



Rwanda – Voices of Hope

by Michael Grosspietsch

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Editor:
Michael Grosspietsch



voh@newdawnassociates.com

Editorial

Half a year has passed since I published the last issue of the Voices of Hope. My own busy schedule of the past months has to hold as an excuse. But I promise that the newsletter will become at least bi-monthly again.

A few weeks ago, Rwanda was able to celebrate a major success. The country had won the title for the best African stand on the biggest tourism fair in the world. The ITB takes place every year in March in the German capital Berlin, and this time I was able to join the Rwandan delegation with a new company which I will introduce later in this newsletter.

While for most countries these tourism fairs are only about business, Rwanda has realized that they also present a wonderful opportunity to create very positive publicity and show the beauty of a destination and its people. For this reason, the country has continuously spent a lot of effort to improve on the physical appearance of its stand as well as the service offered. After a second prize in 2006, we finally made it to the top of all African exhibitors this time!



Having an appealing and professional stand is, of course, also conducive to finding new business partners. The unanimous opinion of participating companies was, therefore, very positive. Particularly new tourism products like community-based tourism and educational excursions were high in demand, as the gorilla experience is starting to be widely known. The challenge on the ground is to ensure high quality standards for these new products so that they also attract visitors who are willing to pay more and, thereby, support local economic development.

Even President Kagame was thrilled about the success of his country's delegation and invited us to a big cocktail party at Kigali's Serena Hotel. It surely will not be the last time that Rwanda has won the title for something. And having the most beautiful stand does not

necessarily mean that we will have the fastest growing business. But it helped to generate a lot of media interest as well as to bring pride to all Rwandans. *Happy reading!*

Architectural conservation in Rwanda

by Robin Kent (rk@robinkent.com)

An important part of Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction should be a new appreciation of historic Rwandan culture, to provide this youngest of African nations with a sense of identity that extends beyond its recent unhappy history, embraces its rich cultural heritage and enhances national unity. This will also help to promote Rwanda as one of Africa's key tourist destinations, with much more to offer than the usual wildlife reserves.

In architectural conservation specialist Robin Kent's on-line article, following his study visit to Rwanda last year, he outlines some key architectural aspects of national reconstruction. In many ways, construction in Rwanda today parallels that in pre-industrial Europe up to about 200 years ago, and uses techniques that we are belatedly trying to reclaim to conserve our environment as well as our own heritage. Rwanda offers a fertile field for study, but the advantages of traditional construction techniques do not appear to be readily understood by most Rwandans and there is a very real danger that, with increasing stability, population and prosperity, surviving knowledge of traditional materials and skills may be lost as perceived 'modern' materials like concrete, steel and glass take over.



© Robin Kent

In Rwanda, as in many other countries, re-evaluation of traditional construction is the key to developing modern buildings that respond better to the environment and also express a distinctive national style and identity. The full article can be read at: www.robinkent.com.

Rwanda Knits project

by Cari Clement (cari@fiberandcraft.org)

Founded in 2003, the Rwanda Knits project provides hand-operated, American-made knitting machines plus technical and business training to low income women in Rwanda to enable them to earn a living through knitting. There are currently over 1,500 women who have learned to use the knitting machines in 17 different women's cooperatives across the country.

Before Rwanda Knits, most of these women and their teachers were subsistence farmers, dependent on help from family or friends or lived in refugee camps and most of them were either widowed by the genocide or the AIDS epidemic. Rwanda Knits focuses on helping women who do not have a reliable source of income, those making less than \$1 per day. Since early 2006, the previously unemployed Rwanda Knits teachers have earned from \$570 to \$850 from both teaching and making items for export.

In May 2006, Rwanda Knits conducted a 4-day business training workshop for members of the 17 cooperatives. Since that time, the cooperatives have practiced their new business skills and secured orders for over 1,000 children's sweaters, a component of every school's uniform. Filling these orders will bring over \$500 to each of the 17 cooperatives – but it requires

the purchase of yarn. To fund the yarn purchase, Cari Clement and her non-profit organization, the Fiber and Craft Entrepreneurial Development Center, will be conducting their first online auction of “star” sweaters, original garments by some of your favorite designers including Nicky Epstein, Gayle Bunn, Doris Chan and many others. These garments have been featured in national knitting and crochet magazines. Additionally, famed designer Mary Engelbright has graciously donated two hand-signed lithographs which will also be auctioned. 50% of the purchase price of each item is tax deductible.

The auction begins at 11pm on Friday, April 20 and will conclude at 11pm on Sunday, April 29. This is your chance to be a star by buying a “star”. All proceeds from this auction will go toward purchasing yarn to be distributed to all 17 knitting cooperatives.

Questions or comments, please contact Cari Clement 802-229-9991 or cari@fiberandcraft.org, or visit www.rwandaknits.org or www.fiberandcraft.org for more information.

3rd International Marathon for Peace

Soroptimist-International of Europe and the Rwandan SI clubs invite you to the 3rd International Marathon for Peace in Kigali on **May 5, 2007**. This project started in 2004-2005 within the theme of “Women Building Peace” of Soroptimist International of Europe in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture of Rwanda and “Les Amis Luxembourgeois du Marathon de Kigali”. In 2006, it continued within the theme of “Women Building Peace through Local Heritage”. There were a total of 3,000 runners from 25 different countries. 2007 will now see the third Marathon for Peace.



For more information, please visit www.kigalimarathon.com.

Tricky decisions in the buffer zone

by Adrian Martin (adrian.martin@uea.ac.uk)

Like so many things in Rwanda, the recent history of the Nyungwe National Park buffer zone is dominated by the genocide, and more recently, by efforts to restore purpose and vitality. Back in the 1950s and 1960s the Nyungwe Forest Reserve was declining by about 1,000 hectares per year under the pressure for land and resources. The buffer zone was initiated in order to try and reverse this trend by clearly demarcating the park boundary and creating a ‘buffer’ between forest and farming. Starting in the 1970s, a series of donor projects got to work on planting trees. By 1992, 10,750 hectares of plantations had been created, most of it pine trees, with a few cypress, eucalyptus and other species.

The buffer zone was not just intended to act as a physical barrier. It had to also serve the needs of local people for jobs, firewood and, indirectly, the creation of roads that would improve access to markets. After all, some of these people had been displaced in order to make way for the plantations. Speaking to local people reveals that the initial works did indeed bring benefits. Many remember well working for the Swiss on the original plantations, or for a series of other donors. They planted and pruned, constructed access roads and sawed timbers. For many households, these activities were a welcome supplement to the modest and unpredictable returns from farming.

The genocide brought an end to all this. For the last 12 years there has been virtually no planting, pruning, harvesting or maintenance of roads. In short, there have been no benefits to local people. During this period, even the management responsibilities have become uncertain, with a tendency to fall between the agendas of ORTPN and MINITERE, the ministry that now has formal responsibility. This lengthy neglect is understandable: there were more pressing matters to attend to than conducting inventories of plantations. And, let's face it, pine trees can pretty much look after themselves for a few years.

But now many of those pine trees are mature. Furthermore, the significance of proper management of this resource goes beyond the production of timber and the creation of jobs. There is a bigger issue at stake: reconciling Rwanda's pride in conserving the magnificent forest of Nyungwe with its commitment to fight poverty in the surrounding area. The Nyungwe buffer zone, if utilized wisely, can play a part in creating a 'win-win' situation in which both biodiversity and local livelihoods end up winners.

It is therefore good to see that the buffer zone has now regained its place on the agenda, with recent work undertaken by the PAFOR project, activities planned as part of a new USAID backed project in ecotourism being led by the Wildlife Conservation Society and a large Global Environment Facility project led by MINITERE. For our own part, we have been investigating future scenarios for the buffer zone as part of a MacArthur Foundation project, working with the International Gorilla Conservation Programme, ORTPN and the National University of Rwanda. As part of this, we held a workshop in Cyangugu on 16th and 17th November which brought together stakeholders from central, district and sector government, NGOs, the private sector, and local associations and cooperatives. I think this went very well. There was real commitment to finding the right ways forward, both in terms of the best use of land (e.g. a debate about the relative merits of tea plantations and forest plantations) and the best structures for management (e.g. whether responsibility should be devolved to adjacent districts).



Trying to 'pick winners' from different options is a tricky process due to the huge number of uncertainties involved. Some of these uncertainties can be reduced through research but others remain irresolvable. For example, it is hard to predict the markets for tea or timber into the future and therefore difficult to establish which will yield the more sustainable returns. Likewise, there is uncertainty about the impact of land use in the buffer zone on wildlife within the park. Under such circumstances it is a comfort to discover so many different stakeholders sharing their particular areas of expertise and debating so constructively. For problems where there is no definitive 'best solution', what is required is a process for making good decisions based on shared knowledge, open debate and sound judgment. I left the workshop confident that there is an appetite and capacity for this.

If you have a view on this, please join the debate by letting us know it:
adrian.martin@uea.ac.uk

A handicap center that creates leather goods

by Craig McGarrah

The Jyamubandi Mwana Association handicap center with assistance from U.S. Government-provided Self-Help Funds, is improving the lives of dozens of handicapped Rwandans. The association has used Self-Help Funds to purchase a leather working machine to aid the center's production of shoes, handbags, belts and other leather goods. The center sells these products and uses the funds to help finance food, housing, physical therapy, education, and job training for handicapped children at the center.

The association, however, does not earn enough money to finance all these operations and relies on donations to fill the gap, according to the center's staff. The center on average earns a profit of about RWF60,000 each month from sales of the leather goods it produces and from shoe and leather repair. If Jyamubandi Mwana is able to attend a trade show, profits can rise to RWF200,000 for the month. The association also earns a small amount of money by creating handmade greeting cards. Nonetheless, the center's expenses are about RWF300,000 per month. To make up the difference, the center relies on donations from well-wishers, local church groups, and to a lesser degree on funds or in-kind donations provided by the parents of the handicapped children. When funds still run short, the staff takes a pay cut for that month.



According to the staff, the center has the capability to expand leather good production, but faces the problem of a limited market in Kigali. The center's location at the edge of town also hinders marketing prospects, because few people will make a special trip out to the center to purchase their products and it is in a poor neighborhood. The association could sell a lot more product if they had a shop in Kigali's downtown or near the major tourist hotels, but rents are prohibitive, according to the staff. Jyamubandi Mwana has sent some samples of their products to Europe and the United States, with expatriates returning home during the holidays, in an attempt to find a regular overseas distributor, but they has so far been unable to cut such a deal.

Jyamubandi Mwana is also putting to good use donations of exercise mats and exercise equipment, including walkers. Handicapped children receive some physical therapy on the mats to improve flexibility and muscle strength and use the equipment to help learn to walk. The center's school has three class rooms with children advancing from the first to the third classroom as they pass each level. Some of the older children also learn how to work with leather and repair leather shoes – skills which they can later use to set up small workshops around Kigali to earn an income.

For more information, please contact Emily Shaffer at the American Embassy at consularkigali@state.gov.

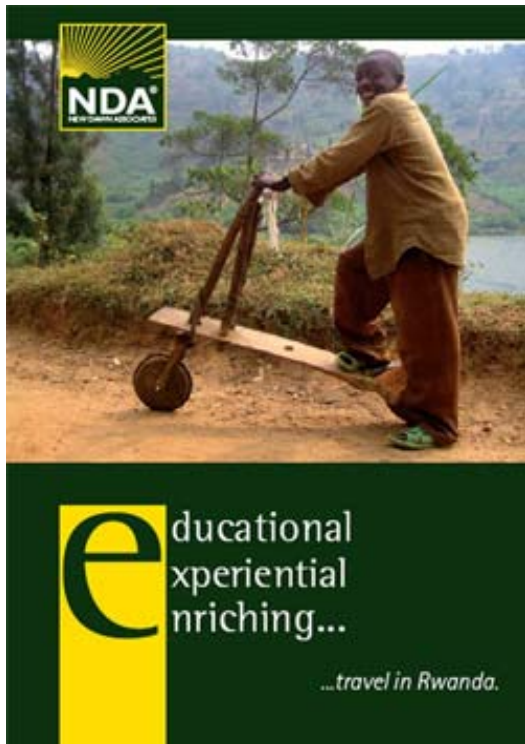
NDA – at the crossroads of tourism and sustainable development

by Michael Grosspietsch

In this newsletter issue, I take the opportunity to introduce my own new Rwandan adventure, a company called New Dawn Associates Ltd. Registered in Kigali, NDA is a Rwandan-European partnership that aims at providing professional services in a variety of fields. Apart from such services like event management and consultancies, we are a pioneer for new responsible approaches to tourism, with a particular focus on learning, cultural exchanges, sustainable development and poverty alleviation. That way, NDA functions like a fully professional tour operator – however, with a range of unusual and unmatched products in addition to the ‘ordinary’ tourist experience.



In tourism, our clients include organizations and universities that look for educational trips with a strong theoretical and academic base. But we also cater for international tourism companies that desire to offer more intimate experiences, focusing on understanding, learning, as well as personal actions and interactions with local Rwandans. Our generally tailor-made products range from Rwanda’s well-known attractions to educational excursions, project tourism, community-based tourism and even responsible volunteering.



A major focus of our consulting work consists of the creation of new tourism experiences. Our team of experts works on the ground in many parts of Rwanda, documenting and interpreting natural and cultural heritage sites, and developing challenging and unexpected products together with a range of local partners. One such experience is going to be an excursion to Mayange, Rwanda’s Millennium Village in Bugesera District. You will certainly read more about this fascinating educational opportunity in one of the next Voices of Hope.

Finally, NDA positions itself as a leading event management company. We already have several exciting major events in the pipeline for the coming months and are happy to collaborate with any kind of partner, including government institutions, IGOs, NGOs, embassies or private sector companies.

For further information about any of these fields (tourism, consulting, event management), please consult the website www.newdawnassociates.com or get in touch with me personally (michael@newdawnassociates.com, 08594524).

Soroptimist-International workshop and visit to Rwanda

by Luud Roos (l.roos10@kpnplanet.nl)

With a suitcase full of thread, thongs and pearls, a friend of mine and I left for Rwanda to give a workshop in necklace making in the Forming Centre for girls, a project of the Soroptimist Club of Gisenyi. Within this existing project, young women and girls receive an education in sewing. For our visit, twelve girls were waiting to be taught how to make necklaces and bracelets. How they

liked it was shown by the result of more than sixty necklaces in different patterns and techniques by the end of the week. The first ones were even sold during the Sunday sale afterwards. Three members of the local Club have been trained to continue with the teaching. If you are interested in the necklaces, please visit the Gisenyi Forming Center and get in touch via email (mmukankaka@yahoo.fr).

We further had the chance to visit a group called “Zaninka” by the American organization “Women for Women”. WfW is supporting post-war countries by educating the poorest and most isolated women. At this time, 4600 women are being trained in Rwanda. In groups of 20, they receive education about their rights, healthy feeding, banking procedures and skills. They get together twice monthly and also receive an allowance to get their businesses started.

Soroptimist International has been supporting WfW for the past four years under the theme “Women Survivors of War”. Four SI clubs in the Netherlands sponsored such a group, Zaninka in Muhanga, and we visited them. We left Kigali with Berra Kabarungi, the Director of WfW Rwanda, and Flavia, a teacher, for a two hour drive to Muhanga. When we arrived, all women awaited us in their best dresses and gave us a warm welcome with singing and dancing. We all went into a classroom where I had the chance to give them the best regards of the Dutch Soroptimist Clubs.



I brought letters, pictures, seeds and presents for them and told them how much the SI clubs were involved and wanted to know how they were doing. Of course, Berra translated all of it. The women were very happy with the attention, the letters, the seeds and the presents. They too had a present for the Soroptimists in the Netherlands – a self-made basket filled with eggs. Some women told their story of their life before and after the support from Women for Women. This was all very moving. One told us that she was very poor and did not know how to bring up her children. At the time, she had only one chicken. But now she has a number of chicken and a bank account with a lot of Francs in it. Another woman told us how her husband used to beat her up. But now she has become mentally stronger, and he doesn't dare to beat her anymore. She too has a bank account so that her husband cannot take her money for his drinks any more.

This all shows how much the women benefit from the WfW program. It supports them in building up a new life through skills training as well as awareness of their rights and knowledge of the banking system. They asked us if women in the Netherlands do get beaten up as well. I had to answer that that happened too, but that there were also women beating up their husbands. They laughed but I don't think they believed me... After the translation of the letters we left while the women sang and waved till we were out of sight. We were all silent in the car...

Project Rwanda

from the website www.projectrwanda.org

Project Rwanda was founded by Tom Ritchey after a visit in 2005 out of his passion for cycling, a love of Rwanda's natural beauty, and the inspiring stories of hope of the Rwandan people. Tom's trip resulted in a realization that the bicycle can be an important tool in rebuilding a country, building national pride and addressing local issues facing Rwanda and other African nations.

Project Rwanda currently operates with a small group of like minded Board members who all donate their time and energy to the project. Donations are primarily used to support actual projects, with only a small portion going toward the occasional need for temporary help with clerical and graphic design functions. We estimate currently that 90% of donations are used in support of actual projects. Project Rwanda has no permanent salaried staff, offices or vehicles and utilizes other agencies' staff on the ground in Rwanda to assist with the local support of our projects.

Projects

1. Build awareness for Rwanda, the country and its people as a tourism and cycling destination through the development of an eco-tourism industry. Annually conduct a multi-day event attended by Rwandan, American and European riders to promote this concept.



2. Special bike designs: Project Rwanda is actively engaged in the design, development and implementation of special use bicycles to address specific needs within the country. Project Rwanda locates a foreign vendor to manufacture these bikes cost effectively for export to Rwanda (landed cost approximately \$100 - \$200). In this role, Project Rwanda serves as a facilitator, consultant, designer and advisor regarding the entire scope of the project. A collaborating agency funds the purchase, delivery and distribution of the bikes. The first undertaking is for 2,000 special hauling long bikes for use by coffee farmers to haul their crop to the washing station collection point more quickly which increases the price they receive for the coffee cherries as this is a very time-sensitive step. This project is in conjunction with the Texas A&M University and their Rwanda management team, USAID/SPREAD, which funded the actual cost of the bikes.
3. Bike distribution: Project Rwanda plans to establish bike distribution to organizations that do not have existing grants to purchase bikes. This program is under development and will involve a "hand up", not a "hand out" through a micro-financing mechanism which subsidizes the cost of purchasing the bike. It provides micro-financing locally but requires repayment of a percentage of the bike cost over a period of time at low interest rates. It is envisioned that this micro-financing mechanism, once established, will be rolled out to other African as well as non-African developing nations. The need for special use bikes worldwide is estimated to be in the hundreds of millions. The bike is an affordable, practical, environmentally-friendly solution to local transportation and hauling needs.
4. National pride: Select, coach, train, equip and promote a Rwandan National Cycling Team with the goal of successful participation in international cycling competitions as a means of promoting this industry within Rwanda and providing increasing awareness and national pride for Rwanda internationally.

More information is available at www.projectrwnda.org.

Recommended background material

Africa: Continent of economic opportunity

by David Fick

Divided into geographic regions and representing every African nation, this comprehensive collection of case studies explores how successful business enterprises of varying size, along with community projects, help to create jobs in Africa. A valuable guide to conducting business anywhere on the continent, this account also offers information on finding business opportunities and handling oft-encountered problems.

Further book description: Please visit www.ste.co.za.

For immediate book availability in Africa and Europe, please contact Angela McClelland at angela@ste.co.za. In the US, please contact the author David Fick at whlgeagle@aol.com who can immediately ship at \$50 per book (shipping included within the US).



From previous newsletter editions (please have a look there):

- *Rwanda: The Bradt Travel Guide* (www.bradtguides.com)
- *Guide des destinations indigènes* (www.indigene-editions.fr)
- *Keepers of memory* (alegisi2004@yahoo.co.uk)
- *With what remains* (victoria.bullock@hodder.co.uk)
- *Steve, l'enfant égaré* (uwayisaba@hotmail.com)
- *100 Days* (alegisi2004@yahoo.co.uk)
- *Rwanda alive: those who listen* (info@gng.org)
- *Guide André – 75 restaurants in Kigali* (avak2000@hotmail.com)

Some international tour operators offering Rwanda

If you are a tour operator and would like to be included on this list, please contact the editor.

United Kingdom

Absolute Africa (0208-7420226; absaf@absoluteafrica.com; www.absoluteafrica.com)
Discovery Initiatives (01285-643333; enquiry@discoveryinitiatives.com; www.discoveryinitiatives.com)
Live Travel (020-88946104; phil.haines@live-travel.com; www.life-travel.com)
Rainbow Tours (020-72261004; info@rainbowtours.co.uk; www.rainbowtours.co.uk)
Reef and Rainforest Tours Ltd (01803-866965; alan@reefandrainforest.co.uk; www.reefandrainforest.co.uk)
Safari Consultants Ltd (01787-228494; bill@safariconsultantuk.com; www.safari-consultants.co.uk)
Sarus Bird Tours (0161-7617297; nigel@sarusbirdtours.co.uk; www.sarusbirdtours.co.uk)
Steppes Travel (01285-650011; africa@steppestravel.co.uk; www.steppestravel.co.uk)
Sunvil Africa (020-82329777; africa@sunvil.co.uk; www.sunvil.co.uk)
Volcanoes Safaris (0870-8708480; salesuk@volcanoessafaris.com; www.volcanoessafaris.com)
Wildlife Worldwide (020-86679158; sales@wildlifeworldwide.com; www.wildlifeworldwide.com)
World Primate Safaris (0870-8509092; sales@worldprimatesafaris.com; www.worldprimatesafaris.com)

USA

Africa Adventure Company (800-882-9453; noltingaac@aol.com; www.africa-adventure.com)
Ker & Downey (281-3712500; info@kerdowney.com; www.kerdowney.com)
Volcanoes Safaris (770-7300960; salesus@volcanoessafaris.com; www.volcanoessafaris.com)

Germany

Globetrotter Select (08171-997272; info@globetrotter-select.de; www.globetrotter-select.de)
Top Trail Tours (0221-2708960; info@toptrailtours.de; www.toptrailtours.de)

Switzerland

Zingg Event Travel AG (01709-2010; zet@bluewin.ch; www.zinggssafaris.com)

South Africa

Unusual Destinations (Pty) Ltd (011-7061991; rita@unusualdestinations.com; www.unusualdestinations.com)
Wild Frontiers (011-7022035; wildfront@icon.co.za; www.wildfrontiers.com)

Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania

The Far Horizon, Uganda (41343468; info@thefarhorizons.com; www.thefarhorizons.com)
Origins Safaris, Kenya (020-331191; info@originsafaris.info; www.originsafaris.info)
R&N Xplorer Africa Safaris, Kenya (723684974; rxploresafaris@gmail.com; www.gorillasafaris.netfirms.com)
Volcanoes Safaris, Uganda (41346464; salesug@volcanoessafaris.com; www.volcanoessafaris.com)

There are also many tour operators in Kigali that can arrange visits to Rwanda, including international travel and vehicle-hire. For details contact the **Rwandan Office of Tourism and National Parks (ORTPN)**:
+250-576514; info@rwandatourism.com; www.rwandatourism.com

“Voices of Hope” is the successor of “Behind the Headlines”, edited by Janice Booth.

It is encouraged by the Rwandan Embassy in London and by the Rwandan Office of Tourism and National Parks (ORTPN).

Nevertheless, the content is the sole responsibility of the editor who, on the other hand, relies on the adequacy of the contributions. He promises that the information contained in this newsletter is correct to the best of his knowledge.

Contributions are highly welcome: If you would like to make a contribution, or if you have ideas or comments, please get in touch with Michael at voh@newdawnassociates.com.

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