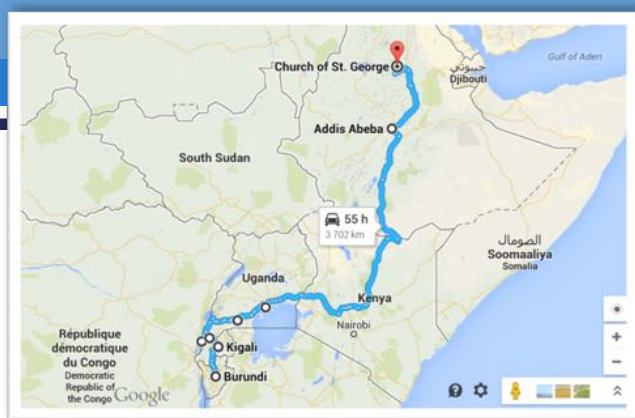


Eastern Africa



Burundi, Rwanda, D R Congo,
Uganda & Ethiopia

July 2014



...A 17 day adventure trip with Gorilla trekking...

...The flight to our first stop on this 17-day adventure went from Stockholm via Vienna, Addis Ababa and Nairobi to Bujumbura in Burundi. Arriving in the afternoon into Bujumbura gave us some time to arrive at our hotel – **The Karera Beach Hotel at Saga Beach** directly on the Lake Tanganyika in a decent time.

Having checked in and washed away the travel-dust we decided to go down to the beach and take the well deserved beer. This when we realized that this Christian Pastor owned joint did not serve beer – disaster! Fortunately there were a few other places neighbouring our hotel, which did indeed have both beer as well a decent food and entertainment. We came to spend most of our time at the more relaxed place **Bora Bora**. With a pool, good food and drinks right on the beach – this is where we settled in during the days and evenings during our 3-day stay in Burundi.

We had been informed that travelling around the country is not all together safe and should be done only cautiously. We therefor took these 4 days as a “rest-up” on the beach venturing into Bujumbura and preparing for our more “packed” journey ahead into Rwanda, D R Congo, Uganda and Ethiopia.





Bujumbura and Lake Tanganyika!

A place to watch out where you go and travel....

...A city of 2 million, Bujumbura does not have much to offer the tourists in terms of sight seeing, hotels or restaurants. This is more of a provincial town. We decided however to find out for our selves so we hitchhiked in from the beach – Lake Tanganyika – where we had our base into town. We started our tour of the city at the local market place and where more or less immediately told by various people not to take photos of people around. We managed however to “charm” our way around some of the local sales women by offering to buy some of their food in exchange for some “shots” – this seemed to work quite well.

The further into the market we came the more crowd it got. And all of a sudden I felt someone with his hand into my pocket. He took off and speed into the crowd of people. As I shouted “Thief” all people seemed to stop and help apprehending the thief. He was also caught quite quickly. The police was also very quickly in place. It got very quickly quite ugly as they lifted up the thief and started to take his clothes of and try and “shake” the stolen money off him. All that came out was a piece of glass, probably used to threaten victims with. The local sales women were all-furious and started to kick and beat the poor guy. He was then taken away into a smaller side street and got beaten up some more from the police. We were asked to testify, but turned this down – saying that we had no further claim against this guy. So be warned and be careful, as a foreigner you do stand out and attract the local thieves trying to make a quick buck.



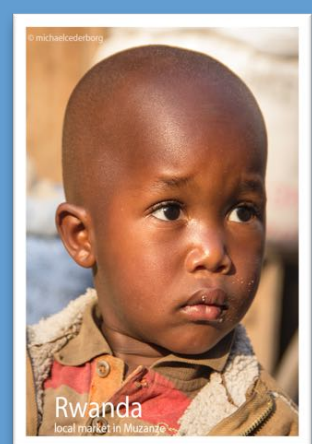


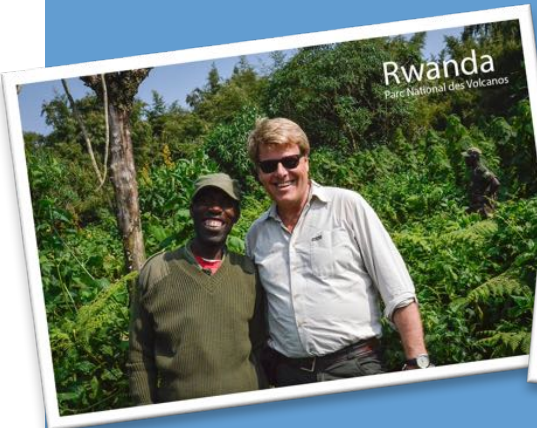
First a stop at the museum of Genocide...



Before leaving Burundi, we had to sort out a little issue with our visa. It turned out we only had a 3-day visa having stayed over 1 day (should have had a much more expensive 5-day visa). This was however sorted out in mutual understanding with the local customs guard. For a marginal cost he escorted us straight through all the checkpoints as if we were VIP's – and “ta-da” everything sorted in no time at all

Our first stop in Kigali was of course to visit the Museum of Genocide. A horrific period in the history of Rwanda (1994) where almost 1 million people were slaughtered in just 3 months. Having visited similar sites in Cambodia, Israel and Germany I noted one big difference. The word “forgiveness” is ever present as the various groups try to reconcile, forgive and move on. Our guide, a Rwandan had as many others lost close family during this period. His brother and his 6 children were killed. Only the wife, miraculously survived, as the perpetrators thought she was dead and therefor left her on the pile of dead bodies. The killers were found, confessed and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. They were paroled as they confessed to these crimes. These two guys now meet up on the day of the killing of the brother and his children with the surviving family once every year to remember this day. Talk about taking forgiveness to the extreme. I'm not sure I could/would have done the same in our Guides' place.





Golden monkeys and more....

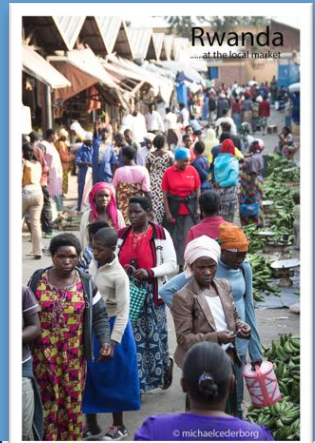
From Kigali to Musanze (Ruhengeri)...

We continued our journey from Kigali after making an “uncalled” stop at a local school. We were invited into the classrooms and had a chance to talk to the students and teachers. This was very interesting.

We drove through some beautiful mountainous landscape all the way to Musanze in the west of Rwanda. We stopped along the way to interact with the locals and what they were selling and doing... This naturally gave us some chance for “photo-ops”. We also made a quick stop at the local market, before checking in at our **lodge – Gorilla Mountain View** in the **Volcanos National Park**. This proved to be quite luxurious lodge considering the alternatives.

On our first full day in the National park we started out **by trekking for the Golden Monkeys**. This was a half-day tour and a fairly light trek mostly along village fields and crops, but also through some thicker vegetation and bamboo forest.

There are only some 5000 of these monkeys left and they all seem to be in Rwanda and this national park. The afternoon was spent in a **village for pygmy**. This did unfortunately not leave me a genuine feeling for how they live and fare. It was quite touristic, but probably gave them an outcome to make a decent living – which one has to respect.





Mountain Gorillas in the mist....

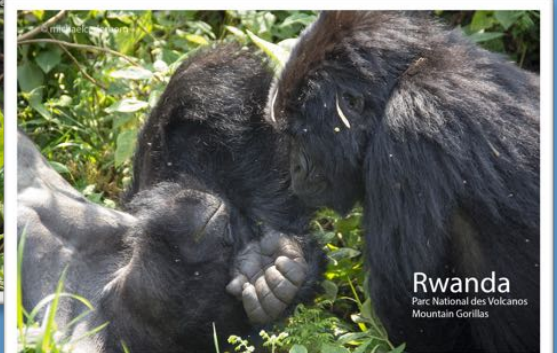
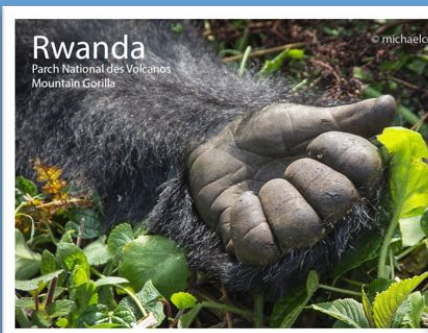
...Time to fulfil my live long wish ...

I have rarely been so excited as when we gathered in the morning for permits and the usual "briefing" on the Gorilla group to visit during the day. It seems we (a group of 8) were very lucky to be assigned the Amahoro group consisting of 25 Mountain Gorillas with only one Silverback in charge of the group.

We took off in our 4-wheel drives to the starting point in the National Park of Volcanos for this morning's trek. We were then informed by the morning "trackers" that the group

Was actually not too far away into the forest at all. Only after one hour's walk and only part of it in thicker vegetation we reached our group.

I can assure anyone who has not yet been, that it is an experience which supersedes any expectations one might have. It was simply exhilarating. We were told to keep a minimum distance of 7 metres. However, we seemed to be more like 2-3 metres away most of the time. At one point a young male also walked right passed us as if we did not exist at all. We had 1 hour with the Gorillas. They seemed not to take much notice of our presence.





Community walk and more pygmies....

...A chance to get a closer look

After our successful encounter with the Mountain Gorillas, we decided to go for a “Community Walk” organized by a local Non-profit organization where the proceeds largely goes back into the local villages.

We walked off with our local guide to visit a school, a local “brewery” and a few families at their homes. All these stops felt very genuine and gave me a “truer” picture of the real situation in the rural areas.

Although much has probably improved over the recent years, it is painfully obvious that farmers in and around the countryside are very poor indeed. They lack most of the necessities such as running water, heating and/or electricity. The schools are compulsory and paid for by the government. However, there is of course a great need of many things also here.

I’ll briefly mention that we also visited the Imbabazi orphanage on the way to Gisenyi. We also made a stop at another Pygmy community (Batwa) in Gisenyi. This last visit felt much more genuine c.w. The encounter we had up around Musanze.





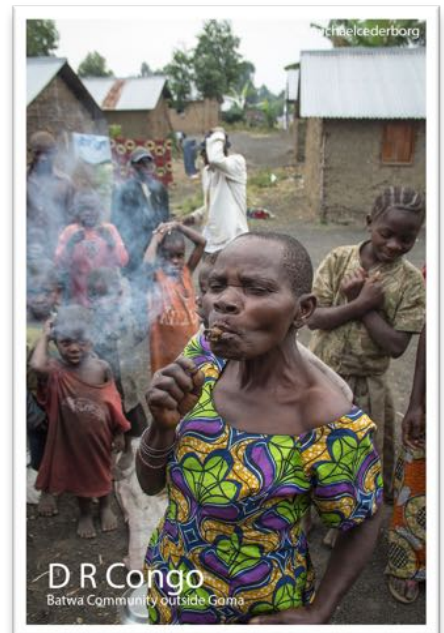
Visit to Orphanage and Pygmies'

...Images which never leaves you – that's for certain...

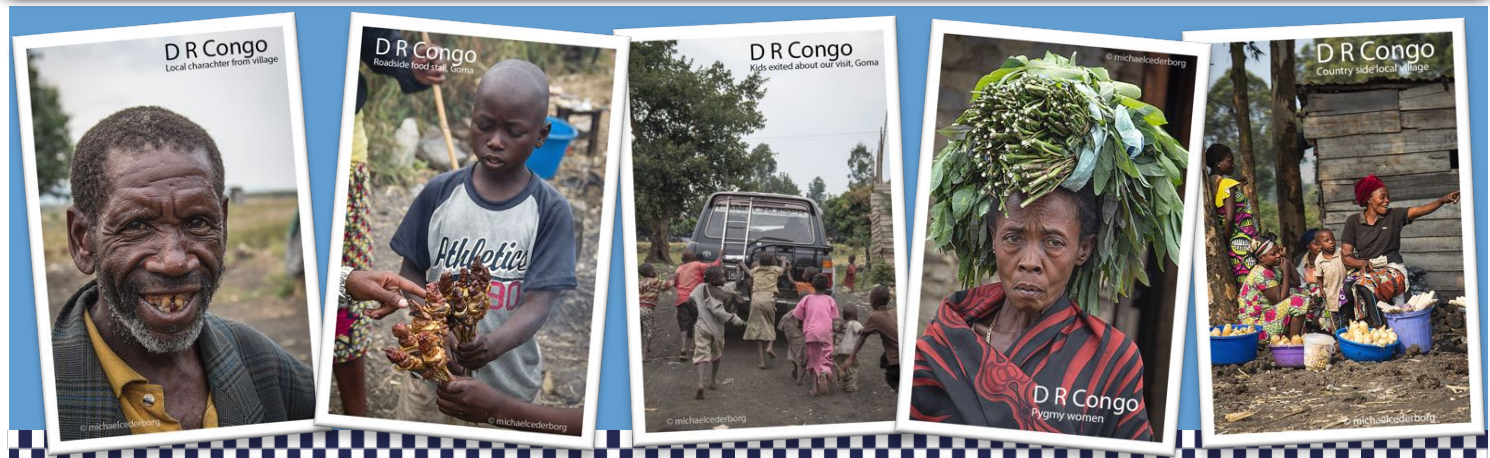


An hours' drive from Goma on very poor roads, we passed some villages and refugee camps along the way including some military checkpoints. **In the small village of Mubambiro we got to meet and interact with a small Pygmy group.** This was anything but "touristic". There had been some relief organizations to help set-up a couple of houses in the area, but other than that I don't think they had been much interaction with westerners. Most of the people lived in man-made sheds and tents. In short, very primitive conditions in deed.

We took some photos, made a few video strips, shared something to smoke (much appreciated) and left water and soft drinks + money. We have since decided to fund and make sure all of the children can be guaranteed schooling in this village. This will be set-up during the fall of 2014.



People and scenes from the rural areas in D R Congo....





Virunga National Park....

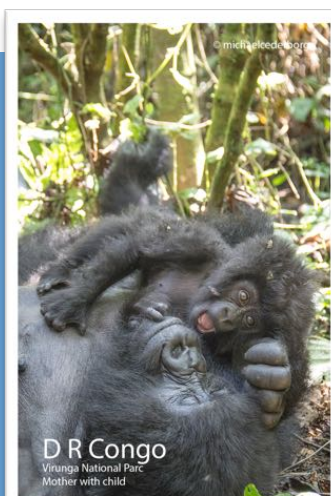
...Time to fulfil a “life long wish” ...

Time for our second Mountain Gorilla trek – this time in the famous **Virunga National Park** (The oldest NP in all Africa).

...A two-hour drive north of Goma, we eventually came into the NP. This is also the area where the M-23 rebel group had their stronghold during the period in 2012 when they seized power in the region. They were eventually ousted, but only after many people were killed. There are still many restrictions in the Park as the authorities are trying to make the area safe for tourists yet again. We came to visit with two prime targets on our list.

1) **To visit the Gorillas** – achieved and 2) **to climb the Nyiragongo Volcano** with its active lava lake – not achieved! The latter because it is still not secured and prepared for “tourists and adventurers”. We stayed at the famous and lovely Mikeno Lodge in inside the Park.

We were only 3 persons staying at the lodge – apart from me and Kristian - a professional photographer was also there and on an assignment. We heard shots one evening, and in the morning on our way to the Park for Gorilla trekking, we went through the nearby village. There we found a crowd in the road. In the middle of the crowd was a shot bandit in a pool of blood – quite dead. On the Gorilla trek it was only me en KR + our ranger and tracker – it felt very genuine. One of the smaller Gorillas came up and touched my hear a couple of times..





“Heal Africa” Project in Goma...

...The need for support is of course endless

A Non-Governmental Humanitarian Organization operating in Northern Kivu District in D R Congo. With previously mostly emergency work after the war, the work is today more focusing on long-term rehabilitation activities as well as preventive work. The support and attention today from foreign aid organizations is unfortunately being reduced, even though the need is still huge.

Reintegration and protection programs for abused women as well as taking care of more than 700 HIV-positive children. The cost of treatment (medicine etc.) is around 16-18 USD / child and month.

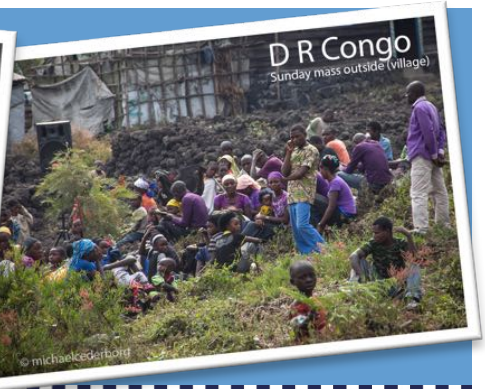
Traumatized women who have been raped during the war (M-23 rebels) as well as having lost their children and/or husbands are treated here. Orthopaedic work and surgery of more than 2450 people have been performed to date. Over 8000 sexually abused women have passed by “Heal Africa” in Goma.

They also offer vocational training as well as schools for the children – many of them HIV-infected.

In order to access this NGO operated project we had to submit a letter and request for specific permit to visit. We were received by the Program Manager and his staff who guided us through the premises. I can truly say it was a heart-breaking visit. All the people volunteering in helping all those in need of treatment overwhelmed me.

We decided to help also here (with my meagre means + friends) to put together some supporting funds to be channelled to a few selected projects/activities within the Project “Heal Africa”. A lot of tears were shed before we left this place right in the heart of Goma.



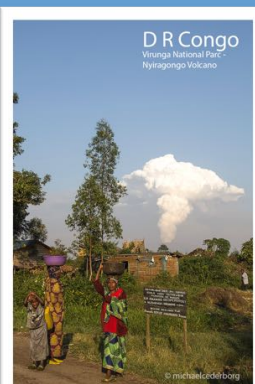
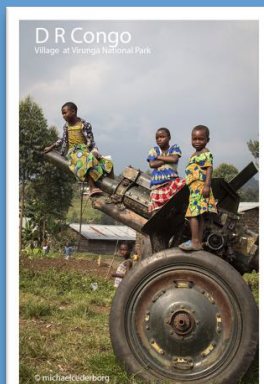


...last impressions of D R Congo



In addition to "Heal Africa" we also made a stop at another amazing and good serving project – The Don Brosco; primarily sponsored with funds from the Italian church.

Here we met with the Italian Pastor and Administrative Manager. We were shown around the premises where primarily orphans were taken in for shelter, food, care and schooling. The older children were partially helping out and doing many of the daily chores. The picture (top left) shows the kitchen where all the food is prepared. The picture (right) shows some of the sick and orphaned children being feed. The Picture (left) a refugee camp sponsored by Oxfam (UK) organization Bottom left – a picture showing kids playing on a Habitu used in the recent war with the M-23 rebels. Rumour has it many of them (not imprisoned) have taken up refuge in Uganda biding their time.





Transiting through Uganda...

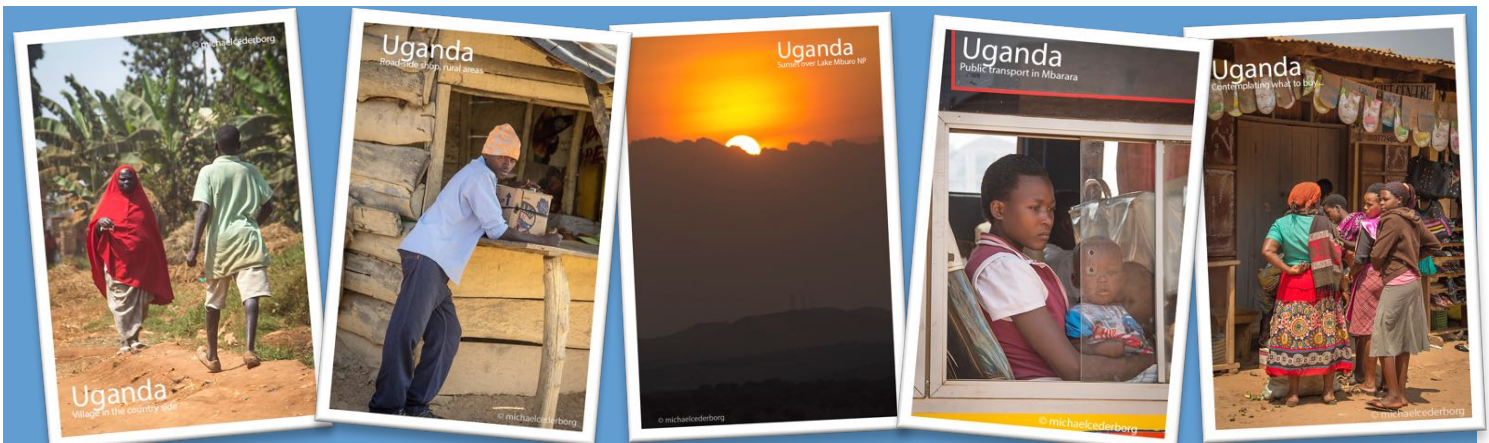
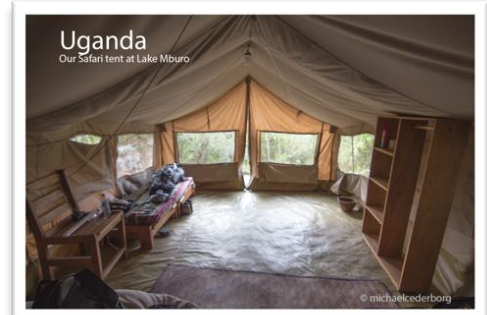
..Stopping over in NP Lake Mburo half way to Entebbe

Stopping over in Musanze (former Ruhengeri) on our way to Uganda we stayed at a famous local hostel, where Dianne Fossey used to stay when in town.

We decided to make use of local transports as much as possible with a stopover at Lake Mburo National Park halfway through to Entebbe near Kampala. It turned out we had to change transport three times before we eventually late in the afternoon arrived at the crossroads to the National Park. We stopped and changed at Kisoro and at the slightly larger town of Mbarara. Here we decided to take the local muto (taxi-mini-bus). It took some 2 hours before they had filled up the bus before departing and setting off. The mini-bus had some 14-seats, but they managed to squeeze in some 25-26 people. I had the pleasure to share seat with a local drunk who stank and kept falling asleep on my shoulder...

The only available room/beds at **Rwakobo Rock Lodge at Lake Mburo** turned out to be a tent. This served our need/purpose just fine. Here we could sleep with only the local Vervet monkeys playing on the canvas from time to time. They were also the same audience watching as I showered outdoors under the blue sky... We stayed 2 nights here and enjoyed the hospitality, good food and bar, offered by the British couple Chris and Katie running the Lodge

On the second day we decided to go on a **Mountain bike Safari trip in the National Park**. It went quite well until I accidentally drove into a termite hole in the grounds and turning 180 degrees landing on my back. Breaking a couple of ribs in the process. Needless to say, two weeks after, I've far from recovered and am still healing





Lalibela – UNESCO world heritage....

With a Stop-over to meet a friend in Addis ...

Lalibela is a 1-hour flight from Addis in the northern Ethiopia famous for its monolithic rock-cut churches from the 12th century.

...This place has been on my to-do list for quite some time now. So when we had a stop-over in Addis or a couple of nights to meet up with an old friend, now working there, what better opportunity could there be to add a visit also to Lalibela. This is a UNESCO world heritage site since 1978, but has not been seen/visited by many westerners primarily due to its difficult to reach location in the northern part of Ethiopia.

The rewards are all the greater when you do reach this place, as there are very few visitors. The month of July being off-season also for the Ethiopians. They primarily come during their Christian high season in the beginning of January.

There are many places to choose from to stay at. One does not need to make prior arrangements. It is just to pick-n-choose upon arrival at the small airport. All lodges are present and try and under-bid each other in offering the best prices including transport. We opted for the **Mountain View Lodge recommended** by my friend in Addis who had recently stayed there. It was located on the top of the hill with an absolutely magnificent view (2000 m above sea level). Detailed information on the Lalibela site can be found on Wikipedia.

