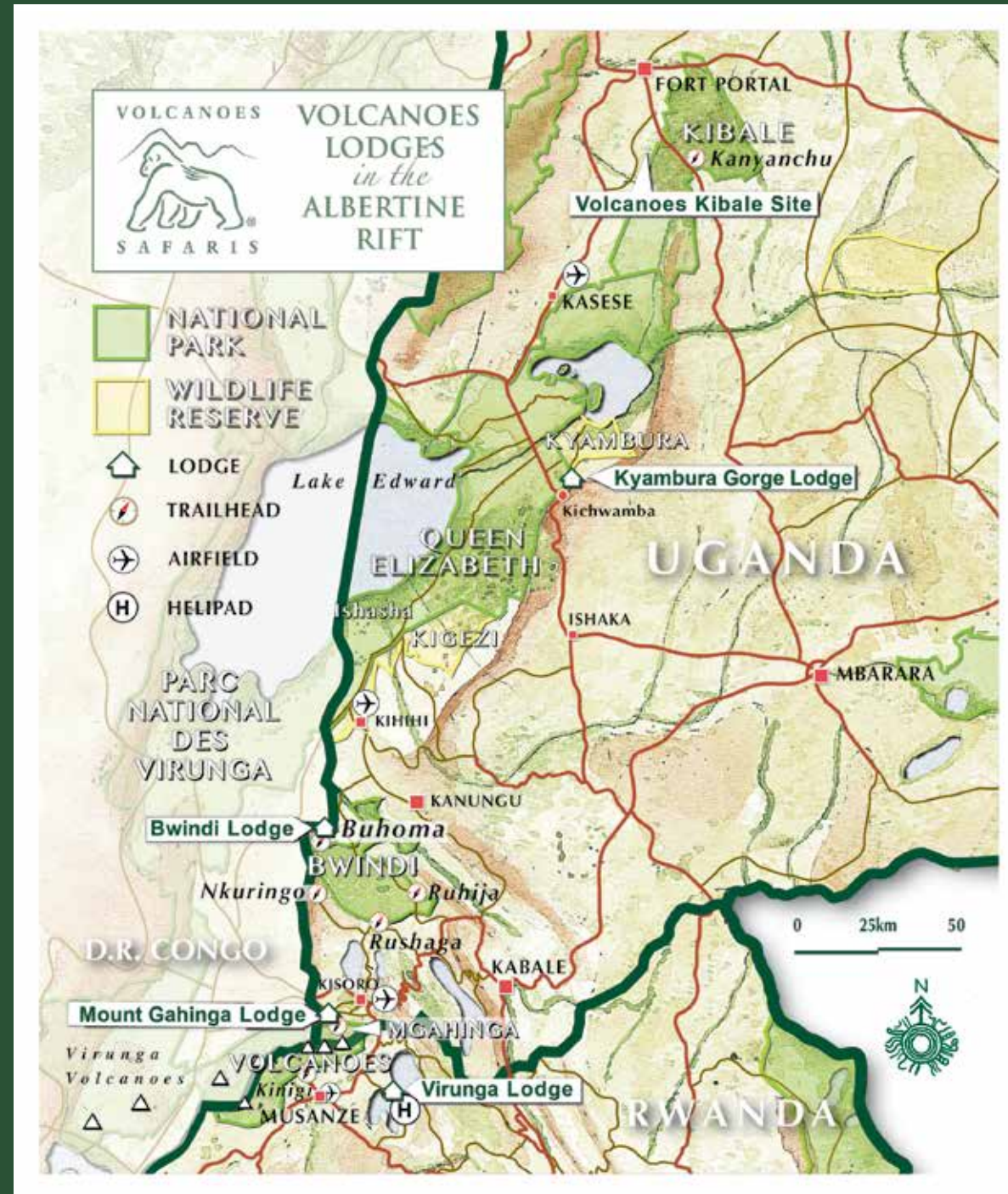




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The journey of the first 25 years 1997 - 2022

The journey of Volcanoes Safaris over the last twenty-five years has been full of challenges and setbacks, self-doubt and angst, elation and achievement. It's been a privilege to have been on such a unique and fulfilling journey. The time has flown by. It is a miracle that we have survived. It feels like magic realism in action!

In December 2021, the supporters and mentors of the company were ushered into the august rooms of the Linnean Society in Burlington House in Piccadilly. Until then I had never thought of Volcanoes Safaris as a company, but as a way of life, akin to Hinduism, the religion into which I was born, or better still what we call a 'time pass' in Punjabi.

So, how did this long and complex journey of becoming pioneers of gorilla and chimpanzee ecotourism and building lodges on the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and DRC, begin? This is my attempt at navigating my past, in an effort to answer this question!



*Praveen Moman
October 2023
London*

Backstory: A hundred years of the family in East Africa

People often ask what led to an Indian being the founder of an ecotourism company in the heart of Africa. The answer is quite complex and reflects a series of circumstances, that led to my forefathers becoming part of the ‘Indian tribes’ of East Africa, as memorably depicted in Bend in the River by V.S. Naipaul.

Although the journey of Volcanoes Safaris started in 1997, the backstory to my journey probably started in 1884 when the Berlin Conference divided Africa between the European great powers and the ‘management’ of the continent changed hands. The British colonial administration sent a handful of top civil servants from the UK to run the new British territories in East Africa. Others followed as settlers or to seek their fortune. Britain however looked to India for the bulk of the people to develop and administer the territories in line with the views of Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for India.

Indians have been connected to the East African coastline from antiquity. By the mid-19th Century, they were the dominant economic players in the Sultanate of Zanzibar to such an extent that Sir Richard Burton unkindly referred to them as ‘the local Jews’. In 1896, some 30,000 Indian craftsmen, surveyors and labourers were brought by Britain to Mombasa on the coast of Kenya to build the infamous Uganda railway. Some 2,600 died during the building of the ‘Iron Snake’, as the railway was referred to by the local Africans. Satya Sood, a cousin, whose

grandfather Fakir Chand Mayor was appointed as the first Indian senior stationmaster in the Ugandan Railway in Kisumu in 1928, describes the huge endeavour by Indians in building the railway, in his book *Victoria’s Tin Dragon*. He also explained how a Sikh turban was very handy in all circumstances: protection against the sun, sweat, and mosquitoes. In addition, it can be used as a rope, a bandage, and a water filter, so I commend a Sikh turban to all of you!

With the railway came the white missionary, the settler, the British administrator, and his Indian subordinate and the fearless *dukawalla*. The *dukan* in Hindustani is a shop and the *dukawallas* of East Africa are legendary for spreading commerce throughout the region. Amongst this band of entrepreneurs, the intrepid Allidina Visram rose to fame, establishing a network of stores along the track and becoming the sole supplier of food to the Indian workers building the railway. His success as a merchant, and later as a philanthropist, served as an inspiration to the Indian traders and administrators who became central to opening up East Africa from the early part of the twentieth century.

In 1905 the first of my great uncles, Ram Rakha, came to work in Kenya. In 1927, my great uncle Charanji Lal Phakey, from the village of Katani Kalan in Punjab, pitched a tent some twenty miles from the source of the River Nile in Uganda, where it was not uncommon for a leopard or lion to skulk, according to my father’s reminiscences. From this tent, Phakey became His Majesty King George V’s Postmaster at Iganga. He

was the third of my father’s great uncles to work in the colonial administration in Kenya and Uganda. Their jobs were often lumped together as ‘clerks’, but, in reality, had key operational roles in running the Empire. They were part of the many thousands who came from India to work in key posts as Administrators, Post Masters, Station Masters, Harbour Masters, Engineers and Telegraphists.

My father, Kuldip Rai Moman, arrived in Kenya from the Punjab in 1937 aged 17, encouraged by his uncle Ramji Dass Phakey, who had arrived in 1923. He had the influential post of Head Clerk in the Marine Division of the Railways Department in Kisumu in Kenya. This was the beginning of the African adventure for my father and his career for the next 35 years in East Africa. In 1946, on home leave in India, he married my mother, Kaushalya Devi Sud, from Lahore. As it happened, she left for Africa before the brutal partition of Punjab and India in 1947, in the closing years of British rule in the sub-continent. My grandmother and her other children, like many Hindus and Sikhs, had to flee to India, while many Muslims went to Pakistan. The huge and influential province of Punjab was suddenly and arbitrarily divided in a historically tragic episode. This division left a shadow over the lives not only over Punjabis in the sub-continent, whether Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, but also over the Punjabis who had gone to live in East Africa. They were bewildered by the division of their common homeland. I only realized the enormity of this division when I visited Lahore in modern day Pakistan in 1989, and I saw the other half of the Punjabi nation.

In 1946, my father was transferred from Nyeri in Kenya to Iganga in Uganda as the three territories (including Tanganyika) shared a common civil service. My parents lived in Uganda for the next quarter century and raised a family there. My father continued to work for the East African Post and Telecommunications Department until 1964, serving as a Postmaster in Iganga, Mbarara, Soroti and Masindi and then at the General Post Office in Kampala.

Thanks to my father’s postings and his unending passion for the blue skies of Africa, as a child I visited many of the wilderness areas of East Africa. Unbeknownst to me then, this would be the beginning of my lifelong connection to the great apes and special ecosystems of the Albertine Rift on the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC.

Love of the Zakhira – The Wilderness

My romantic love of wilderness, of remote, forlorn, and desolate places, comes from my father. In his reminiscences of growing up in Punjab, he wrote “walking through the wood at the edge of my village I could look at the blue sky overhead, through the *zakhira*, the wilderness, safe in the knowledge that I was protected by my Bhua and Bobo, my aunt and my grandmother.”

Throughout his life my father was driven by his wanderlust, his insatiable and restless pursuit of special landscapes. This passion remained with him until he

died aged eighty-nine in London. As a child, I went on endless safaris with my parents. I first visited Queen Elizabeth National Park in Western Uganda when I was about a year old. When I was twelve, I went walking in the foothills of the Virunga Volcanoes near Mgahinga, in Uganda with my father.

That first visit to the Virungas seems a very long time ago now, but it left an indelible mark upon me. It was an idyllic landscape, a lost paradise; the eight volcanoes rising dramatically out of the land, covered with an ethereal afro-montane forest. That is when I first heard about Dian Fossey’s pioneering work with mountain gorillas.

In 2006, the year before my father died, barely able to walk unaided and suffering from a heart condition, he insisted that I take him back to Africa for the last time. My father’s interest in the wilderness was for his own personal pleasure, whilst I naively decided to ‘bottle’ the blue skies and sell African safaris to the world. Setting up Volcanoes Safaris has turned out to be much bigger venture than I imagined. The inspiration from my father has helped create an important legacy.

I think the love of wilderness is captured well by Ansel Adams, the brilliant master photographer who was involved in the creation of national parks in the USA from the 1920s. He has been a hero of mine since I started taking a keen interest in photography at college. Adams wrote that “wilderness, or wildness is a mystique. A religion, an intense philosophy, a dream of ideal

society... phenomena of an advanced society and a unique contribution to the democratic idea.”

Growing Up in a Changing Uganda: 1954-1970

I was born in Kampala, Uganda in 1954, the third of four children. At the time, it seemed that the sun would never set on the British Empire in Africa. The first school that I attended in 1961 was even called ‘European Primary School’ as befitting of an elite school set up for white children. It admitted a handful of Asian children but there were no black African children before independence. The Africans were expected to send their children to separate mission schools, away from the city centre. It was only after independence that we had more contact. Colonial life – schooling, job promotion, housing, hotels and clubs, land ownership, – was segregated. The Indians occupied the middle and lower layers of society except for the wealthy few. The Africans were largely at the lower end. As Yasmin Alibhai Brown says in *The Settlers’ Cookbook* “colour-coded class divisions between whites, blacks and browns became ever more embedded and unyielding. Ugandan Asians kept their heads down, built up more wealth and acquisitive, middle-class lives.”

The curriculum was based on the assumption that the pupils were British and would continue their studies at boarding school in the UK as their parents’ jobs would take them to different parts of the Empire. It followed the Christian faith, and little mention was made of

other faiths. I learnt to sing (rather badly) ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’. At home we had the multi-heritage of the Punjab: Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, as well as other communities of the sub-continent. The teachings of Guru Nanak, Mahatma Gandhi and the Sufis were part of my multi-faith upbringing, and have been an important inspiration for my work with Volcanoes Safaris. The plethora of different Indian communities tended to live within their distinct, but overlapping, cultural comfort zones.

Sadly, the races led largely separate lives in the divided colonial world. Our contact with Africans was through our house staff and those we met in shops and offices, with few exceptions. I did however know the family of Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, who is today a distinguished gorilla conservationist in Uganda. I have only recently reconnected with her mother, the renowned social activist Rhoda Kalema who I used to see as a child at Hemantini Bhatia’s home. Hermantini worked actively on women’s rights. She was the mother of my friends Deepum and Nipun.

My mother, Kaushalya, had a career as a teacher. She had the rare distinction of being one of the few women of her generation to have two degrees, a Bachelor of Arts and then later read for a degree in teaching. She taught in schools in the small towns in Uganda wherever my father was posted, eventually becoming the Senior Mistress in Nakivubo School, one of the main Indian schools in Kampala in the 1960s.

In the 1950s the Indian community had not fully appreciated that these were the closing years of the British presence in the African colonies. The British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan had talked about how “the winds of change”, of national consciousness, were blowing through the African continent in his famous speech in Cape Town at the South African Parliament in 1960. In 1962, Uganda was granted independence - one year after I started primary school. By the mid-1960s Britain had also exited from Kenya and Tanzania as well as most other African colonies. Similarly, the Belgians were exiting from neighbouring Congo, Rwanda and Burundi during this period and many of their citizens had to flee as the transition was turbulent.

Uganda’s independence from Britain was generally peaceful, unlike the Mau-Mau rebellion in neighbouring Kenya. The new government under Milton Obote was naturally keen to ensure the African population could advance. In 1964 many jobs in the Civil Service were ‘Africanised’ and my father had to resign from his job. He subsequently became the Manager of the Entebbe Club and then later the Field Manager of the East African Insurance Company, so he could have the freedom to pursue his wanderlust while working. The 1960s were a turbulent period for the country. Newly elected Prime Minister Milton Obote and President Freddie Mutesa, the former *Kabaka* of the Buganda Kingdom, struggled for power and by 1966 Mutesa had gone into exile to the UK, where he had been at school. President Obote gradually

established a one-party state and began to reveal a darker side to his politics.

The journey from India to East Africa for the Indian community changed our whole identity and outlook. We had originated in the Indian sub-continent, made the East African territories our home and most of us had become British. The place of the Asians of East Africa in the newly independent countries, now run by black politicians who had to rule for the majority of their people, meant that our identity, our nationality, our allegiances and future home was about to go through a major upheaval in the next decade. The country went from having a white administration until 1962, to a black led government after independence which wanted to move away from the colonial past. It was more socialist in outlook and the focus, rightly, was on the majority black population.

There was increasing pressure on Asians to have African partners in business, trading licences were restricted, and demands made that they become citizens of Uganda and renounce their British or Indian nationality. Many Asian families started leaving the country or sending their children abroad for studies, as they were also doing in neighbouring Kenya. The attitudes towards the Indian population were mixed in those years. While many Africans seemed to accept us as an integral part of the country’s population, some politicians were vociferous in criticising Indian domination of business, trade and professions. Obote’s economic policies added further pressure on the Indians.

Leaving for England and the Expulsion of the Family

Although my parents wanted to continue living in Uganda, they realised they could not bank on staying forever with changing circumstances. They started planning for a possible exit. My brother Shalley was sent to college in England in 1966. My sister Meena and I joined him in 1970. In 1971 the family bought a house in London, with the help of a mortgage from the Holloway Building Society, for which I organised the paperwork, given my father’s lack of interest in practical issues. We did not appreciate this at the time, but this was the beginning of the family’s exit from Africa.

Political tensions in Uganda continued between the different factions and in early 1971, while President Obote was attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Singapore, Idi Amin, the Commander of the Ugandan army and former warrant officer in the British King’s African Rifles, took power in a coup. Obote had sent Mohammed Hassan, the then Indian head of the Criminal Investigation Department, to arrest Amin. In a fast-changing scenario, Amin arrested Hassan instead, who then died in prison from torture and starvation. Hassan was a close family friend and I have memories of him babysitting me as a child. Amin started the reign of terror against the African population, who suffered much more than the Asians, and Uganda started falling apart.

The early days of Amin seemed to be a positive development as he appeared to be more accepting of the Asian community and businesspeople. Amin’s rule however was erratic, he favoured certain tribal groups and progressively became more violent. His attitude to Asians became more negative and he accused them of milking the economy.

On 4 August 1972, Amin announced that the British Asians were to be expelled in 90 days. An air of panic started building up in the community and people started organising their paperwork and packing for departure. My father, unperturbed, took off on his last safari to see the tree climbing lions at Ishasha in western Uganda! My mother’s reaction can be imagined. This vignette is symbolic of my father’s care-free attitude to life. Given the uncertainty in Uganda, my parents decided reluctantly that they had no choice but to leave the country that had been their home for 25 years. Together with my youngest sister Neeraj, they started to pack their belongings. It was a scramble to organise all the paperwork in the midst of an increasingly hostile attitude from the local population and the unhelpful attitude of the British High Commission staff towards the Indians who were trying to leave. In the UK some British politicians, notably Enoch Powell, and the media were very negative. Despite this hostility, Prime Minister Edward Heath made clear that the Uganda Asians were British subjects with British passports and would be welcomed.

My sister Neeraj and my parents arrived as refugees at

Stansted Airport in London in the middle of the night on the special flights organised by the British Government. The official asked my parents whether they needed to be housed in a refugee camp for a few days. My father said yes immediately, ever keen to have a new ‘experience’! My mother replied forcefully that they had no reason to go to a camp, since they had their own house where her children were staying. They were given £50 each by the Uganda Asian Resettlement Board and an overcoat by the British Red Cross. It was an abrupt, if not entirely unexpected end to the paradoxical situation of the British Asian and white population in Uganda. About 28,000 Asians came to the UK.

Settling Down in the UK

It was a harsh beginning in a new country. The country that the Asians had been brought up to believe was ‘the mother country’ was not very welcoming. As my father noted in his reminisces: “We had arrived finally in the capital of the old Empire, where we were suddenly with the white people, who had created the Empire in which we had lived, and for whom we had worked. But many of them did not want us to live in their midst and told us we should not have come. We were now on our own and had to begin again.”

Our family was luckier than most. We had been to the UK before, we had a home and did not have to go to camp, and my parents were able to get jobs quickly as they were educated and had a long career history. The four children meanwhile got on with their studies.

My mother had to settle for a clerical job at the Crown Agents and take three buses every day to get to their offices in South London.

My father worked briefly for an insurance company as he had done latterly in Uganda. He also worked as a volunteer supporting the resettlement of the Asians in the Borough of Haringey in North London. In 1974, this became a full-time role as he was appointed Community Relations Officer by Haringey, assisting with housing, nationality issues, getting jobs and dealing with racial discrimination faced by Asian shopkeepers. Given the upheaval the community had gone through he thought it was important that they continued to meet and support each other. He created a number of community groups. The most important one was the East African Asian Association with its inaugural meeting on 21 July 1974. “It was a bright sunny Sunday like East Africa. You could feel a freshness in the air” he recorded.

Shortly afterwards he managed to secure a grant from the Government and Haringey Council to set up an East African Asian Centre in the Borough; the centre only became a reality in Wood Green some years after his retirement in 1983. Today the centre serves all East Africans, particularly the refugees from Somalia. He went back on his first visit to Kenya and Uganda in 1985.

Schooling in London and Discovering the World

After our arrival in London, I attended Wood Green School in north London, formerly a grammar school and

now a comprehensive. As the financial situation in the family was challenging, I did a number of evening and holiday jobs. I worked at the ABC Turnpike Lane cinema in the evenings. During the holiday, I worked as an Accounts Clerk in the head office of Butlin’s Holidays in Oxford Street. I am not sure my accounts work was neat or accurate, but the Head Cashier was a welcoming boss, and the staff were generous with providing homemade cake! I also worked in one of the Indian-owned HiFi shops that dominated Tottenham Court Road. These experiences gave me my first connection with the bright lights, smart shops and cosmopolitan feeling of the heart of London. I found it more appealing than the endless suburbs which I was unused to, having grown up in the small green city of Kampala with 80,000 people.

After leaving school, I made my first visit to mainland Europe, having managed to get a summer job in Germany by replying to an advertisement in the personal column in *The Times* in the old-fashioned way that allowed aspiring middle-class people to find unusual opportunities. I spent the summer with a German family, the Kluffingers, with four sons a few years younger than me, helping them with English conversation. It was idyllic to be based outside Kempten in the beautiful Allgau region of Bavaria, to go walking in the Alps and experience the culture and music of Mittel Europa. Staying in the heart of this farming area, close to the mountains with small, picturesque hamlets made me realise how much I missed the simple life we had had in Uganda. I was also intrigued by the distinctive style of the German farmhouse, the *Bauernhaus*. Although

a rather banal boxlike shape externally, its structure allowed it to be divided easily internally to make large spacious rooms and accommodate the needs of an extended family. I also visited Berlin with Martin, the oldest son, a city still divided and with a strong reminder of the unfinished business of the Second World War.

In 1973, I was selected by the Voluntary Service Overseas to be a volunteer teacher in Junction, a small town in Jamaica. This was my first visit back to a tropical country and in many ways, I felt at home. The headmistress was of Indian descent, a reminder that the British engineered movements of its different imperial subjects to many parts of the world. There was not much to do in the evenings except for drinking copious amounts of Appleton white rum laced with condensed milk and listening to dramatic reggae music of Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley. Walking among the lush homesteads was charming and by chance I bought a couple of acres of land on a hillside called Chocolate Hole for about £200, to which my father contributed half the cost. After my year teaching at the school, I travelled through Central America from Mexico to Panama. I was enchanted by the different cultures I saw, while being conscious of the divided societies that the colonial presence had left behind.

Westfield College in Hampstead

On my return I became a student at Westfield College in Hampstead, North London, a somewhat idiosyncratic place with the science block dominated largely by

middle class British men, while the arts department had predominantly glamorous foreign female students. It was a godsend to live near Hampstead Heath and escape from the streets of London. I was reading Biological Sciences, as I had taken science A Levels encouraged by my parents. It was a subject in which I was mediocre and did not have a deep interest. Although I was studying the Sciences, I made friends mostly with those who were reading Modern Languages, History of Art and Classics. It widened my horizons enormously, learning about different European cultures and languages, about art and aesthetics, discovering surrealism and Cocteau films. It was very liberating. I acted in Ionesco's play *The Bald Prima Donna* as Mary the Maid, complete with a big bushy beard and dressed in mountain boots and long red walking socks. I also acted in a tragi-comic adaptation of Racine's *Andromache* by my friend Terry Kyan at the Edinburgh Fringe; we only had a handful of spectators, including a drunk who shouted at us to go back to London.

My interest in photography continued to grow and I was inspired by the spectacular photographs of Paul Strand, Bill Brandt and Ansel Adams. With a £14 Russian-made Fed camera I would take pictures of landscapes around Hampstead, my fellow students and city scenes. On biology field trips I discovered the wild areas of Scotland and went on trips to the islands of Mull, Erraid and Iona. Jeanette Jackson, the director of the nearby Camden Arts Centre felt that my photography had some promise and she kindly agreed that I could have a one-man exhibition. Rather wishfully I had put on the posters that

part of the proceeds would go to Amnesty International, but there was not much to share. I did, however, work in Amnesty's Post Room as a volunteer after college.

While at college, my interest in film grew tremendously. I used to watch films at the French Film Society and was mesmerized by the artistic depth of Visconti's *Death in Venice* and Mahler's music. I wrote and directed a short 8mm film with my father's movie camera, called *L'Homme Civilisée*, about an accountant who is kidnapped by wolf children, in homage to Francois Truffaut's film *L'Enfant Sauvage*, which was screened at college. My film was shot on Hampstead Heath on a grey rainy November weekend. Sadly, the poor lighting made the film difficult for viewers to understand so it was not well received.

I also became conscious of the different architectural styles in Hampstead, from its twee cottages to fine 'Victorian villas in the country' to modern experimental buildings, different to the monotony of most of London. My room in one of male college houses, Marian Delf Hall on Finchley Road, was abuzz with different students who would drop in for tea and biscuits. To tone down the rather strong orange wallpaper, I decorated it with artefacts and prints from my travels which was unusual among the workaday rooms of my fellow students.

In my college holidays, I worked as a counsellor at Summit Camp in the Poconos in rural Pennsylvania in America, which predominantly catered for Jewish children who were brain damaged. Participating in

Jewish rites, gave me a special insight into the beliefs of people from this ancient faith and how many of their families had ended up in America because of the Holocaust in Europe.

At the end of three years, I was awarded a "very good" lower second-class degree as one of my dons described it, which summed up my efforts at being a scientist. Although I had contemplated doing a PhD, furthering my project work on the transmission of ions across frog skin epithelium, I thought the interests of science would not be furthered by my cutting up more live frogs.

Working for the European Union

After graduating, I was keen to go to film school or to study art and design in London or in Paris. I managed to get a place at Film School, but it was difficult to take it up as I was already working for the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and finances for the family were still difficult. I also wanted to buy my own place to live, so my artistic pursuits had to take second place. My work at the CBI focused on the impact of the European Union's growing legislation on health and safety of employees and the environment. It led to my selection as a Robert Schuman Scholar in the European Parliament in Luxembourg. Initially I lived as a lodger with a family in a large house in the historic medieval Grund area, in the valley of the Petrusse River. Following my *stage* I was recruited to work full time for the British Conservative Members of the European Parliament.

I was based in Brussels and travelled regularly to other European cities. It was interesting to return to Berlin, a still divided city, but this time to attend European Union meetings in the historic Reichstag building, with East German border guards monitoring our activities from their watch towers across the wall. I started looking for somewhere to live in Brussels. Through an acquaintance of a *stagiaire* friend, Hans, I ended up renting a sixth floor walkup *grenier* apartment in a rundown building in Rue Lebeau, off the Place du Grand Sablon in the heart of the old city. The building had the whiff of bad drains, but this did not bother me. The apartment had no front door initially, but the landlord eventually hung one. I set about furnishing the bare-boards apartment. Even at that stage in my life I was not very keen on conventional furniture which I found banal. It turned out to be quite easy to find alternatives.

The Sablon area, dating from the fifteenth century, was ringed with antique shops and had a market every weekend. Not far away in the Marolles, the *quartier bas* was the Place du Jeu de Balle with its *brocante* or flea market. It was a surreal place with this rather down at heel piazza, where van loads of artefacts ranging from a job lot of cheap shoes to fake *ormolu* furniture, to the contents of quite grand houses affected by the Belgian economic crisis of the 1980s were strewn on the ground. This area was largely inhabited by Moroccans who had come as migrants in the 1950s and 60s. There was an air of racial tension in the area: one day a cafe on the piazza refused to serve me coffee as

they said they did not serve brown people. That was a jolt to my rather charmed life. The Sablon was one of the most architecturally rich areas of the city, far greater than I had experienced living in suburban London or even in Hampstead and in modest towns and cities of Africa. The Petit Sablon up the hill was a late 19th century small *bijou* formal square ringed with statues of historical figures. At the time the Sablon area was run down and unfashionable. It was the home of Wittamer, probably the best Maître-Pâtissier in the city at the time as well as the Vieux San Martin where all the *bon chic bon genre* crowd hung out. Living in this area was the start of my lifelong obsessive interest in scouring markets for unusual artefacts, paintings and furniture.

One of my first purchases was a folding garden decorative wrought iron bed with a torn horsehair mattress. The horsehair was uncomfortable and the mattress far too short for me, but it was exotic, so I insisted on trying to use it as a bed. It was painful! Another purchase was a small inlaid marqueterie hall table described as '*tendance fin de siècle*' which seemed to be a passepartout title for any piece of furniture that had no clear provenance or year when it was made or copied. As I was paying for the table, the fourth leg crumbled in my hand, having succumbed to woodworm. I was disappointed that this trophy was now less of a prize acquisition. My friend Lillian took this all in her stride and found some woodworm fluid in her garage and treated the table. The local *menuisier* made a replacement leg but it always looked like an add-on. Possibly the most awkward and exotic purchase

was a long, very narrow refectory table some 2 feet wide and 11 feet long with elaborate column-like legs. Having bought it on impulse, I then had to persuade the junk dealer to take it up six floors on a narrow staircase, after it had been unceremoniously dismantled with a mallet and screwdriver to get it up there. It made for an unusual dining table - you could see the eyeballs of the person opposite but the people either side were somewhat hidden. Eventually it became the hall table in our apartment building in London.

Having stumbled on this rather unique area, I ended up buying a house off the Place du Grand Sablon which I continued to furnish in this eclectic way. A rather grand friend, Stefan, who was the grandson of the former German Chancellor von Papen, said my house looked like a furniture warehouse. I took this as a compliment. At about this time, I met my future wife Giulia who came from an established Italian family and who owned some fine homes. She was aghast at some of the things I would bring home from the *marché aux puces*, but tried to keep her opinions to herself. Sadly, when we moved to London in 1986, she threw out many of my weirdest pieces of furniture. This included a sloping kitchen counter: you had to be quite nimble to use it. A glazed wooden cake display provided an attractive display case, but I had no patisserie to put in it. Although I had no interest in baking, I bought a large wooden peasant's dough trough that took up a big part of the kitchen. I acquired more elegant French Empire and Austrian Biedermeier furniture. I found furniture made from wild cherry, birch and walnut wood to be

more subtle than the dark mahogany and mvule, the tropical woods of my childhood. I started collecting watercolours, especially landscapes.

Reconnecting to East Africa

My career as a political and policy adviser in the European Parliament blossomed, dealing with Development policy and Foreign Affairs. In 1981, I made my first visit back to Africa at a meeting of parliamentarians from Europe to Sierra Leone. I then made several visits to South Africa, working on the Scott Hopkins report on Southern Africa. Having grown up in East Africa, visiting South Africa some ten years after I left was an eye opener. While I had grown up in a segregated society, the divisions were minimal relative to South Africa. There were ‘Whites only’ notices in many areas and only white people had full rights in democratic structures. I was proud that we managed to include some forward-thinking recommendations on how the EU could bring about change in South Africa.

I made my first trip back to East Africa in 1982, some twelve years after I had left for the UK to study. I arrived at Nairobi airport late in the evening. Although I was on an official EU visit, I was refused entry because I did not have a visa, which I belatedly realised was an unofficial requirement for British citizens of Asian origin since the Ugandan Asian expulsion of 1972. The immigration officials said I had to spend the night on a bench until their senior officers arrived in the morning. Luckily the European Union Delegate came to my rescue and told

the immigration officials their action was illegal. He took me into town, but irritatingly they still held on to my passport for the night. It was not an auspicious start.

Late at night I finally arrived at the Inter-Continental Hotel in downtown Nairobi where I was booked to stay. The hotel was full to capacity, and they finally found me a room after about two hours. At about 2am, I was awoken by two armed men who informed me they were from the President of Gabon’s entourage and asked that I leave the room as it was allocated to them. I was unceremoniously thrown out of the room and was ‘reallocated’ to sleep on a sun lounger in a cabana by the swimming pool with mosquitoes for company. Many years later I met the President of Gabon at a conference but did not have the courage to mention the inconvenience caused by his team.

Despite this rather awkward beginning, it was very emotional to be in East Africa again, where my father had arrived some forty-five years ago. It was a strong reminder that I was still connected to this continent. As a child I had often come on holidays to visit my many cousins in Kenya. In Uganda, we did not have direct family, as it was the end of the line in terms of colonial outposts, but in Kenya we had many aunts, uncles, cousins, and wider members of the Sood-Phakey community to whom we belonged. By the 1980s although there were still tens of thousands of Asians in Kenya, my cousins had virtually all left with the changing circumstances for Asians in the country.

Visiting Uganda during the war

It was strange to be back in East Africa as a foreigner who lived abroad and who was now part of an EU delegation discussing development aid and projects being supported in Kenya. It marked the transition of my connections with East Africa: from being of this land, even though not originally of the continent, it looked as if East Africa was now a foreign land for me. As luck had it, there was an EU car taking the mail to their small office in Kampala, a day’s drive away, about 400 miles. I jumped at the chance of travelling there. My driver was a very courteous Muganda gentleman called Musoke who looked after me well and guided me through the endless roadblocks of drunken soldiers once we crossed into Uganda.

Arriving in Kampala in 1982 was a shock. The neatly ordered green city of 80,000 inhabitants that I had left in 1970 was now being fought over. There were areas that had been bombed and abandoned, and there were roadblocks everywhere. Two white security guards escorted me to the EU office. From 6pm there was a curfew, and I had to stay indoors in the Speke Hotel. The once prestigious two storey colonial hacienda style building, owned originally by the enterprising Goan family, the Godhinos, was run down and bare, serving chicken and chips as its staple food. Across the road the Sheraton Hotel had been commandeered by military forces. They had wild parties throughout the night with a mixture of Ugandan music, Jim Reeves country music and reggae. There would be periodic fighting and shooting would break out, so it was rather unsettling.

During the day it was difficult to walk around the city. I visited a few places escorted by my guards – the houses where we and our family’s friends had lived, schools where I had gone as a child - the European school, the Aga Khan Ismaili school and Kololo School. After four days I left Kampala as it was unpleasant to move around, and the city of my birth felt destroyed. I thought I would never go back but it was difficult to keep away and I would return every few years. Meanwhile I continued with my work as a political and policy adviser in Brussels.

In and Out of Politics: Brussels and London

In 1985, I had the privilege to work in the cabinet of Lord Cockfield, the Vice President of the European Commission working on the creation of the internal market for Europe. This was a very important project for the economic growth of Europe. Arthur Cockfield was a very exacting and demanding technocrat, unlike many politicians who tend to focus on polemics, rather than intellectual analysis. In 1986, I decided to return to live in London as I did not want to live in Brussels long-term, as my parents were growing older, and Giulia had gone back to live in London. I also thought it would be better to work for the UK government, given the divisions in the Conservative party on Europe, rather than continuing to work in the EU institutions. This was a naïve idea!

It was challenging to work in a political party that was divided by the issue of Britain’s membership of the EU.

The British media portrayed the EU as trying to take over the UK and change its culture. In the run up to the 1987 elections, I worked as a researcher for Michael Heseltine on his book *Where There’s a Will*. Heseltine had walked out of Mrs Thatcher’s cabinet over personal and policy differences. A long-term future in politics for me seemed uncertain so I thought it would be good to build up an alternative career. For some years I set up and ran a property refurbishment company until rising interest rates made the market challenging. I was mostly doing residential refurbishment in London. I also ambitiously submitted a tender to refurbish the Georgian Baths in Bath. This would have been a massive project, but I was unsuccessful in winning the bid.

In 1988 I married Giulia, deepening my connections to Italy, its people and its culture. I then took a sabbatical and read for a Masters in Oriental Studies at Cambridge University with a particular interest in paintings of the Punjab Hills - *Pahari* paintings. Shortly afterwards, I was asked to be a Special Adviser for Tim Renton, the Minister for the Arts in the British Government, working until the 1992 elections. We had the opportunity to visit the buildings that President Mitterrand had built as part of his *Grand Travaux* projects in Paris. We learnt from the French Government how the powerful Ministry of Culture was instrumental in driving forward important artistic and heritage projects. This was different from the rump Office of Arts and Libraries that existed as part of the Cabinet Office in London. This experience was helpful for the proposals Renton and I wrote for the setting

up of the Ministry of National Heritage in the UK government which were subsequently approved for the Conservative party’s manifesto for the 1992 elections at the last moment. Unexpectedly, the Conservatives came back to power and a new Ministry became a reality in 1993. As often happens in politics, having done the work, neither Renton nor I remained in the government to see the vision implemented. It was rewarding to see the national lottery become a reality and help raise funds for the arts. Later Tony Blair’s Government also created the Millennium Dome, a rather vainglorious project which was ill-thought out.

Having been forced to ‘rest’ between jobs, in 1992 I took the opportunity to go on a political visit to South Africa. Afterwards I visited Uganda. It was possible to travel to most of the country and with advice from William Pike, the Editor of the *New Vision* newspaper, I climbed the Rwenzoris, the famed Mountains of the Moon, on the border of Uganda and DRC. It was liberating to finally be able to explore the country. This trip was the first reconnection with the magical world of the Great Western Rift Valley, often called the Albertine Rift. It reawakened long dormant memories of this enchanted world. That summer my son Partha was born: later in life he would develop his own African connections. During the summer holidays in 1994 I did an internship with Seva Mandir in Udaipur, Rajasthan, India which gave an insight into the marginalised Adivasi community – the tribal people. Later on, this inspired me to work with the Batwa in Uganda. Meanwhile, I was appointed as

Special Advisor for Tony Newton, the Leader of the House of Commons in London. It continued to be a difficult period for the Conservative government. They had a wafer-thin majority and there was increasing disunity in the party, especially on the issue of Britain’s membership of the European Union. It was awkward working as a special adviser with these divisions.

1994 and The Great Lakes

In 1994, the genocide against the Tutsi took place in Rwanda, but the upheaval affected all the countries of the Great Lakes - southern Uganda, Eastern Congo and Burundi. The suffering of the people made a big impact on me. Although our family was not directly connected to Rwanda, there were of course Indian families who lived in Rwanda and the DRC when we were children, who were related to families in the neighbouring countries. They often transited through Uganda on their way to the coast and India. In the post-independence upheavals in those countries in the 1960s many white and Indian refugees arrived in Uganda, so we had been conscious of their plight.

These sad events in the Great Lakes made me think about my connections to the region. In September 1995, Giulia and I went to Kenya on vacation with Dorian Rocco, an old friend from a French-Italian settler family in Nairobi. We then went walking with the Masai in the Monduli Hills near Arusha in Tanzania. It was wonderful to explore again some of these enchanting areas of East Africa. I continued to Uganda on my own. I drove down to Kisoro,

near the Virungas. The car was provided by the Batuma family from Kabale who have become lifelong friends.

The idyllic paradise of my childhood in the Kigezi region of southern Uganda, the so-called Switzerland of Africa, seemed to have disappeared. The journey from the hill town of Kabale to Kisoro, through the terraced hills of Kigezi was dry and dusty, the road that was plied in the 1950s by SS Gupta’s trucks taking goods to the Congo from Mbarara in the fifties was busy with World Food Programme trucks taking vital food and medical supplies to the war zone. Only eighteen months after the genocide, the Kisoro valley was full of refugees, around 80,000, with the camp dwarfing the small town of Kisoro. The town, although semi-derelict with buildings damaged by the war, looked substantially the same as in the 1960s, with its fifty or so small single storey Indian *dukas*, a few government buildings largely from the colonial era, and the remains of Walter Baumgartel’s Travellers Rest Hotel. I stayed at the Umubano Hotel, which was barely functioning, its plumbing system jammed, toilet overflowing and the odd rat scuttling around.

The next day I continued on the 18km mountain road to Mgahinga, in the Ugandan part of the Virunga volcanoes, where Baumgartel and Rueben, the local tracker he had worked with, had tracked gorillas in a simple way in the 1960s. Outwardly the mountain area looked idyllic, and the terraced hillsides had their rich crop of beans, sorghum and potatoes. Near the park gate I started walking around and talking to local people. This area seemed to have survived the worst of the upheaval.

Despite the ongoing turmoil, I had a flash that one day I would set up a camp near Mgahinga. I even started asking around about land for sale. This would not happen until 1997, some two years later after I had finished working for the Leader of the House of Commons.

During the general elections in 1997, Robert Cranbourne, now the Marquess of Salisbury and at the time Leader of the House of Lords, was asked by Prime Minister John Major, to be the Chief of Staff at No. 10 Downing Street, where I worked for the last few weeks of the government’s term. It was fascinating to live through an election from the vantage point of the Prime Minister’s office. The government lost the election, as widely expected, and I felt it was time to strike out and do something on my own. I also felt that my long-term interest, foreign affairs, especially Britain’s place in the EU, would not be a fruitful area to work given the lack of consensus in the party. At the time it was also hard to imagine significant personal progress in the Conservative party for someone with an Indian background. Furthermore, as we have seen the ‘Brexit wars’ continued to dominate the agenda. In any case that is a separate story, in which my former special adviser colleagues David Cameron and George Osborne played a central role. I took the decision to walk away from political involvement in 1997.

The Beginning of Volcanoes Safaris

My exit from the political world was the beginning of Volcanoes Safaris. From 1997, I made regular visits to

Uganda to start this new venture, setting up an office in Kampala and buying land for camps upcountry. It was difficult to be away for long periods, particularly for Giulia, Partha – who was five at the time – and for my elderly parents.

At that time none of my family owned any assets in Africa. I had no staff, advisers, offices or land. Except for a childhood friend, Nipun Bhatia and the odd acquaintance, I knew very few people. It was both exciting and daunting to be setting up a business in a country that I was born in, but I had left twenty-seven years before as a child. The government departments were beginning to function again. It was hard to understand the culture, the people, the working practices, and the legal and financial systems. There were conmen who would propose fake deals and try to sell you land that didn’t belong to them or get you involved in some other scam. Getting anything done followed no clear process or timetable and was perplexing and frustrating.

The serendipitous journey of establishing lodges on the western border of Uganda, initially looked as if it was a blunder in terms of timing. In Kampala, there was a feeling of optimism, of a new beginning for Uganda, and many new businesses were being set up by returning Asian families. Many of the derelict and bombed buildings were being rehabilitated. The border areas, however, were sporadically caught up in the aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the continuing conflict in the Great Lakes area. Rebels and refugees from the DRC would spill over into the

neighbouring countries. It was a very anguishing period for the people of the area, and it left a lasting impression on those of us who saw glimpses of it.

It was complicated to negotiate for potential lodge sites within national parks; the procedures seemed to be unclear and took forever. I therefore decided to look outside the parks. Large sites did not exist as land holding is fragmented, so I started acquiring individual pieces of land from local farmers. This inevitably was a long process. I drove in many different directions and walked through thick mud during the rainy season. I had long negotiations with villagers, sometimes over several years and often they were abortive. For many, the land they were selling was their most important asset and owned by many members of the family. The local communities started to understand my intentions and kept increasing the prices, with no regard for market rates; one enterprising man pegged the asking price of his land to the price of a second-hand bus he wanted to buy!

When I first started thinking of a camp at Mgahinga, I realised it was important to have a ‘base camp’ for guests in the town of Kisoro in the valley below. Kisoro was still unsettled with militia groups from the DRC sometimes overrunning it. The shops only opened on Monday and Thursday - the two market days - if people felt secure. Raju Patel, the first Indian with a shop in Kisoro, started opening every day and the other *dukawallahs* then followed suit. There was nowhere decent for guests to stay in Kisoro. The simple

ramshackle house we rented for our own use, belonging to an African Punjabi family, was unsuitable for guests. We rented a newly built bungalow and added extra toilets and bush showers at the back and opened it as Kisoro Guest House. It immediately became the best place to stay!

Coincidentally the war damaged shell of Walter Baumgartel’s historic Travellers Rest had recently been bought by the Catholic Church. With the support of the Austrian government it had been renovated and redesigned, but in a conventional architectural way, and its original charm of a small homestead hotel had been lost. We leased it for a year but it was tough going running a hotel in this unstable border town. There were very few guests. Anthony Teasdale, a friend of political days, came to stay. As someone who was used to gourmet meals of Brussels he remarked that the “food was adequate but uninspired”, not realising that even getting a fried egg to eat was a miracle. A year later we gave up the hotel and focused on building our camp in Mgahinga.

Charles Nzabarinda became our *askari* and remains at the lodge until this day. Nelson, aged 22, was one of the few young men at Mgahinga who could read and write, and he became in charge of managing the site and staff. Once we had a few acres I then cleared and landscaped the site and built a dry-stone wall around it. In 1998, I pitched six tents at Mgahinga in the shadow of the Virungas, some seventy years since my great-uncle had first pitched a tent in Uganda.

It was like coming home. My parents travelled with me from London to Uganda that year. Although they stayed in Kisoro, they came and had lunch at the camp. My father was ecstatic at being reconnected with the African soil. It was a symbolic moment of a new beginning - not only the beginning of Mount Gahinga Lodge in the Virungas, but of a new venture in the heart of Africa. The journey back to this area had a special perspective for me. I was following in the footsteps of my forebears - my great uncles, my father and many other Punjabi families, who were central to the opening up the East African interior during the twentieth century. I felt my quest was being guided by the wisdom of the elders, the *bazurg*, as they are called in Urdu and the *wazee*, as they are called in Swahili.

Kampala was neglected and run down, but was still substantially as it was in 1970, green and pleasant with very little traffic. Today it is chaotic and sprawling, with much of the beautiful areas gone, and traffic jams everywhere. I bought an old colonial bungalow built in 1932 on Nakasero Hill, in Kampala, the hill where I had been born and lived for my early years. I bought it through an upright gentleman, Mwangi, a civil servant who had paperwork to show he was the legitimate tenant and had the right to sell it through the privatisation programme. Shortly after I had paid the deposit, the National Housing Corporation declared that my purchase was illegal because I had bought it through the wrong government department. The house was declared not to be mine! I had to repurchase it, luckily only having to pay the deposit again. This was one of

the vagaries of the Amin era: paperwork relating to properties and assets were disordered. Property related to Asian families who had left was even worse and often disputed. The bungalow became our HQ in Kampala and the public face of Volcanoes, the workshop for the safari cars and a small pied à terre for me.

I remember how different the country was when I was a child. Then it had these ordered toy town colonial settlements. I often remember the families with whom we used to have strong ties, but who have almost all disappeared: SS Gupta from Mbarara in southern Uganda whose trucks plied the Congo and Rwanda from the 50s; his brother Anther Singh who ran the general store; Dosaj, who had an African wife; the Tandon family who had the concession to trade with the Karamajong from Moroto in northern Uganda; and Suda, the station master of Kampala railway station, from our Sood community, originally from Ludhiana. There were other people dotted around in far corners of the country with whom there were family ties: a harbour master at Butiaba port, cotton ginners near Soroti and Mbale, Sikh sawmillers in Budongo, a petrol station on the edge of Mbarara that belonged to an Ismaili family. There was a tin mine that belonged to Amarchand near Kisoro and his neighbour Kikades, a Greek man who lived on an almost inaccessible hilltop on the Congo border. Near Mbarara there was an eccentric English lady who lived on an island in the Akagera river and would let you come and stay in her guest rooms and sent you a box on a cable to bring you to the island.

Some families like the Mangats, who have been refugees in and out of Uganda and Rwanda, still continue to run businesses across different countries, despite the many challenges. During the 70s and 80s from their shop in Ruhengeri, now Musanze, they supplied the weekly provisions for Dian Fossey while she lived at Karisoke. Harjeet's mother Iqbal, used to give Dian motherly advice on looking after herself while she lived in the Virungas. Some old displaced Ugandan Asian families from the 1970s, like the Kotecha and Dattani families, relocated to the DRC. Today, the third and fourth generation of these families continue to be important traders based in Bukavu and Goma, following the long-established trade routes from the 19th century.

Into Rwanda and the building of Virunga Lodge

In 1998, with my colleagues Yusuf and Francis, I crossed the border by car to Ruhengeri, an hour away, the nearest town to the gorilla park in Rwanda. The area was still unstable. It was like a garrison town with thousands of soldiers. The hills that ringed the town were full of the sound of bazookas. At the Muhubara Hotel, where Dian Fossey used to stay, the only item on the menu were intensely coloured orange omelettes. It was clearly too early to think of setting up tourism. We had to wait until 2000 when the area began to stabilise and Ian Redmond, a researcher who worked with Dian Fossey, led our first group into Rwanda, organised by Julian Mathews from Discovery Initiatives, a company that pioneered conservation tours.

We worked actively with the government, the military (who were professional and co-operative) and the diplomatic missions to understand the security and ensure there were safe *couloirs d'accès* to the park. Soon we started taking guests staying at Gahinga on a three-hour bumpy drive to see the gorillas in the park on the Rwandan side. With this small move we in effect became the first international company to start taking guests to Rwanda, relaunching gorilla tourism after the genocide. I feel very proud of this. In truth, the park was barely functioning, with an improvised office in the Mayor's office in Ruhengeri, where we had to wait in the rain while the permits were hand written.

In 2001, encouraged by David Pluth, an American photographer who was documenting National Parks in Rwanda for the tourism bureau, I decided to go to Kigali. I was lucky enough to go on the first tour of Rwanda with a handful of Rwandese tour operators, including the late Florence Nshekera and Manzi Kaihura. Outside Kigali there were few tourism facilities. Our trip included brief forays into Goma and Bukavu in the DRC. After this trip, I took the plunge and decided to open an office in Kigali. The 'office' at the historic Mille Collines Hotel, of the film 'Hotel Rwanda', is a grand description for what Zozo, a long-term member of staff at the hotel, remembered as a small desk, brought from Kampala and covered in *makeka* - local matting - in a kind of no man's land between the beautician, gents' toilets and the spiral stairs leading to the pool bar downstairs. Kigali was beginning to open after the difficult years and only

had two major hotels at the time and very little formal office space, so we were lucky to get this perch. Later we moved to a fully-fledged office in the Mille Collines Hotel and are now one of their oldest tenants.

This move into Rwanda was an important turning point in our journey. Until then my focus had been on developing camps in the ecosystems of western Uganda. These ecosystems were part of a wider special landscape that straddled Uganda, Rwanda and DRC - the greater Virunga landscape, encompassing this part of the Albertine rift. It had the richest biomass of wildlife in Africa in the 1960s. Going into Rwanda opened our horizons to the world of the gorillas on three sides of the Virungas. It was also the beginning of my long connection with Rwanda.

Soon after we set up the office in Kigali, more flights started to come into the city as Kigali began to open up. In 2002 we organised the first visit of the Dian Fossey Board to the gorilla park after the war, with whom we have retained a close relationship. There was no quality accommodation near the park, so I began scouting for a site. This was the beginning of Virunga Lodge. I drove around for hours on rocky tracks and walked endlessly around the volcanoes. No site seemed to work. I would end up near a refugee camp, an inaccessible mountain peak or a swamp. Meanwhile, without trying to dramatise the situation, I would see refugees coming back from the Congo dying in front of me. That made everything I was trying to do seem even more urgent.

Early on in my time in Rwanda, I was lucky to get to know Ros Carr. Originally from the US, Ros first lived in Congo and then Rwanda. She managed a pyrethrum farm near the volcanoes and became a close friend of Dian Fossey. In 1994 she reluctantly agreed to be evacuated but subsequently returned to set up an orphanage near her farm. She was a committed humanitarian and an inspiring individual. After she passed away in 2006, I served on the board of the Imbabazi Foundation for some years.

After two years of traipsing around the Parc National des Volcans I was about to give up when a local contact, Canisius, said he had found a spectacular site. I was ill with a high fever in a hotel room in Kigali, but still went to see it. We had to walk for the last few kilometres. It had rained. The earth smelled fresh. Then we got to the highest point, seemingly eye level with the volcanoes – and overlooking the magical lakes of Bulera and Ruhondo. It was a perfect place, like the lost paradise my father would talk about.

All around us, people were rebuilding their lives, constructing basic shelters, walking miles to collect water, and cultivating their rocky land. They greeted me as *padre*, thinking I was a priest. I started negotiating for the land, wondering how to build a five kilometre road, imagining a lodge in this celestial spot. In 2003 we began to build. We also led a public private partnership project with the support of the UK government – the Volcanoes Safaris BLCF project - to kick-start tourism around the gorilla park. We helped train the national park rangers.

Prosper Uwengeli, who is today the Chief Warden of Volcanoes National Park, was one of the participants. The area started to open and confidence started returning. The shops and local hotels started working. The soldiers started to leave the streets of Musanze.

In June 2004 we opened our first four cottages, or *bandas*, at Virunga Lodge. They were nothing fancy: large but simple rooms, locally made furniture, local *kitenge* cloth curtains, hurricane lamps, with very basic bathrooms since getting water was a big issue, initially we had dry toilets and bush showers. Still, it was a grand project.

Like most of our other lodges, I designed and built Virunga Lodge myself, with input from others, building by eye, improvising with what we had by *aandaza* and *jugaad* as it's called in Hindustani. I had to rely on the simple *fundis*/builders we could find in the village who had a few basic hand tools. About a hundred local people were involved in the building. Somehow it worked. The guests came and they liked what we were doing. They said it was the most beautiful site in Africa. Our staff were keen to make it work too, and very soon we were the best show in town.

My wife, Giulia, was a tremendous support, looking after Partha and coping with this new changed life. Ruzibiza and Theobare, became our best carpenters. Maria Thanase used to grout the tiles with a teaspoon. Today she is head of laundry. Our first manager, David, started as a waiter. My parents made their last visit to the region

in 2006, my father barely able to walk with his heart condition, visiting Virunga, Bwindi and Gahinga.

The Albertine Rift and Congo Basin

The move into Rwanda also made me think of setting up properties near the gorilla parks in the DRC - Kahuzi Biega and Parc National de Virunga. I made several recces on the DRC side. I even began active discussions on setting up a public-private partnership with the German development agency. I announced this on Congolese television in Kinshasa, but the political situation remained fluid, so this was not pursued. Later we discussed a tourism partnership with Emmanuel de Merode, the newly appointed warden of Parc National de Virunga. Again, the circumstances did not appear to be conducive, so we did not take this forward. I remain disappointed that we never set up in the DRC, but it has probably been for the best.

The early risks that we took as a small company setting up in Rwanda drew attention to our work in this complex part of the world. I began to be asked to speak about great ape ecotourism in different forums around the world. Our move in Rwanda, in turn, created new connections for me with other gorilla sites in the Congo basin countries – Gabon, Central African Republic and Congo Brazzaville. Although I made several visits, scoping out possible sites, difficult access and lack of infrastructure made it too challenging to develop tourism there at the time.

Our knowledge of great ape ecotourism began to be recognised. In 2006 I was asked to speak about our pioneering work at the Adventure Travel World Summit in Seattle, organised by the Adventure Travel Trade Association, which brings together adventure companies from around the world. Subsequently Shannon Stowell, the founder of the ATTA asked that I become an advisory board member. Learning from like minded people at the ATTA has been an important part of my journey on ecotourism, sustainability and working with indigenous people.

In 2012 the US State Department asked that I join the Congo Basin Forest Partnership as the ecotourism adviser. Although I have never managed to set up a camp in the Congo Basin, I am happy that I can share my experience with those who work there. Today it is the Albertine Rift that is ahead in terms of ecotourism: in fifty years I wonder whether the Congo Basin will be ahead, as the population and development puts immense pressure on the small parks of the Albertine Rift. I would like to see how we can connect the Central African wilderness areas to the world, using the unique models we have created in Rwanda and Uganda. The people, the animals and forests of Africa need to be championed.

Design and Architecture

I have always been interested in architecture, interiors and landscapes and was keen to create distinctive hand-built properties. It has been a privilege to be an owner-builder-

designer, who has had the opportunity to put his ideas into action. I have largely developed the lodges through my own instincts for design, with inputs from external designers and architects from time to time. The inspiration has come from my childhood memories of the modest African mud hut, colonial administration buildings, Anglo-Indian bungalows, Indian merchants' villas, tented camps, safari lodges and settler farms. Later on, I have also been exposed to more sophisticated architectural styles from Europe and India, to refined Italian villas, Regency crescents and Victorian garden squares, as well as Mughal and Rajput aesthetics.

One thing is clear: having been born in the pre-industrial age in Africa, I have not become accustomed to buildings that look like modern concrete blocks with so little soul and can leave you feeling that the vital element of *gushimisha*, the Kinyarwanda term for being charming, warm and welcoming, has been forgotten. Sadly, so much of the variety and richness of traditional African cultures and skills have been lost in the colonial period, the subsequent years of conflict and the rush to modernisation.

My sense of what I believe makes for good building and design has become much clearer. The organic and handmade to me is more important than the styles of many modern lodges. The input of different colleagues and friends has been important in the journey. Yusuf, our General Manager in the early days, helped set up Volcanoes operations and also with the laborious process of land acquisition for sites. Miriam – or Mama Bwindi as she was affectionately called since she was the queen

of tourism when Bwindi National Park opened in the 1990s – helped find the land that became the Volcanoes Bwindi site. The rangers even named a gorilla after her! The land was bought from Phenny Gongo, one of the first rangers in Bwindi who helped habituate the gorillas there. Helen Watkins who helped with marketing, introduced me to tent suppliers in Kenya given her family connections there. Ssemanda from Kabale, Uganda, was our Construction Manager in the early years before a kidney transplant meant that he had to take a more sedentary job with another company. Cyprien Serugero, born near Virunga, was a road surveyor and helped build the original 4km road to the lodge in 2003. Twenty years later he is still with the company and oversees construction of all lodges.

Robin Pendleton, a guest from the USA in 2002, helped with the original minimal decoration at Virunga. She was given a shoestring budget and was told to use what could be found locally. Ravi Govindia, an old friend born in Jinja in Uganda, whose father was a cabinet maker gave advice in between having smoking breaks with Yusuf. Maxine Silsby helped for some years on interiors. Different visiting architects - Hitesh Mehta, Prabhat Poddar, Nigel Tilling - provided input at certain moments in the journey. Ross Langdon helped on the original building of Kyambura in 2010. Felix Holland, based in Kampala, also acted as an architectural consultant and designed the Gahinga Batwa Village Community Centre which opened in 2018. Stuart Forbes, who worked with Richard Rogers in the UK, has been our architectural consultant more recently.

I have been lucky that since 2009 the Volcanoes Advisory Board have helped to critically review and evolve the company. The Board has been fortunate to have a long-term team which includes David Benello, a formidable strategist, Philippe Krenzer, a professor of hospitality, and Simon 'Scoop' Cooper, who worked for Island Outposts, set up by Chris Blackwell.

The high-level training of architects is very different to how I work. I build by eye and based on instinct, with childlike sketches on scraps of paper. I like pacing out buildings with pegs, working out practically how the furniture would fit, trying to see how the buildings will sit in the landscape, relate to the contours and be aligned to the views. Architects like to assess every detail and produce reams of formal complex drawings. These can take so long that the construction has already started. In the background there is Philippe, who claims he knows nothing about design, but will happily criticise a building for being underwhelming or of questionable taste.

Design is, of course, a personal and controversial subject. It produces many heated exchanges, especially among designers, architects, lodge owners and most of all among guests! It can be fun to ask three people to suggest what curtains should be used and the variety of answers can be endless. In my opinion the local ecru calico *Amerikani* is the far more timeless option and that is what I now use. The key thing is dialogue with a trusted team to evolve and remain true to the core concepts. I often find the most successful

concepts are what I call the ‘two rupee – two minute’ solutions, using local skills and materials and culturally appropriate models.

The Volcanoes style would not have met the high standards of an aesthete like Harold Acton, or for that matter Giulia’s father, Giorgio Ajmone Marsan who was another aesthete who effortlessly produced fine houses, interiors and gardens. I have sought to create my own distinctive style. From both my mother’s Indian heritage and my mother in law’s Italian heritage, I also learnt how beautiful textiles can be, although sadly in East Africa we have limited textile traditions.

The Building of Volcanoes Safaris Lodges

When I started building in Mgahinga, conflict in the Great Lakes was still rife. Refugees and rebels were everywhere. In addition, we were greeted by the El Niño floods, which made the roads impassable for our truck carrying the clay soil from the valley below. We had to deposit the soil by the side of the road, where we subsequently watched it get washed back down the hill. It was like living through the myth of Sisyphus.

My mother used to ask how many times I would have to go back to Africa to finish what she called my ‘mud huts’. In my defence I liked to quote an old Swahili proverb: *Haraka haraka haina baraka pole pole ndio mwendo* – hurry hurry has no blessings, slowly slowly is the way to go. Since we began, there has been a dramatic evolution in our lodges: from simple camps initially to

today’s leading great ape lodges. The journey can be broadly defined by three phases.

In the first, early survival phase, I started with mobile tents. Uganda and Rwanda were just coming out of conflict and the political situation was precarious. It was unclear when things would stabilise, and tourism would be able start. There was a high risk to working in this area and I recognized we needed to invest cautiously. In addition, the models of savanna tourism found in Kenya, Tanzania and Southern Africa were not appropriate for high altitude forest ecotourism for chimpanzees and gorillas. We, therefore, had to think carefully about what sort of places to set up, and at what level of investment.

In 2003 at the site for Virunga Lodge we erected four mobile tents facing Lake Bulera. When a BBC crew was sent to film the camp, Charles, the Ugandan cook/butler, managed to serve a modest lunch of chicken and chips, probably followed by pineapple rings with jam. This was one of his go-to desserts, an unfortunate parting present left over from the colonial period. Shortly after lunch, and after the film crew had gone on their way, strong winds and rain came across the lake and the tents collapsed and blew away! We decided to move the tents lower down the hillside. The next day, the winds were even stronger, and the tents again collapsed. After that they were packed away never to be used again. This first phase was short lived, and we soon transitioned to basic stone and brick *bandas*.

The *bandas* – phase two – were equipped with dry

toilets, bush showers, a flashlight, a kerosene lamp and later equipped with solar power with a few low wattage bulbs. It was at this stage that I became infamous in the American travel industry for dry toilets. The conventional flush toilet uses a lot of water, and the wastewater requires disposal. It needs some basic level of plumbing knowledge which most plumbers in post conflict rural areas didn’t seem to have. They specialised in leaking taps and toilets that didn’t flush. I thought it was best to bypass the plumbers and use dry toilets. These toilets did not use water, but separated the solid from the liquid which then could be disposed of separately, with the solid matter being recycled in the garden. They were easy to build and service, but I realised that while my sentiments were correct these toilets were not comfortable enough for our guests. Now that sustainability has become a buzz word, perhaps opinions would be different. The dry toilets were replaced in 2010 when we finally felt local plumbers could be trusted, and we financed the plumbing of the whole Virunga ridge complete with waste pipes and soak pits.

In 2016 the third phase began. My colleague Kevin, originally from England - who had begun with Volcanoes as an accountant and now is the Chief Operating Officer - had unexpectedly survived working with me for several years. Kevin ganged up with Philippe to propose a plan to bring the lodges to the level expected by today’s guests. Scoop, an accountant through and through, of course, opposed the plan as he is allergic to spending money. At first, I was not convinced a major change

was needed. I wanted to be faithful to our pioneering days, but I also realised my 1960s childhood views of hospitality were out of date. The lodges were much loved by our guests and the core of what had been created was very special, but we had to make sure the facilities were fit for purpose. So, I embraced the need for change and took this opportunity to further enhance the Volcanoes style without it becoming too shiny or frivolous. We have kept our *attar*, our essence as they say in classic Arabic. We have retained the Afro-chic ethos, blended with other influences from my life – classical aesthetics and influences from India and Europe.

Philippe said to the Board some years ago that the strength of the Volcanoes style was the design aesthetic that I had built up. His comments encouraged me to harness and refine what we have done which has been very rewarding.

For me the concept of luxury is hard to define. I know it when I see it. The handmade approach and the improvised design by eye (called *kienyeji* in Swahili) rather than the obviously contrived is important. The essence of luxury is that you should not notice it. A space should look undesigned, while having a clear framework of design and aesthetics. Objects should look as if they have always been there, comfortable in their own context, not placed for effect. The *bric-à-brac* look, having elements of the unimportant and unusual intertwined together, the feeling of layers, evolution, patina as well as history and depth are what luxury means to me. When I was a child, luxury was

the rare privilege of experiencing the magic of the wilderness, rather than the aesthetics or comfort of your accommodation. The essence of a safari was the search for zen, for nature and wildlife, for simplicity, and not to have material comforts. Today, the aspiration is the reverse. The modern traveller requires the latest urban comforts and amenities, even in the most remote locations. Whilst they like the idea of simplicity and authentic local experiences, they need the facilities of an international 5 star hotel. This is important to balance.

It is worth recalling Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince*’s mischievous observation: “Grownups like numbers. If you tell grown-ups, ‘I saw a beautiful red brick house, with geraniums at the windows and doves at the roof,’ they won’t be able to imagine such a house. You have to tell them, ‘I saw a house worth a thousand francs.’ Then they exclaim, ‘What a pretty house!’ ”

The Volcanoes Design and Build Team

The construction team continues to be led by Cyprien. In recent years we have brought in a young cadre of locally trained engineers and architects, often called ‘the photocopies’. John Bosco, born in Kabale, who trained at the long established Kichwamba Technical College in Western Uganda has been an important addition. He helped to rebuild Mount Gahinga and is now the project manager at Kibale Lodge, being built in 2023. Freedom, Gift and Gilbert are leading the engineering and design work at other lodges. The young engineers are from modest village backgrounds,

but in their quiet way, they are highly skilled and proficient in computer aided design programs which are beyond my understanding. We also have earnest Celine, who is a keen botanist trained at the University of Rwanda under Beth Kaplin, who is working with me on the massive job of replacing the invasive plants with indigenous species. Meanwhile I have launched a major redesign of our landscaping and gardens to bring out the best of our sites and indulge an old passion of mine. Meanwhile I have launched a major redesign of our landscaping and gardens to reflect my interest in gardens of paradise.

Most of our builders and craftsmen are from the villages around the lodges and have had little formal training. We have had to develop an inhouse team of African *fundis*, furniture makers, and upholstery specialists. Our building style has required much experimentation with local materials and techniques and sometimes has relied on *jengha na wunjha* (build and break) methodology. The buildings are naturally low impact: we recycle where we can, harvest rainwater, use solar power when possible, and build with local materials.

Virtually everything is now made in-house at the lodges. Nsabimana, a young man from the village of Kinoni near Virunga, leads our team of artisans. He has a rare instinct for design and aesthetics and can seemingly produce furniture to any specification. We also use the street side *jua kali* welding workshops, the local *mzee* (old man) and local women’s groups

to make furniture and crafts for the lodges. Whatever the original design was and wherever it originated, an old *armoire* from Germany or a French empire desk or a local stool, by the time it goes through our hands it looks as if it grew in the village! One of the biggest challenges to get right in far flung places is upholstery - finding filling materials that are appropriate, making sure the ‘internal sandwich’ is hard and soft all at once. I oversee the *uphostry* department, as we call it in house – it is one of the few real skills that I appear to have developed, with the help of Wycliffe at Virunga.

Our teams have achieved levels that twenty-five years ago I would have considered impossible. We also have Stephane and Guy from Paris who have changed the way we think about food in simple and subtle ways. We have worked with James Suter and Oli Caldwell over many years, who sensitively convey the essence of Volcanoes lodges through their photography and filming.

Our staff are our greatest asset. Whatever the background of the staff, we all try to work as ‘barefoot villagers’, working together in an empathetic way. Empowering local staff is a key aspect of Volcanoes’ philosophy and about half of the managers in the company are women, including Shannon, our General Manager in Rwanda, and Priscilla at Kyambura and Phiona at Gahinga. Although their families have lived through years of conflict in the Great Lakes in the 1990s, they have shown great resilience. They have kept their modesty, quiet dignity and spirit, rooted in the cultures of the Great Lakes. Our staff take a great

pride in the lands from which they come and make you feel that you are in a warm cocoon. To me the soul of a place, its connection with people, their lives and landscape, is the real jewel of the experience. Our philosophy follows the simple beliefs of the 13th century Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta who said that to him travel means “kinship with humanity”.

Linking Conservation to Communities

The core of Volcanoes’ work has been to build lodges. Having said that, there’s an equally strong thread connecting the lodges to conservation and communities. These are the three main lessons about conservation I have learnt on my journey.

First, conservation of a threatened species or of a landscape has to be part of the economic mainstream – it has to pay for its preservation in substantial part to survive and get the support of governments and local people. Putting wilderness and wildlife on a pedestal, without any thought of the costs involved, as tended to happen when the National Park movement was developed a century ago, will not help its cause. There needs to be a business case put forward for safeguarding wildlife and wilderness. In addition, the private sector has to be a key factor in this process. Too often the vital contribution of the private sector is not understood, such as bringing skills and economic development to a remote area. My thinking on the vital connection between conservation, ecotourism, community livelihoods was set out in a Ted Talk I gave in 2018.

Secondly, sensitive and controlled tourism is critical in the case of endangered animals and landscapes. Dian Fossey was against tourism as she was concerned about its impact on the health of the gorillas. In my experience over 25 years if there is no tourism, then the animals will not have a value and therefore no economic incentive to safeguard their future. If tourism is uncontrolled, it risks putting undue pressure through disease and stress on the great apes which will not be conducive to their survival. It is a very delicate balance, and we must all ensure that tourism is carefully controlled and protocols for disease transmission are followed.

Thirdly, the focus of conservation and tourism must be on communities. Local people will only be supporters of tourism and conservation if they receive a tangible benefit. They need bread on the table, education for the next generation and progress in their lives. They want a slice of the growing wealth of rich countries. If we want the gorillas and forests to survive, we need to focus on the people. This philosophy is at the core of the Volcanoes great ape ecotourism model.

In 2005, at the first meeting of the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP), Volcanoes Safaris signed the UN Kinshasha Declaration on protecting the great apes, the only ecotourism company to do so. Since then we have continued to participate actively in GRASP discussions.

In 2009, I established a non-profit organization, Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust (VSPT). VSPT connects our lodges to the neighbouring communities

and conservation. It aims to create long-term, self-sustaining projects that enrich the livelihoods of local people, promote great ape conservation, restore natural habitats and reduce human-wildlife conflict. Guests at our lodges can experience these projects to get a unique insight into the challenges of conservation and to share the lives of the local communities.

VSPT is funded through our lodge guests, private donations and from Giulia and I. The Gahinga Batwa Village, a major community project at Mount Gahinga Lodge, was built in 2018 to provide a permanent home to over 120 of the Mgahinga Batwa Community, who had been evicted when the park was gazetted in 1991. The project was also financially supported by the Adventure Travel Conservation Fund. In 2020 during the covid pandemic VSPT worked in partnership with DEG (a German development partner) to provide health training and personal protective equipment, agricultural assistance and emergency food donations to communities around our lodges.

The Kyambura Gorge Ecotourism Project, is a series of connected projects which aim to safeguard the Kyambura Gorge ecosystem. Since 2009, the project has developed a 3km wildlife buffer zone, restored a 45 acre wetland, built elephant trenches, set up a coffee cooperative, run hospitality training for local youths, and established a tree nursery and reforestation project. Nicole Simmons, who researched the Kyambura chimps over a number of years, is now an authority on this isolated community of 30 chimps. In 2015 we

opened Bwindi Bar, the ‘Harry’s Bar of Uganda’ which provides practical hospitality training for young people from the local community. The trainees serve guests the famous Ugandan ‘rolex’ wrap and our signature cocktail ‘The Gorillini’, inspired by David Benello.

These are examples of important community and conservation projects that I think are crucial for the protection of landscapes and wildlife in the threatened Albertine Rift and elsewhere.

Partnerships

We have signed a long-term partnership with the Jane Goodall Institute Uganda to deepen the community and conservation work at Kyambura. We have also signed a partnership with the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund to support their work at the newly built Ellen DeGeneres campus at Kinigi, Rwanda. We support the work of Conservation Through Public Health set up by Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka on supporting health, hygiene and sanitation in local communities, which in turn supports gorilla health. Since 2022, we have partnered with Alexander Brackowski to establish the Kyambura Lion Project, to monitor carnivores in Queen Elizabeth National Park. We are partnering with the Rwenzori Sculpture Foundation, set up by Rungwe Kingdon, at Kibale Lodge to display innovative sculptures by Ugandan artists. We are also supporting Sadhguru School near Kibale Lodge, created by Lulu Sturdy. We have been long term partners of Cricket Builds Hope. Inspired by Christopher Shale, his son Alby made

Rwanda’s first international level cricket stadium a reality.

The Albertine Rift: Safeguarding the Great Apes 2022 to 2050

The concept of protecting wilderness spaces, of creating national parks, developed in Europe and North America, and became the basis of protected areas in Africa. The Congolese and Rwandan sides of the Virungas became the first national park in Africa in 1925 – Parc National d’Albert, some twenty years after the discovery of the mountain gorilla. This was thanks to the dogged commitment of Carl Akeley from the Natural History Museum in New York and the vision of King Albert of Belgium.

The romantic dream of protecting wilderness is what I was inspired to cherish by my father. Today this romanticism needs to be tempered with the realities of poor people who live near parks.

As part of the celebrations to mark Volcanoes Safaris’ 25th anniversary, I hosted a retreat on the challenges facing the Albertine Rift with 25 leading conservationists at Mount Gahinga Lodge and Mgahinga National Park in November 2022 to brainstorm on collaborative action needed from key stakeholders to develop a long-term vision to 2050 to safeguard the Albertine Rift.

Over the last 25 years, as the politics of the Great Lakes region have stabilised, particularly in Uganda

and Rwanda, the governments, supported by a number of major conservation organisations, have made significant progress in rebuilding the National Park infrastructure, opening the gorilla and chimpanzee parks for tourism, and creating the conditions for the private sector to develop lodges.

However, looking ahead to 2050, the wilderness areas of the Albertine Rift are going to be under major threat from development. There is increasing pressure around the parks of a growing population, which is set to double in this period. Local people need land to live on and from which to make a living. If development is not controlled around National Parks, wildlife could be overwhelmed. I believe that unless there is a long-term strategy to create a better balance between the increasing needs of humans, wildlife and habitats, the future of the great apes in the Albertine Rift could be in peril.

The next twenty-five years will therefore be more challenging than the last twenty-five. The pressures are even greater in Eastern DRC due to insecurity. Following the retreat, the ‘Albertine Apes Alliance’ was created to continue the dialogue. As a first initiative, the partners are already supporting protected area authorities on reinforcing gorilla and chimp protocols being observed by all stakeholders.

Conclusion: Taking forward the vision

In 1997, I pitched the first tent at Mgahinga on the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC, three years

after the turmoil in neighbouring Rwanda. That was the beginning of Volcanoes Safaris. The timing was not ideal and there have been many challenges, but I remained focused on fulfilling my dream as I do not like to give up easily. In a paradoxical way, it was the unfortunate events of the genocide in Rwanda that drew me back to this unique part of Africa. Very few were thinking about tourism at the time, but, as the area settled, I felt setting up camps could contribute to stability and economic progress in the area. So, I started focussing on reviving gorilla tourism. I am proud that our lodges, ecotourism projects, and practical partnerships for community and conservation activities have made a tangible contribution.

We have had to create new models of working in post-conflict areas. This has inevitably been a long and complex process, but it has finally come into its own. These simple endeavours started because of a childhood growing up with my father’s obsessive pursuit of wilderness. They have led me to build lodges that I believe have become beacons of hope. From small beginnings we have become the pioneers of gorilla and chimpanzee ecotourism, the only company to focus on this distinct type of tourism.

This twenty-five-year journey has been rather more challenging and complex than I had imagined, but the pioneering spirit of my forefathers in Africa for over 100 years has kept me going. It has also been far more rewarding than I expected with all that we have achieved and aspire to achieve for the future. In

keeping with a strong characteristic of the Baganda among whom I was born, I learned that you should cherish your work and do it in a quiet way. I am proud of our achievements and now finally, twenty-five years later I think it’s worthwhile to record them.

Of course, life is always a work in progress as Gaudi’s Basilica de la Sagrada Familia in Barcelona teaches you. With our three gorilla lodges – Mount Gahinga and Bwindi in Uganda, and Virunga in Rwanda – and a chimpanzee lodge at Kyambura in Uganda well established, we are now adding a further chimpanzee property near the Kibale Forest in Uganda in 2024.

I used to say to my son Partha, when he was a child, on his early journeys, that the region was like ‘the land before time’. Now the region is very much connected to the world. We need to work hard to ensure that in being connected to the world, it is not destroyed. Partha came with me on many visits to East Africa and also went to the Congo. In a spirit of family oneness, he has pitched his own metaphorical tent in Mogadishu, Somalia, and is seeking to make his own contribution to the Horn of Africa.

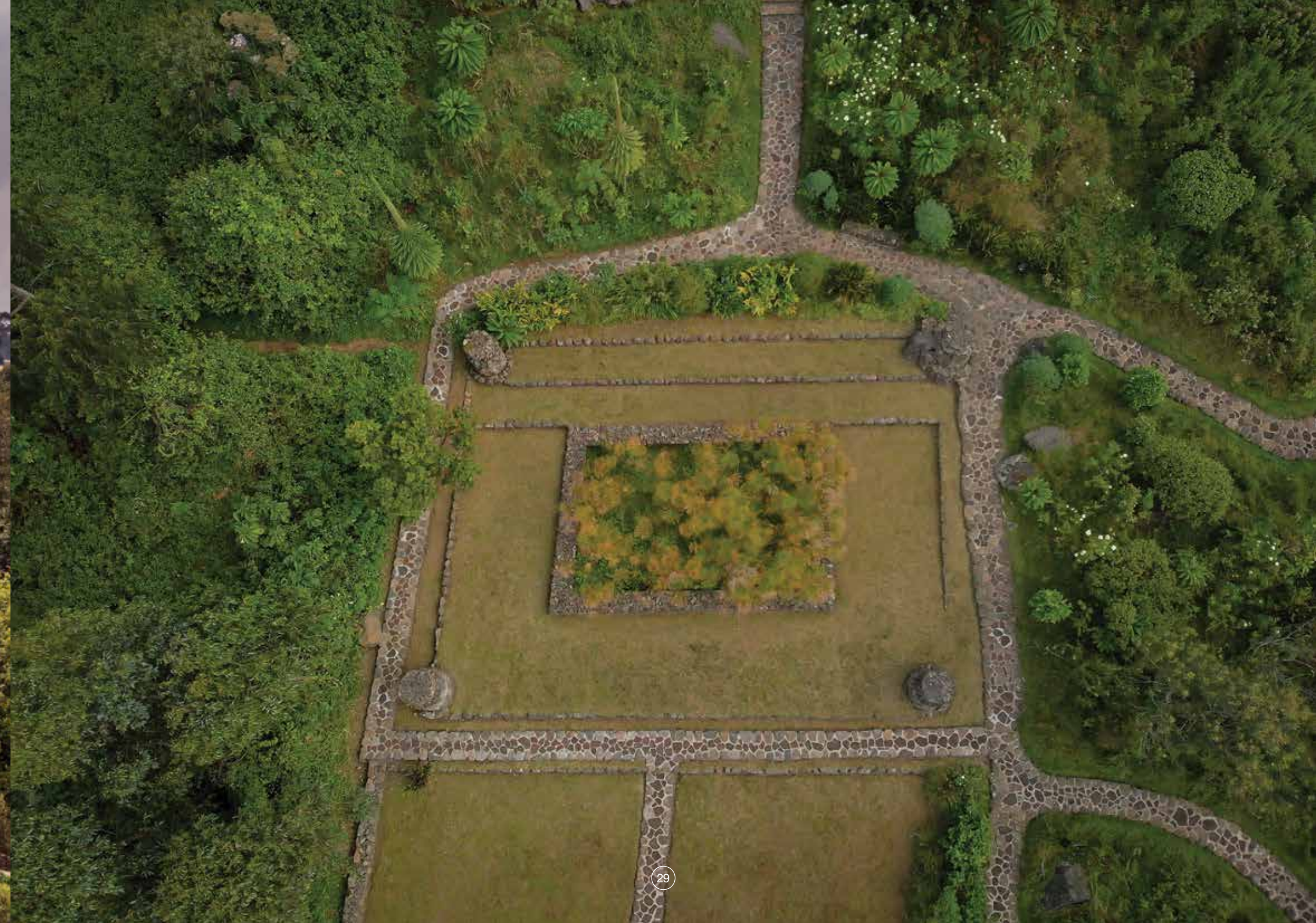
Looking forward I would like to ensure Volcanoes lodges and ecotourism projects continue to evolve and be innovative pathfinders. We have established our footprint and now turn our attention to our broader advocacy for the Great Apes and the Albertine Rift. We urge our guests and our partners to support us in this important task.

The work of Volcanoes Safaris would not have been possible without the support of our loyal guests, the travel trade, the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, our conservation partners, the communities near our lodges, the Volcanoes team, my parents and parents in law, my wider family and friends, Giulia and Partha.

IN MEMORIAM

Kuldip Rai Moman (Moron, Jalandhar, Punjab 1918 - London 2007) and Kaushalya Moman (Lahore, Punjab 1921 - London 2013).

In memory of those who have suffered in the Great Lakes conflicts, especially during the reign of Amin in Uganda and the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994.



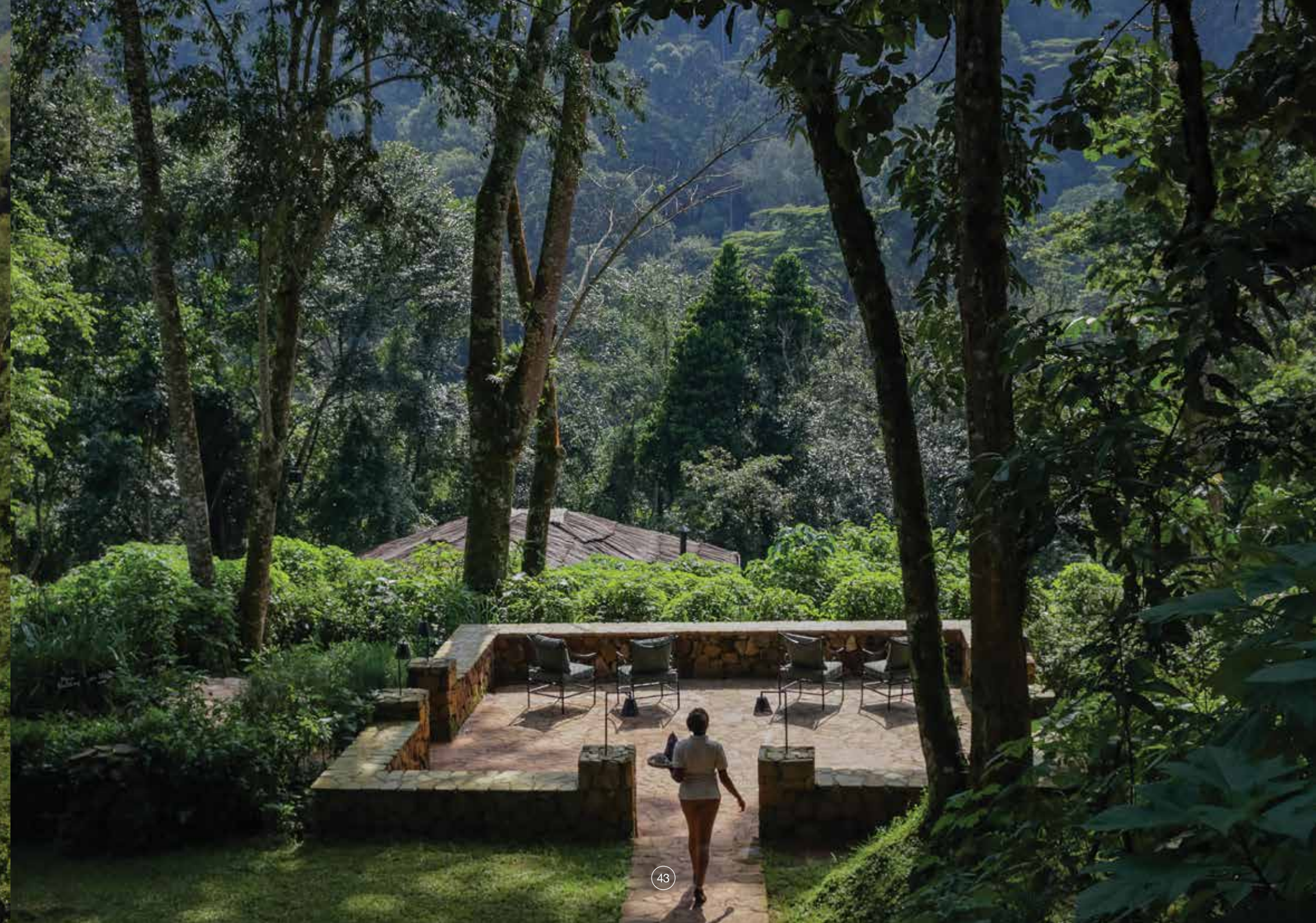










































EVOLUTION OF THE VOLCANOES STYLE

Inspiration from childhood 1954 - 1970



The Moman family in Soroti



Mweya Lodge



The Traveller's Rest, Kisoro



Chief Warden's house, Mweya



Dian Fossey in her cabin, Karisoke Research Centre



Masindi Hotel



Post Master's house in Masindi



Paraa Lodge, Murchison Falls



Nakasero Indian Club, Kampala



Roadside kiosk



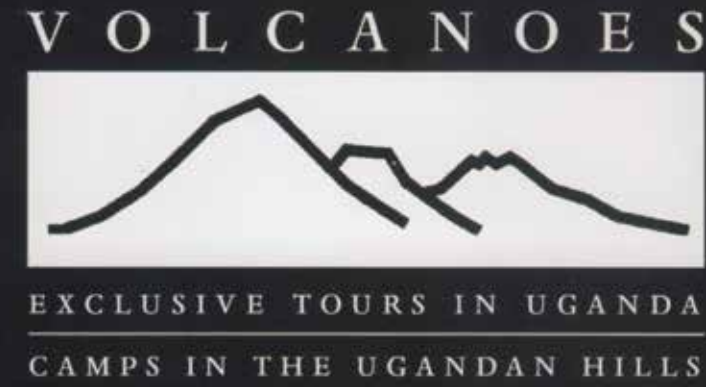
Hut, Mgahinga



Volcanoes Safaris offices at 27 Lumumba Avenue, Kampala

THE BEGINNING OF VOLCANOES SAFARIS
KISORO

Initial development: John's house; Kisoro Guest House; and the Travellers Rest Hotel 1995 - 2002



Original Volcanoes' logo



Volcanoes' base, Kisoro



Yusuf Mulima Mubiru,
General Manager



UNCR refugee camp, Kisoro



Park rangers



Inauguration of Travellers Rest with the Bishop and the Austrian Chargé



Park ranger, Rachel Hunter, Gladys Kalema & Ian Redmond



Partha Moman



Kisoro Guest House, Kisoro



Traveller's Rest, Kisoro

MOUNT GAHINGA LODGE

Initial construction phase 1996 - 2005



Praveen with Sheba, Park ranger, at Mgahinga National Park entrance



Road to the Volcanoes



Lodge site



Praveen's parents visiting first tented camp



Original banda



Preparing the site



Giulia Marsan & Rosalind Hill



Overlanders camp



Preparation of thatch



Original bathroom



The lodge at the foot of Muhavura

BWINDI LODGE

Initial construction phase 1999 - 2005



First tents



Mess tent



First public area



Roof of living room



Banda interior



Original bathroom



Dining room



With Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda



Verandah of living room



Overview of lodge

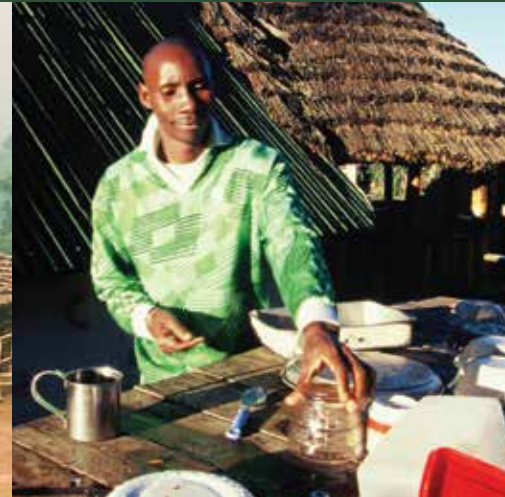
SIPI LODGE
1997 - sold in 2004



Original Governor's bungalow



Reception area



Outdoor kitchen



INTO RWANDA
2000 - 2002



Gahinga and Muhavura



Praveen, Claire Richardson & Kate Fawcett from the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International at the grave of Fossey 2002



Banda



Interior



Dining room



First visit by tourist operators to Parc National des Volcans



Ruins of Karisoke Research Centre

VIRUNGA LODGE

Initial construction phase 2002 - 2009



First tent



BBC crew at lunch



Tent blown over by wind



Kuldip Moman



Building the public areas



Original dry toilets and bush shower



Path to site



Praveen overseeing foundation work



Building the 4 km road



Banda interior



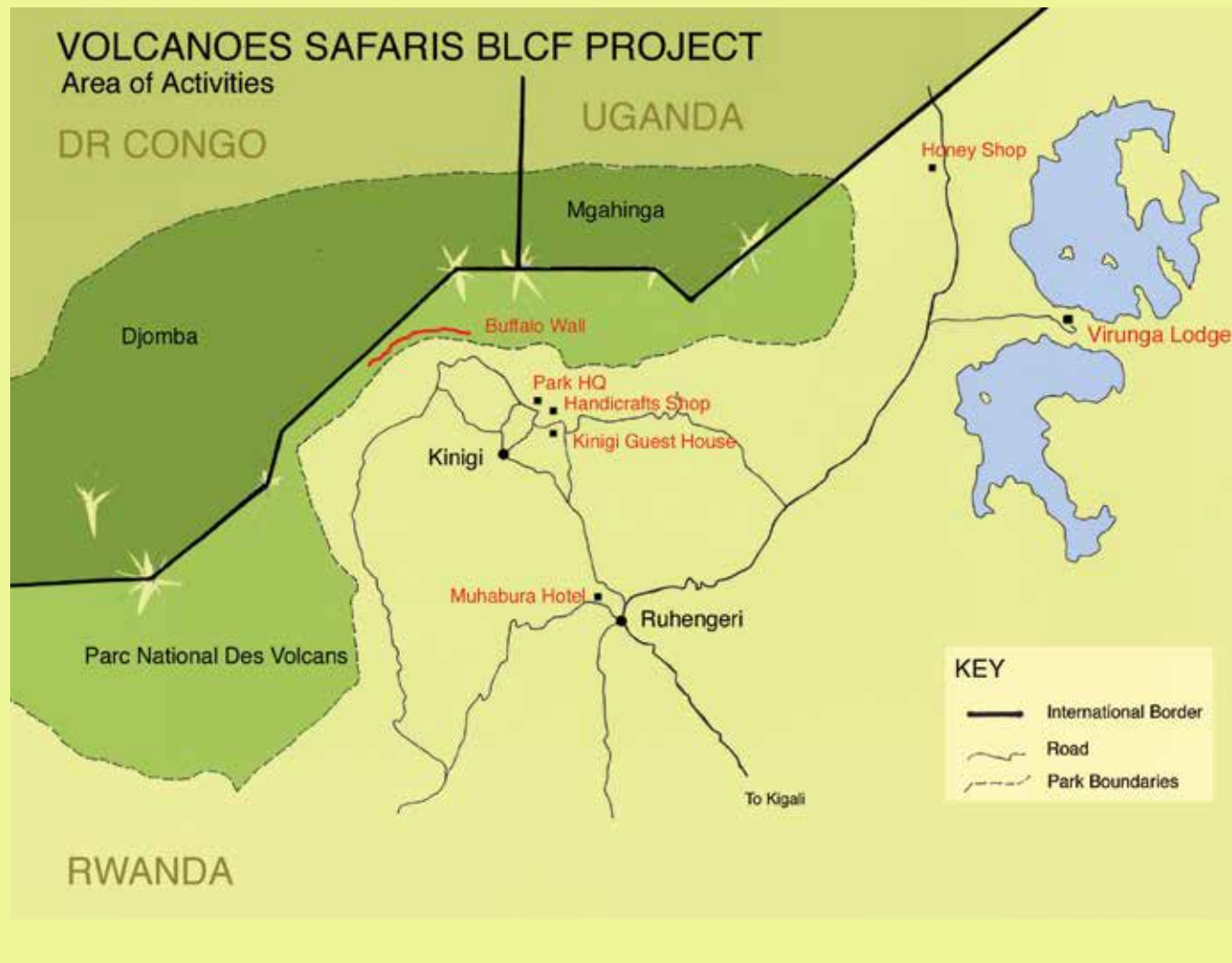
Moses, Charles and David with Kaushalya Moman



Dining room

VOLCANOES SAFARIS BUSINESS LINKAGES CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT

Relaunching gorilla tourism in Rwanda 2003 - 2007



New car park at Park Headquarters



Building the buffalo wall



Meeting with BLCF partners



Staff training at Muhabura Hotel, Musanze



With Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda



Staff training at ORPTN



IGCP Craft shop



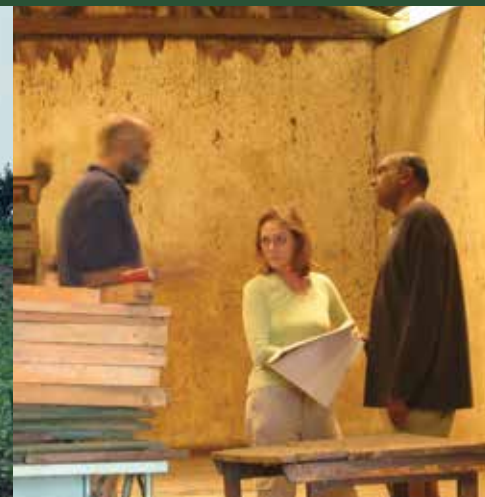
Etienne & Praveen at UN Great Apes Conference, Kinshasa, 2005

KYAMBURA GORGE LODGE

Initial construction phase 2000 - 2012



View of site



Praveen with Robin Pendelton & Prabhat Poddar



Old Coffee shed



Main building remodelling



Ross Langdon, architectural consultant



Building of the sombrero



Site meeting



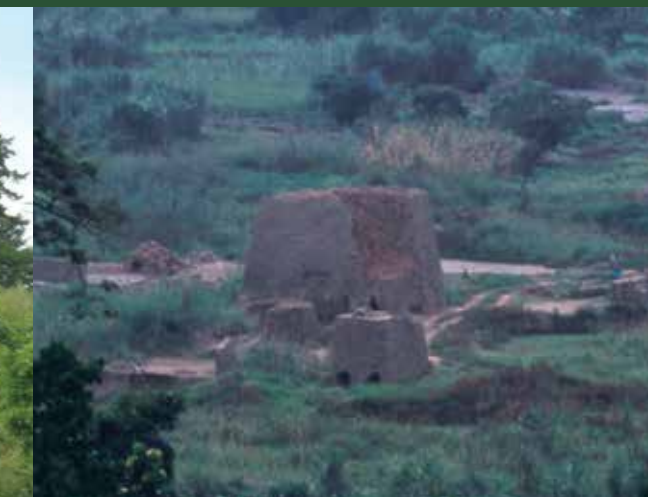
Renovating the old coffee shed



Visit by Emmanuel de Merode, Chief Park Warden, Virunga National Parc, DRC



Test banda

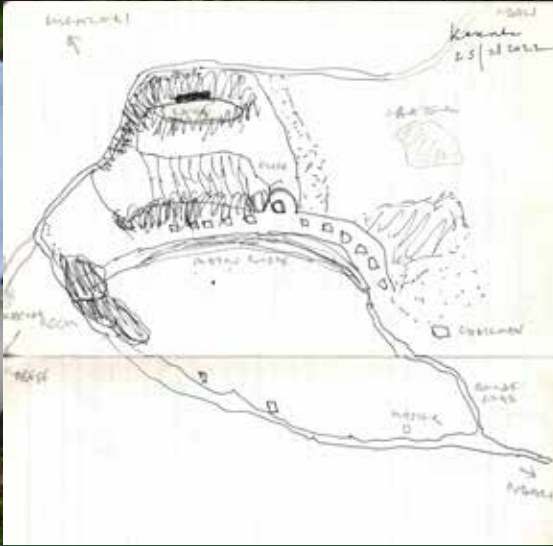
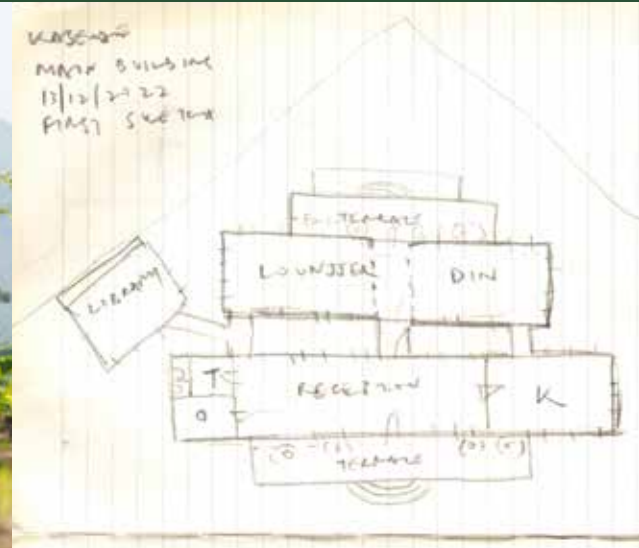
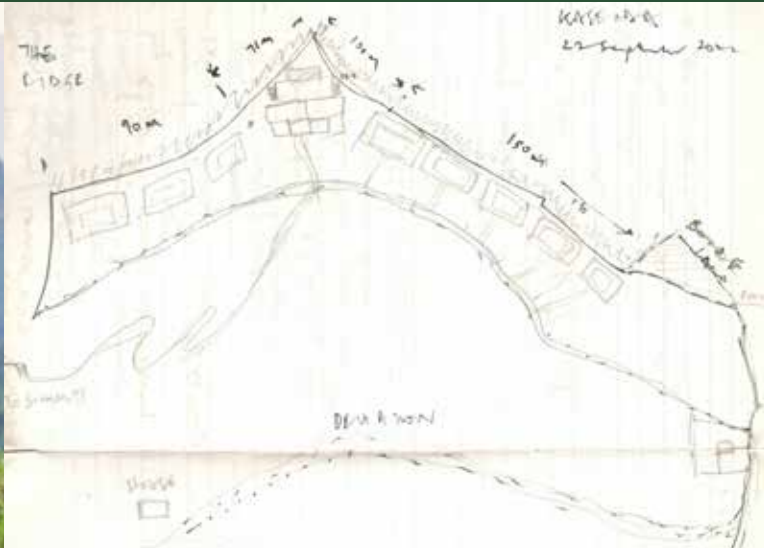


Illegal brickworks in wetland near lodge

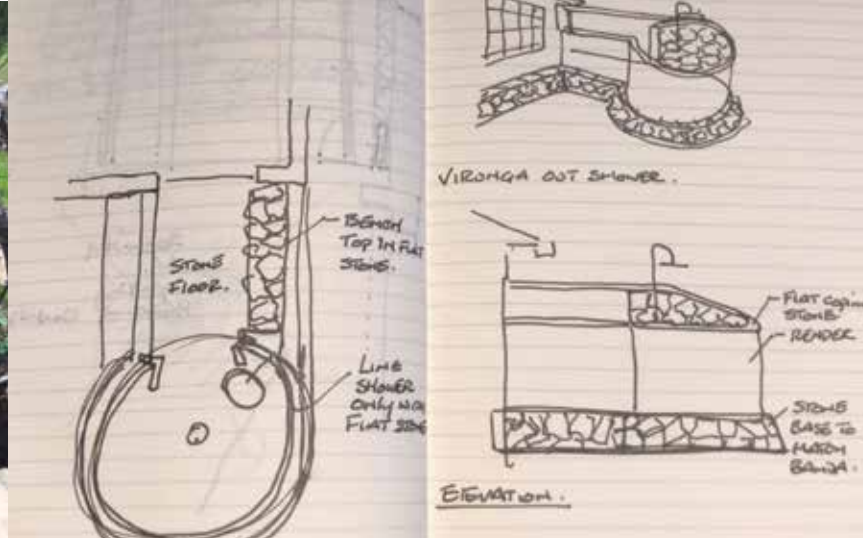
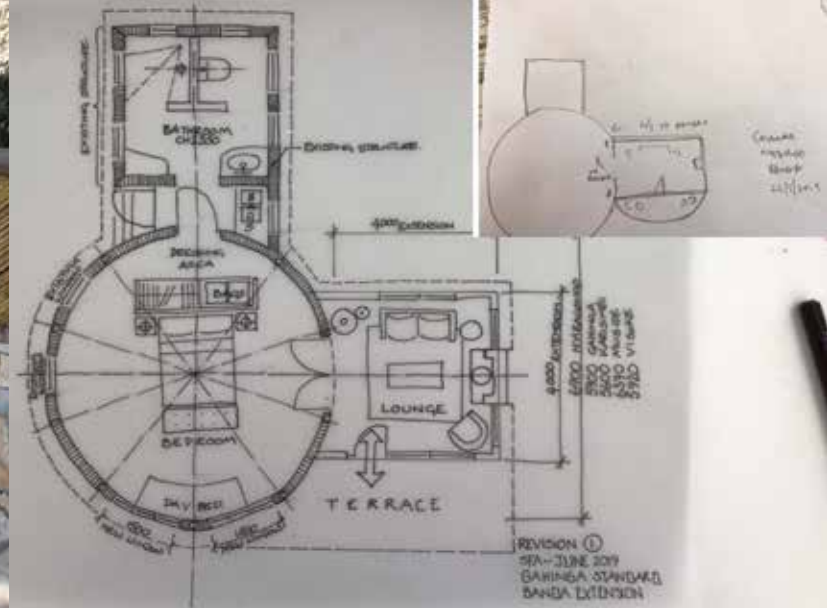
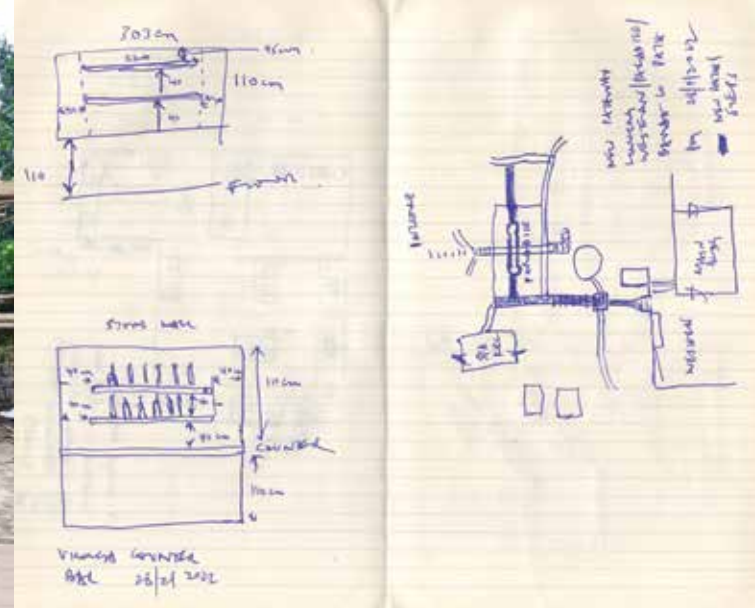
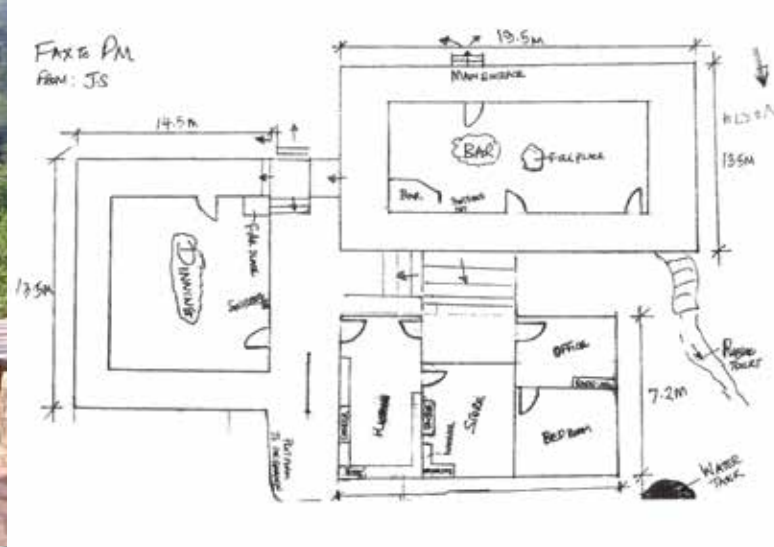


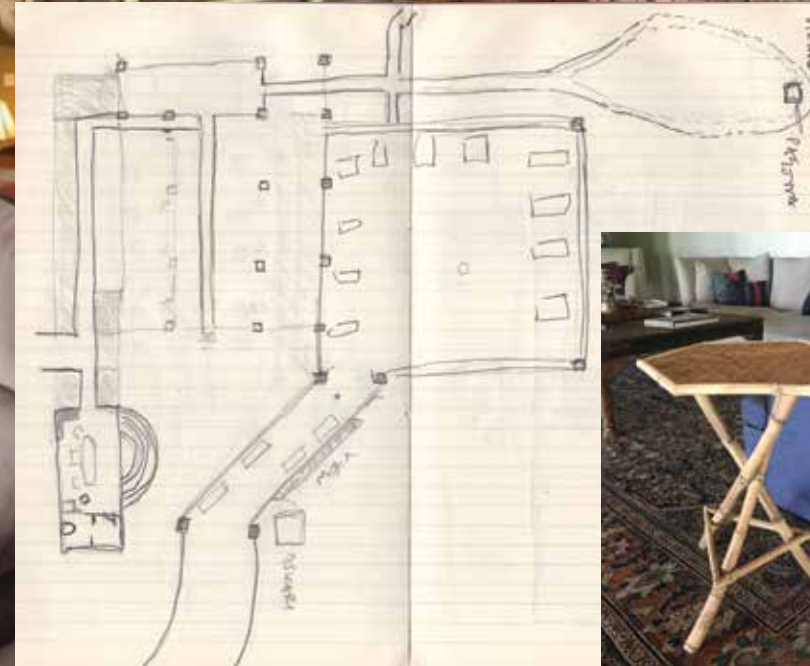
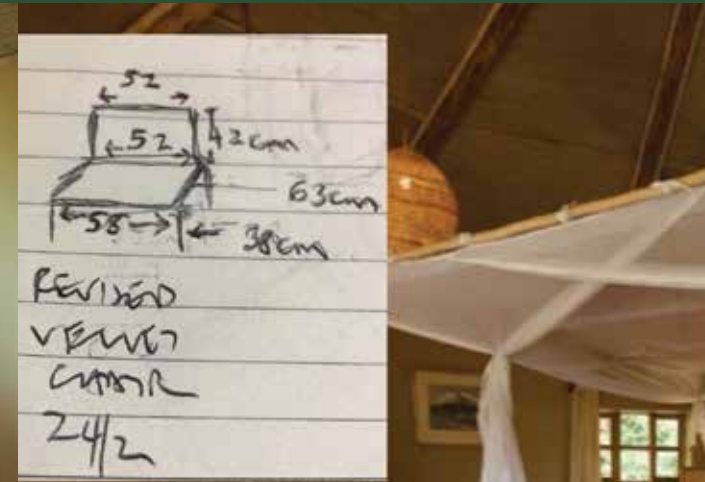
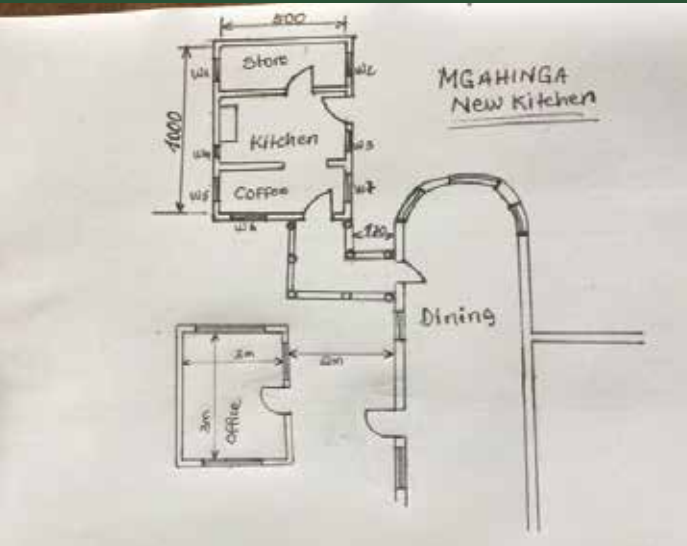
Building bridge across river

KIBALE LODGE
Construction 2023-2024



THE VOLCANOES WORKSHOP: DESIGN INTO REALITY

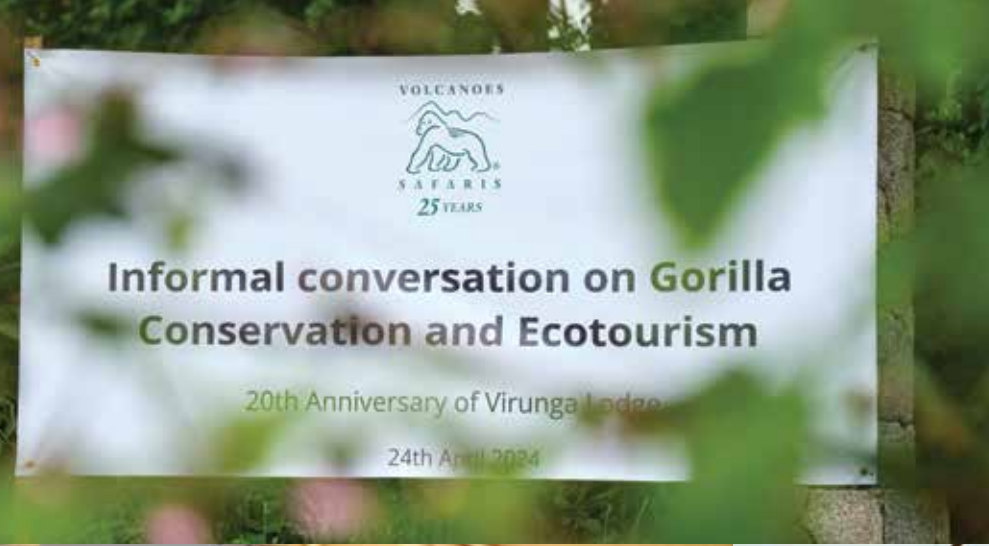




THE ALBERTINE RIFT ECOSYSTEMS AND GREAT APES: CONSERVATION CHALLENGES 2022 TO 2050
RETREAT AT MOUNT GAHINGA LODGE AND MGAHINGA NATIONAL PARK EDUCATION CENTRE
12-14 November 2022



20TH ANNIVERSARY OF VIRUNGA LODGE: INFORMAL CONVERSATION ON GORILLA ECOTOURISM AND CONSERVATION
24 April 2024



THE PEOPLE BEHIND VOLCANOES SAFARIS





