claimed represented the source of the Nile and which is now the Murchison Falls – the Mountains of the Moon. Seventeen centuries passed before the explorer Henry Stanley placed the Rwenzori on the modern map. On the 24th May 1888. He labeled it ‘Ruwenzori’, a local name that he recorded as meaning ‘rain maker’ or ‘cloud-king.’ In the years since Stanley’s 1888 visit, the Rwenzori has become established as one of Africa’s great mountaineering adventures, offering the chance to ascend snow peaks and walk on equatorial glaciers that represent the highest and most intriguing source of the Nile. Though the range is now established as the Rwenzori, the Mountains of the Moon tag remains apt for the higher contours are the domain of a weird and wonderful botany that impart a distinctly alien feel. Unlike other mountainous regions, moreover, the high Rwenzori really does feel like a place apart, after starting a trek, a week can pass without a glimpse of the real world that lies beyond.

The Rwenzori range, which lies on the Uganda-Congo border on the edge of the Albert Rift Valley, measures approximately 110km long and 50km wide. The high Rwenzori bears six distinct mountains, Mt Stanley (5109m), Speke (4890m), Emin (4797m), Gessi (4715m) and Luigi da Savoia (4627m), all of which bear their own crown of peaks. Though its summit is the third highest point in Africa, after the volcanic Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya, the Rwenzori, which is an unfaultered block, is the mountain range.

Trails ascend to the peaks from Kilembe, Mihunga and Katebwa. Make no mistake; climbing the mountain is steep. Conditions are cold and wet, the terrain is tough and boggy and a week or more is needed to reach (and descend from) Mount Stanley. But with the help of local Bakonzo guides and porters, the mountain can be climbed and the rewards are vast. Indeed your Rwenzori experience will likely rank among your most challenging and satisfying achievements.

WILDLIFE

The park is also home to 18 mammal species, 217 bird species, 9 species of reptiles and 6 species of amphibians. Large mammals, including elephant, buffalo, giant forest hog, bushbuck, chimpanzee and leopard are present in the forest zone; but are rarely seen. Though elephant droppings are frequently found and chimpanzees heard while blue monkeys and leopards are present in the forest zone, but are rarely seen. Though elephant droppings are frequently found and chimpanzees heard while blue monkeys and leopards are present in the forest zone, but are rarely seen. Wildlife is scarce in the harsh environment higher up the mountain but watch for the scarlet-tufted malachite sunbird feeding on lobelia flowers and the endangered lammergeyer soaring overhead.

The main wildlife attraction in Rwenzori Mountains National Park is its vegetation, for standing over 5000m above sea level, forested for 500m contour, is montane forest. This gives way to the bamboo (2500-3000m) followed by groves of Rapanea, then to montane heath that is encased in garishly coloured mosses (3000-4000m). Above 4000m, the mountainside opens out into montane meadows, apt for the higher contours are the domain of a weird and wonderful botany that impart a distinctly alien feel. Unlike other mountainous regions, moreover, the high Rwenzori really does feel like a place apart; after starting a trek, a week can pass without a glimpse of the real world that lies beyond.

The Bakonzo people have lives on the slopes of the Rwenzori for generations and the mountain is central to their culture and cosmology. The peaks are the home of their principal god, Kitasamba, whose name is not be spoken on the mountain. Eighteen sacred Konzo sites on the mountain have been identified, mapped and protected as worship areas.

ACCESS

The Rwenzori Mountains lie along the Uganda-Congo border in western Uganda. The main trailheads are accessed from the farming Fort Portal-Kasese road. Kasese, is 375km from Kampala via Fort Portal (which is 300km from Kampala) and 450km passing via Mbarara. The Kilembe Trailheads at the head of the Nyamwamba Valley, 15km west of Kasese. The Central Circuit Trailhead is located in the Mubuku Valley at Mihunga, 22km from the fort Portal-Kasese road, 25km north of Kasese. For the Bukonkuru Trail, turn off the main road at Nyakigumba midway between Kasese and Fort Portal, and drive for 6km to the trailhead at Katebwa. To reach the shorter Kazinga Trail, follow the surfaced Bundibugyo road out for 9km, then turn left at Bukalasa for 5km. Air transport can also be arranged to Kasese from Kampala’s Kajjansi airfield or Entebbe International Airport.
CLIMATE
The climate on the Rwenzori Mountains is cold and extremely wet. Rainfall is heaviest (sometimes reaching 300mm/month) during March-May and August-December, though even in the drier months some daily rain is common. Though daytime temperatures average 10°C, after dark they drop below freezing. It is common for visibility to be obscured by mist and (on the peaks) snow.

WHEN TO VISIT
The Rwenzori is best climbed during the drier months of January and June-July.

ACCOMMODATION
UWA's concessionaire operators (see below) provide accommodation in basic shelters on the Kilembe and Central Circuit routes. These are provided with wooden sleeping platforms/bunks and climbers should bring their own sleeping bag and camping mat. Kilembe trailhead is served by the Rwenzori Trekking Services Hostel while Nyakalengija has a choice of community-run budget lodgings and the upmarket Equator Snow Lodge. Both trailheads can also be reached from hotels in Kasese and Fort Portal town and tourist lodges in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

ACTIVITIES AND ATTRACTIONS
MOUNTAIN TREKKING
Three routes ascend onto the high Rwenzori. Rwenzori Trekking Services (RTS) operates the Kilembe Trail which enables nine-day expeditions to summit Mount Stanley and a shorter, six day option to the more accessible, but equally scenic, Mt. Luigi da Savoia. The Nyakalengija-based Rwenzori Mountaineering Services runs the Central Circuit which reaches and returns from Mount Stanley in seven days. The Bukurungu Trail ascends from Kitumba to Mount Gessi.

Essential equipment
Be sure to bring the following: sleeping bag, camping mat, warm clothing, gloves, rain gear, including good waterproof trousers, head-mounted torch, lots of plastic bags (to keep fresh clothes dry and to quarantine wet and muddy garments), energy snacks and any necessary medication. Hiking boots are required on the peaks, but on other days, gumboots are more useful. Specialist gear for climbing the peaks can be hired from your trail operator.

FOREST WALKS AND BIRDING
The forest zone, which occupies the lower contours of the national park, can be visited as a day walk from the Kilembe and Nyakalengija trailheads. Happily for birders, this relatively accessible area is where the park's birdlife is concentrated. Look out for the Rwenzori turaco and Rwenzori double collared sunbird and other localized rarities such as the three horned chameleon and Rwenzori colobus.

Forty percent of all park fees are shared with communities in park boundary parishes to share the benefits of ecotourism and generate local support for conservation.

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Abanyarwenzori Mountaineering Association
(Kazingo Trail)
+256 (0) 772 621397 Contact for Bukurungu Trail?

TARIFFS & PAYMENT
For information on park entrance and activity fees, please refer to the UWA tariff sheet at www.ugandawildlife.org. Payments can be made using Uganda shillings, US dollars, British pounds, Euros and Visa. Twenty percent of all park fees are shared with communities in park boundary parishes to share the benefits of ecotourism and generate local support for conservation.

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Peak climbing
The highest peaks on the six mountains that form the high Rwenzori can all be climbed. The most popular is the 5109m Margherita, the highest point on Mount Stanley and the roof of the Rwenzori. Be aware that summiting on Stanley, Speke, and Baker is a physically demanding activity, frequently in bad weather, and for which specialist equipment and technical experience is required. An ascent of Mount Stanley requires a minimum of seven days on the mountain.