sacred Ibis and the Hadada ibis. All these are large, and we had such good views of them on the river banks. We also saw weavers, Malokite Kingfisher and lots of unknowns. The land was well cultivated with many people growing beans and sweet corn, yams and potatoes, and obviously it is all very productive, and not a machine in sight - everything all over Rwanda is done by hand still, and the produce carried many a mile.



We were warned and shown what to do when we hit the rapids, so we managed the first lot rather well - just a little excitement. The next difficult bit on our 10 km journey was getting out and straddling a log foot-bridge while Sandrine dragged the canoe over. We thought this was it, when we came to a rapid set of shallow water with mud banks in the side and in the middle. We were less prepared for this, and Beth and I hit the bank and capsized. This was very difficult as the boat was on one side and stuck. Beth was hanging on above the boat with her legs in the fast stream, while I was swept down stream in the fast flow, and could not grab the bank. In the end I managed to get on a mud bank in the middle, all the time shouting Beth are you all right. She did respond, it took a while to crawl up the slippery mud to Beth and the canoe. Beth was hanging on for dear life, and although she had a life vest, it was sapping her energy. In hindsight, I should have said to let go and she would have gone under the canoe and down stream with the flow - there were no rocks in the water. Meanwhile Sandrine had realised there was something wrong and managed to come up on the top of the bank to try and help. Fortuitously a farmer came along on the other side of the bank and came into the water and managed to heave Beth onto dry land. If he had not come along we would not have managed.

So now, we are all saved, it we had to get the canoe back in the water, which Sandrine and I did, then I had to get in and bail out, then Beth had to get in, and then Sandrine to go down the rapids to where poor Sheilagh was waiting rather worried. Sandrine got back in the other canoe and the two canoes went the last stretch down together which was quite short.



The driver and helpers got the canoes out the water, and we were all a bit shivery and very wet.

The good news is that we were all safe and sound. Beth had bruised ribs and shins, and had lost her flip flops and sarong. I had lost my flip flops, but also my glasses - thank heavens I had another pair back at the guest house. The drive back was not too long, and Sheilagh had called ahead to ask the hot water to be put on, so Beth and I got out of the wet clothes while Sheilagh went out to get a pizza. We were all a bit traumatised, but thankfully could talk about it all. Beth came over faint and collapsed before bed, but we all finally went to bed and slept like logs ready for the next adventure!

Rwanda Day 11 Tuesday 11th October 2016

In one way, this is the day we were all anticipating as we were off to see the Mountain gorillas in the Volcanoes National Park. This area is the Rwandan sector of the Virunga Mountains which straddle Congo, Uganda and Rwanda. There are just over 800 Mountain gorillas in the whole world, and they are in these mountains, so can be visited from all three countries. We had of course all heard about Dian Fossey and her work in the field, and then later all saw the amazing film about her life in *Gorillas in the Mist*, but here we were going to see the very same gorillas.

Gorilla Conservation and Gorilla Tourism have been so well managed in Rwanda that it is thought to be one of the most successful stories in the world today. The management is such that it costs a lot of money to go, there are only around 70. People allowed in any one day, and they are divided into groups of 8 people with each subgroup tracking a different family. We started out at 6 am and everyone congregates where the passes are

scrutinised and we are divided into groups. While this was going on the local village had dancers and drummers performing for us. This was not naff, but a joyous occasion with the musicians, singers and dancers all enjoying themselves while making money for the local community.



Such a happy bunch of people at 6:30 in the morning!

Our driver was Francis, who had bought his Land Rover in the Middle East and shipped it over to Rwanda. The road was extremely tough and of the three vehicles going up, the other two got stuck, so we were lucky. We were off to see the Hirwa group with our guide Patrick, a family of three from UK, and a very active octogenarian couple from Philadelphia USA. We hiked up through the potato fields and pyrethrum which is used for insect repellent. The group was delightfully controlled by Patrick who chose Cynthia and Beth as his Queens and kept them at the front.



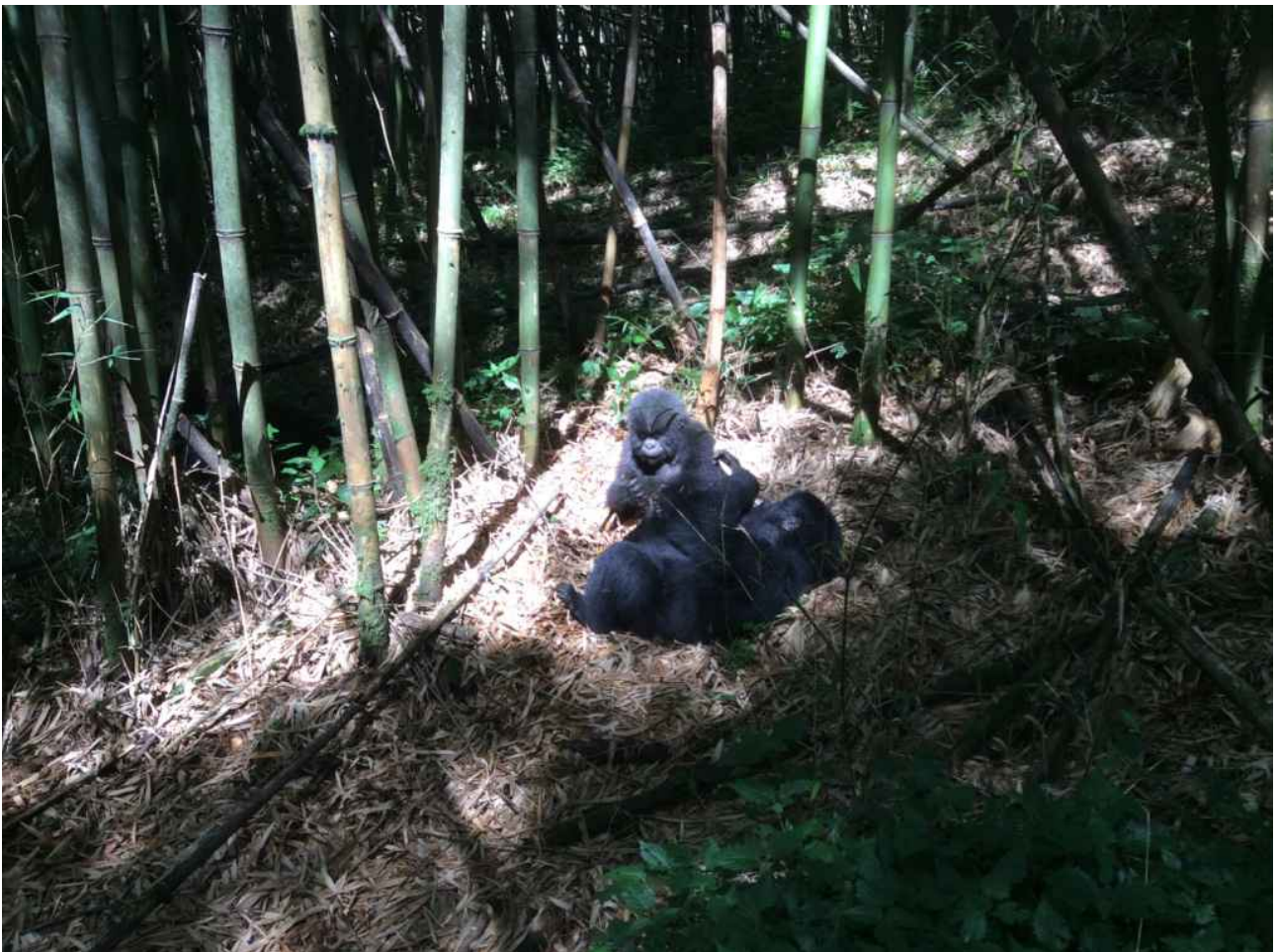
Patrick, our guide with the walking poles

We steadily progressed up to the barrier to the mountain where we met the trackers who carry rifles in case buffalo attack. We entered bamboo groves, and hiked between them. The trackers are the men who follow the groups every day and know where they might be for the morning viewing.



These are the trackers who follow the Hirwa group of Mountain Gorillas

We entered the protected area in a thick bamboo forest, and did not walk very far before we were told that the Hirwa were nearby and that we must keep very quiet. Well, I was really not prepared for how very close we would be, and how mesmerising it would be to watch this family. The large Silverback who is the head of the troop was there, and lots of much smaller ones, some very young. The younger ones were playing around with one another and swinging on creepers, at one point they were squabbling and the silverback came across and sorted them out. They eat bamboo shoots, so would rootle around in the undergrowth and get them out, or get stems and leaves from the bamboo. The bigger ones would climb to the top of the bamboo and weigh it down so that the others could feed. There was a lot of bamboo crashing and little ones climbing up and sliding down.



We moved along with them, and stayed with them for just an hour. They were unphased by our presence and would walk between us.



The silverback who is head of this group of 33 Hirwa

At one point one actually came right by me and touched me. The ranger and tracker were there at all times, and made grunting noises to the gorillas. It was all fascinating , and felt like such a privilege to be among them. We were thrilled and exhilarated by the experience.



The rest of the day was rather mundane as we went back to the guest house, packed up, had a coffee and headed back to Kigali up and over the mountains and ridges. It is an easy drive, Sheilagh is an excellent driver, and the speed limit is 60 mph and 40 in villages. There is little traffic on the road with a few crazy mini buses, a few trucks and even fewer cars. What will happen when all the motorcycle folks get cars, all the bicycle folk get motorbikes and all the walkers get bicycles could be crazy.

We did some washing, walked the dogs and ate at a lovely restaurant called 'Heaven', but were all very tired. Beth slept in 'my' room, I slept with Coco in Sheilagh's room, and she slept in the box room.

Rwanda Day 12 Wednesday 12th October 2016

A day of travel to the South West and the Congolese border at the bottom of Lake Kivu at a place called Rusizi. The countryside was a little different, but there were still many many people everywhere and the land was cultivated to the very top of all the mountains. We went through rice growing areas and tea growing areas, but then all the usual bananas, potatoes, yams and greens were being cultivated.

Our first stop was around 11 am when we stopped at Nyanza, where in 1899 the King, Mwami Musingi Yuhi V selected a hill in the town as his permanent capital and built his palace. The Rukali Palace Museum has a replica of his traditional palace alongside the newer palace built by his son Rudahigwa Mubarak III in 1932. Just before he died in 1959, he was building a new two story more European Palace on the opposite hill. He never lived to see it completed. His brother inherited the title, but in 1961 the traditional monarchy was abolished and his brother went into exile in the States. He is still alive and lives in Washington DC.

We had a good guide in Jean d'Amour and started with the traditional woven buildings,

the first included the most enormous King's bed, learning some of the court ways, before seeing the milk production and banana and sorghum beer production smaller buildings, and then the Long Horned Kings cows. These are amazing beasts with fantastic long white horns. They were much prized by the King and used to parade for ceremonial purposes. Now the herd is kept going, and we saw some lovely specimens. Milk is a very important commodity and is still given away ceremonially and should never be refused.

The palace built in 1932 and lived in by the King and his wife until 1959 was quite simple, and the rooms had some authentic furniture, some had been ransacked during the Genocide. There were photographs and maps, and we learned some of the history through this. In the 15th century Rwanda was a tiny province, and slowly expanded until it had land right up to Lake Edward in current day Uganda and the Congo. Now that land has become part of these modern day countries, but some people still speak Kinyirwanda in those areas.

There were photos of the old King, who was tall and thin and had prominent teeth, then of course his son was seen visiting western countries wearing a suit it was all very interesting, and a good way to break the journey.

We drove on down to Huye which is the home of the National University of Rwanda and a vibrant student town. The British Council had organised a performance of Hamlet by the Globe Theatre here to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare last year. Sheilagh knew a coffee shop in the University area, so we had a pleasant stop. The Huye coffee is very good, and Beth and I had a chapati filled with avocado and boiled egg, which was a great combination.



Beth and Sheilagh in Huye

The last 150 kms took us down through the Nyungwe Forest National Park, when I say down, the road wound up and down with many many bends, and we were in what appeared to be Impenetrable tropical forest again. We saw a few Mountain Monkeys at the road side, these were quite pretty small monkeys with white whiskers, shoulders and tail tip. We stopped at the Uwinka reception centre to find out about the walks and the times they leave tomorrow before heading the last hour down to the Lake through tea plantations. It was a great journey, and we arrived at the Emeraude Kivu Resort just as it was getting dark. Sheilagh had stayed here in late December, and it has a wonderful location overlooking the lake, and the simple bridge to the Congo, so all the lights are the much bigger settlement over the border.



View of the Congo across Lake Kivu from the hotel

The rooms were very lovely with high ceilings and long drop mosquito nets, and I think we will be very comfortable for our two night stay. We gathered on the veranda restaurant for supper and beer. Apparently it is quite busy with business people going to and from the Congo, coming back to spend the evening here and going in the daytime to do business. We have yet to see if there are any tourists, but possibly not as it is a bit remote, though absolutely beautiful.

Rwanda Day 13 Thursday 13th October 2016

I woke around 5:45 to the sound of fishermen singing in their dugout canoes on the Congo side of the Lake (just offshore). Beth and I both had the best night ever with peace

and comfortable beds.

We had a good buffet breakfast before setting off to hike in the Nyungwe Forest National Park. The weather was set fair as we climbed the 50 kms back up to the Uwinka Reception Centre for a 10 am start on what turned out to be a three hour hike in the Nyungwe Forest.



Our ranger guide was another Jean d'Amour, who was a gentle soul, and knew so many trees, their uses medicinally and other uses. We descended slowly into the forest along well-maintained trails, although at times they were quite steep. We were following the Igishigishigi Trail, which means Fern trail, and indeed below us there were tree ferns.



We were heading for a Canopy Walkway. Constructed in 2010 by the Canadians, it is suspended between higher slopes and giant trees over a valley. There were three sections, one was 45 m, the next 90 m, and the last one 25 m. It was quite wobbly, and difficult to take photos when you were out there in the middle, but it was equally just an amazing feat of engineering.



We saw a few but heard more birds, especially the Great Blue Touraco, a bright blue sun bird, and then some mountain monkeys which are just so sweet, small and with white neck band. All in all we had a brilliant time, and even at the end Jean d'Amour showed us some orchids the researchers were growing at their campsite.



At the Nyungwe Forest Lodge

We had a cup of tea at the reception centre, then headed back towards the Lake. We were side-tracked in the tea plantation area to visit the Nyungwe Forest Lodge, owned by World Hotels in the Middle East. This was one of the most amazing hotels in the most beautiful settings in the middle of a tea plantation. It was so sympathetically built of dark wood. We got a guided tour by Emmanuel who had worked there for nine years. It was so beautiful, with the rooms just visible from the central block. We were shown the presidential suite where the President of Benin had stayed for 15 days. At a cost of \$1300 per night, we wondered where that money came from! They are soon to close for 3 months to change the interior of all the rooms - ludicrous! We did like having a look round though!

Back down to the Congolese border which is so simple - little wooden bridge separates these two countries. Local people were going too and fro, but it looked as though no more vehicles would go this evening.



Sunset over Congo

We were treated to a great sunset on our return to our lodge - time to relax and eat dinner on the verandah.

Rwanda Day 14 Friday 14th October 2016

I have been reading 'Season of Blood' A Rwandan Journey by Fergal Keane while here, and trying to understand more about the Genocide. He writes so very eloquently and in such a way that I have far more understanding of what was going on in 1994, as well as the failures of the outside world to intervene. The brutal murder of one million people is described in vivid detail, and previous scraps of knowledge are coming into focus.



Morning view of the Congo over Lake Kivu at its southernmost point

As we drove north through heavily cultivated land, with the usual schoolchildren and workers going to the fields along the side of the roads, we all reflected on the future of Rwanda. Kagame has done such an amazing job in uniting the people and encouraging everyone to work cooperatively for the good of their communities for example on the last Saturday of each month there is something called Umuganda, when each sector and the whole country stop working, and all transport are stopped between 8 and 12, and each 'cell' has their own community project which people work on together, then there is a meeting to discuss any local issues in the the community, and what can be done about it, and then plan what they want to do the next month.

We took a newly surfaced road which followed Lake Kivu northwards, up and down the hills, with tantalising glimpses of the lake below, the colour reminding me of the Dalmatian Coast in the old Yugoslavia! We stopped in Karongi for a drink at Bethanie hotel by the Lake - this was a beautiful spot where Sheilagh had run some workshops. I was interested to read that it had an elevation of 1486m and was 2 degrees south of the Equator and 29 degrees East of the Greenwich meridian.



View of islands in Lake Kivu from Karonga

The last stretch into Kigali had some traffic which slowed us down and took us about two and a half hours, and suddenly we were back in the city hubbub. The chaotic areas are around the bus station and then in the market, it the traffic still moves - Sheilagh coping admirably with the bicycles and motorbikes which weave in and out. We stopped at a supermarket to buy tea and coffee, then a craft shop for Beth, and bought bread before heading back to a warm welcome from the dogs.

A bit of sorting, showering and relaxing before going out to eat at an Indian restaurant called Zaafran. We each chose a vegetarian dish to share, and had naan and roti to go with it - it was quite delicious.

Around 10:30 we took Beth to the airport for her long journey back to Windhoek. We discovered next morning that her flight had been delayed four hours and she was still at the airport at 6:15 in the morning - so much for Kenyan Airlines.

By the time we got back around 11:30, we were really tired and it was still hot, so with city noises and the heat it was actually quite hard to sleep.

Rwanda Day 15 Saturday 15th October 2016

A leisurely start to the day, trying to finish my book! We had breakfast and coffee on the terrace, then set off mid-morning to walk the five dogs. The walk was made more pleasant as there was little traffic, and there were areas where the dogs could be let off the

lead. They were hot (and so were we) by the time we had been up and down a few steep hills. A cool shower was in order on our return.

We had decided to explore the Muslim area of Kigali, which was just half an hours walk uphill. This was colourful and interesting, and we found a women's initiative project where women were sitting making products from the colourful local fabrics, and they were being sold on the premises. This has really empowered a group of women and they are running other initiatives such as leading groups around the area. We continued to wander along to the mosque and saw quite a few clothes stands hairdressers and tailors - all very simple little shops. On the way back we found a market full of second hand clothes from different countries of the world - presumably given to charities - that was rather sordid, and I hoped some of them would end up with the people needing them. The walk back was really lovely along a dirt track with colourful flowering trees and shrubs, and with lovely views over the city. There really is a lot of green in the city - let us hope that is preserved, and more parks are available for everyone to enjoy.

We were again very thirsty on our return, and had cold drinks, then tea. I had a final shower and a final pack before we had a light tea of samosas and salad. The flight is at 8:20 via Entebbe to Amsterdam, arriving early morning, then I connect on the 9:30 shuttle to Humberside.

What an amazing adventure this has been, thanks to Sheilagh's inside knowledge and hospitality. I have learned a great deal about Rwanda from the genocide onwards, and we have covered much of the country by car, so have seen first hand how things are today. In one way the countryside seems over populated, with every inch of ground cultivated, with everything being done by hand - I never saw a machine or tractor being used. There are huge strides in education in every district, there are many projects being led by NGO's, and President Kagame is determined to bring Rwanda into the 21st century..

We stayed in so many lovely places with very peaceful nights by the lake or in the mountains. In Rwanda a major highlight had to be tracking the gorillas, whereas in Uganda we drove among wildlife and birds quite freely which was wonderful.

Where next? Maybe Ethiopia!