



CRA-U 04: 9 Days Mountains of the Moon Adventure

Tour Summary/ Features:

A trip into the Rwenzoris is an exhilarating and rewarding experience, but one which must be well planned. The key to an enjoyable visit is to "be prepared!" the central circuit hike takes 6 nights / 7 days and reaches an altitude of 14,000 ft (4,267 m) above sea level. The conditions on the mountain are a challenge to even an experienced hiker.

This mountain is famous for its un-engineered, steep and slippery trails and frequent rain. Rainfall and cold temperatures, bogs mud, steep terrain and high altitude make it a challenging trip. Never the less it is exciting! You need to try it! Since during much the year mud, rain, mist and wind occurs daily, adequate clothing (and a mental Attitude!) For these conditions are a must.

These periods of July-August and December-February are relatively dry and for inexperienced hikers the best seasons for a trek. During any season, raingear, good sleeping bag, warm hat, gloves, heavy socks, gum-boots, gaiters, and a walking stick for balance (and to probe the mud) are recommended. A basic first aid kit is a necessity.

Day 01: Kampala - Kasese

Transfer to Kasese: Overnight at Hotel Margherita

Day 02: Nyabitaba Hut

Plan to arrive at Rwenzori Mountains National Park and the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services (RMS) offices at Nyakalengija in the morning so as to have ample time to rent equipment and be availed with guides and porters.

Hiking begins from the Park Headquarters 5400 ft (1,646 m), walking past typical "mud and wattle" Bakonzo homes and gradually moving upward through elephant grass and garden plots. It takes approximately forty minutes to reach the park boundary. The trail then follows the Mubuku River, crossing recent landslide areas (to be negotiated carefully), and involves climbing over rocks and bluff, before reaching the Mahoma River in about two and a half hours.

After crossing the river there will be a steep climb through open bracken fern slopes and Podorcarpus Forest up to Nyabitaba hut 8,700 ft (2652 m). Total time for an average hiker from Nyakalengija to Nyabitaba is about 5 -7 hours and total elevation gained is 4,000 ft. (1,200 m). Slower hikers could take considerably longer, so insist on leaving park headquarters before noon to avoid being on the trails after dark.

During this part of the trip, you may hear chimpanzees and sometimes you can see black and white colobus monkeys behind the hut and catch glimpse of brilliantly colored Rwenzori Turaco (a bird of the tree tops). Across the alley to the north of Nyabitaba hut lies the rocky and largely unclimbed Portal Peaks, which rise above 14,000 ft (4, 627 m). Overnight at Nyabitaba Hut - 2652m

Day 03: John Matte Hut - 3414m

From Nyabitaba Hut the trail leads westward for a half a kilo meter then drops steeply to Kurt Shaffer Bridge, crossing below he confluence of the Bujuku and the Mubuku rivers. By turning right the Bridge you begin to climb the central circuit anti-clockwise since the clockwise direction is much

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more difficult and adds considerable danger for you and your porters. After crossing Kurt Shaffer Bridge the muddy, slippery trail climbs steadily up through bamboo forest. After one and a half hours you encounter an area of slippery boulder hopping which some hikers consider the most difficult and dangerous footing of the circuit. After five hours of travel from Nyabitaba, you reach the hut at Nyamuleju and its accompanying rock shelter. If you had a late start or know that there is a large group ahead of you at the next hut, you might consider spending the night here. On a rare clear day Mts. Stanley and Speke can be seen from the top of the rock near the hut. Nyamuleju also marks the start of the giant lobelia and groundsel zone, this remarkable vegetation type is found now where else in the world except high altitude tropical African Mountains.

The one-hour walk to John Matte hut (11, 200 ft / 3,414 m) is through a challenging bog, full of extra ordinary plants and the slow pace can be a delightful chance to examine and photograph this unique environment, typical time to reach John Matter from Nyabitaba is about 7 hrs. Some hikers consider this to be the most tiring and longest day of the circuit, so an early start is important. The loss of altitude to Kurt Shaffer Bridge means the total elevation to be gained on this day is about 3,000 ft (915 m). Hikers who feel they have reached their limits by this point should consider John Matte a reasonable stopping point. You can enjoy the unique vegetation in the bog and the great view, then the following day begin your return journey to Nyabitaba. Overnight at Nyabitaba.

Day 04: Bujuku Hut - 3962m

Leave John Matte hut to cross the Bujuku River and enter the lower Bigo bog, where your first real experience for jumping from tussock to tussock on a grassy bog begins. The trail is muddy and follows the left (southern) edge of lower Bigo bog until eventually it reaches the round metal "uniport". The Bigo hut and its rock shelter. A steep Section past the hut leads to upper to Bigo bog. In the last half of this bog, a boardwalk has been constructed. Though some may think that it is an ugly intrusion, it makes walking easier and prevents the hikers from further damaging the bog. A beautiful narrow stream at the upper end of this bog makes a good lunch break. An hour and a half beyond this upper bog, and after climbing through drier ground criss-crossing the river, you reach lake Bujuku. The southern end of the lake is in a majestic setting, with Mt. Baker to the South, Mt. Stanley to the west and Mt. Speke to the north.

The trail route along the lake's northeastern shore crosses the worst mud on the trip. Beyond the north end of the lake is a rock shelter called Cooking Pot and a short distance further is Bujuku Hut 13,000ft (3962 m) favourably located for parties climbing Mt. Speke (*which requires technical skills and special equipment*). Time to reach Bujuku form John Matte is typically 3-5 hours, and the elevation gained is 1,800 ft (560 m). But the long stretches of bog and the mud along the lake make this another challenging day. The shaded location and frequent mists can make Bujuku Hut quite cold. If one moved around on a nature walk, the chances of seeing Red duikers are high and at night, calls of the Rock hyraxes are common.

Day 05: Kitandara Hut - 4023m

From Bujuku hut leave directly to newer trail, which rises and falls twice before finally climbing steeply trough magical moss draped Groundsel vegetation 14,345 ft (4,372 m) to Scott Elliot Pass. At the steepest section is a short strong ladder after which a right hand branch will lead to Elena Hut 14,700 ft (4,430 m) This is a steep rocky trail which when wet or icy can be slippery. Continuing straight, and a few steps below the pass, there is a sheltered spot for a break; from here, there is a second trail to the right to Elena Hut. Elena is the base camp for climbing 16, 763 ft (5,109 m) to

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Margherita Peak in the Mt. Stanley Complex which requires an additional day or two and can only be attempted with an ice axe, mountain boots, crampons, ropes and prior arrangements with RMS guides.

The circuit trail continues to the left over Scot Elliot Pass and enters an alpine zone of sparse low vegetation and stark rough boulders more familiar to high altitude climbers from northern latitudes. If the weather is bad here (*rain, snow, and wind can occur in any season*) the conditions for "hypothermia" are ideal. As you leave the pass, you may enjoy spectacular views northward of Margherita Peak, Elena and Savoia Glaciers, and Mt. Baker 15,889 ft (4,843 m) towering above you to the east (left) of the trail. Having dropped a few hundred feet in elevation from the pass, you cut below massive rock walls at the base of the Mt. Baker. Here, dramatic "impact craters" have been caused by large rocks falling from above, and your guide may caution you against loud noise! Rising and falling, the trail descends past Upper Lake Kitandara through thick mud to lower lake and Kitandara Hut 13,200 ft (4,023 m).

This lovely site is surrounded by towering peaks, but the sun sets early and the nights can be cold. Time to reach Kitandara Hut from Bujuku Hut usually takes 3-5 hours. The elevation gain to the pass from Bujuku Hut is 1,400 ft (425 m), and because Scott Elliot is the highest point so far some hikers will be slower due to greater effort required at these altitudes. Watch carefully for signs of altitude sickness. Overnight at Kitandara Hut - 4023m

Day 06: Guy Yeoman Hut - 3261m

An early start is advisable to avoid overheating on the steep but lovely hour-long climb from the lake Kitandara, which is 14,050 ft (4,282 m) to the Freshfield Pass. Viewing westward on clear days leads into neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and northward, Margherita and its glaciers still dominate the horizon. Freshfield is a long flat traverse through beautiful alpine mossy glades (and more mud) until after a half-hour, when the trail begins the circuit's long two-day descent. Mist or rain can make tracking the trail really difficult, and the first one-kilometer here can be very slippery. Rock Shelter at Bujongolo and Kabamba are optional overnight stopovers but it is better to push on through the seemingly endless mud to newly constructed Guy Yeoman Hut 10,700 ft (3,261 m). Some hikers make the Kitandara Guy Yeoman trip in 5 hours, but any stops to enjoy the pass, bad weather on descent, and the slow conditions in the last two hours of deep mud can make this a much longer day, which some visitors consider as difficult as day two. Overnight at Guy Yeoman hut

Day 07: Nyabitaba Hut - 2652m

Hikers should begin their journey back early, so as to get to Nyabitaba Hut before dark. In any case the path from the Guy Yeoman is quite difficult in some spots. Helping each other and descending very slowly facing the slope instead of facing outward is recommended, especially as you approach Kichunchu where the trail parallels twice the crosses Mubuku River mostly in deep mud until the last few kilometers of good dry trail. This follows the ridge down Nyabitaba, which completes the circuit. Typical hikers make the Guy Yeoman to Nyabitaba in 5 hours. Should you decide to continue to Nyakalengija, it is another two or three hours depending on the condition of your knees and your desire to reach a comfortable bed and bath. Be especially careful about vines and brush and resist the urge to hurry out of the mountains. Late evening walking can be good for watching birds and you may sight the occasional blue tailed monkey. Sharp eyes can catch a glimpse of the brilliant green but changeable Rhinoserous Chameleon. Overnight at Nyabitaba Hut

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Day 08: Nyabitaba - Hotel Margherita

Descend to Park Headquarters. It can take 2-3 hours. Dinner and overnight at Hotel Margherita

Day 09: Hotel Margherita - Kampala

Return transfer to Kampala

Price excludes:

- Ground transportation
- 02 night's accommodation at Hotel Margherita in Kasese
- 6 nights on the mountain
- All meals as per the Itinerary
- Lunch on Day 01 to lunch on Day 09
- Mountain climbing permit.

Price excludes:

- Peak climbing fees
- Extra porters
- All beverages except water while climbing
- Any activity or accommodation NOT mentioned in the itinerary
- Tips, souvenirs and items of a personal nature.

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