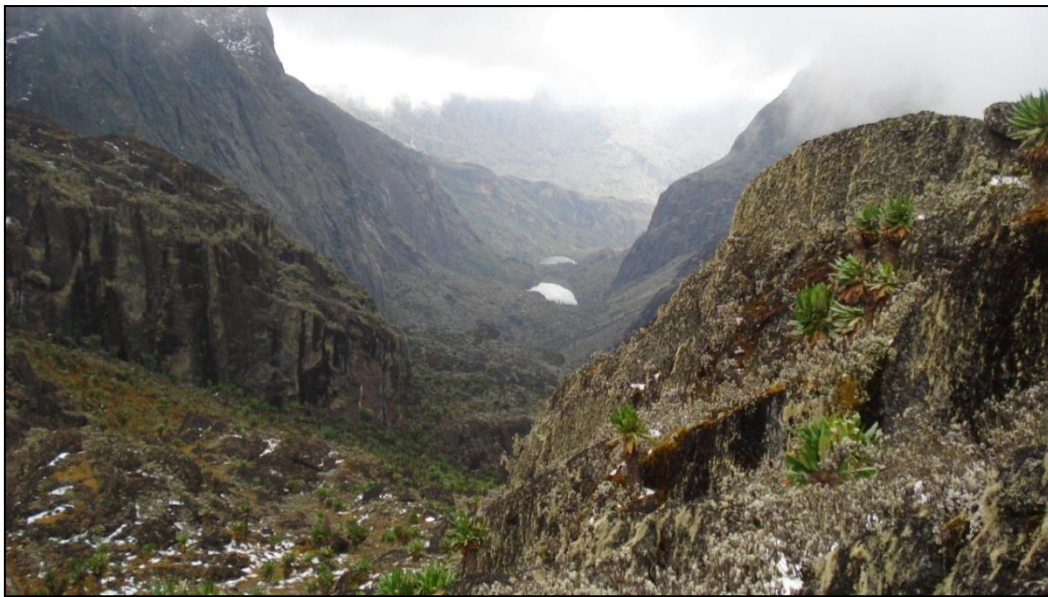


The Mountains of the Moon

*Trekking and Climbing in the Rwenzori Mountains
with Gane and Marshall*



The Rwenzori Mountains

Straddling the border between Uganda and the DRC, the Rwenzori Mountains are Africa's highest and most dramatic mountain range (as distinct from the standalone mountains of Kilimanjaro and Mt Kenya). They are also amongst its least explored. Very much off-the-beaten-track, the Rwenzoris have long remained virtually unknown except to a relatively small number of travellers. Those who have ventured into these remote hills, however, have discovered in them a part of Africa like no other; a surreal, otherworldly landscape of snow and ice, perpetual mists, and wild, endemic flora.

The Rwenzoris have always been shrouded in legend. Almost 2,000 years ago the Greek astronomer Ptolemy made reference to a snow-capped mountain range in the heart of Africa, the fabled '*Mountains of the Moon*', which he correctly held to be the primary source of the River Nile. It was not until the late 19th-century, however, that the mountains were discovered, or rather re-discovered, by European colonists. Henry Stanley set eyes on the range in 1876, but it took until 1906 for the highest peaks to be conquered. Of course, the Rwenzoris had long been familiar to the local *Bayira* people, and even had a semi-sacred status in their culture—like the Himalayas in Hindu tradition, the Rwenzoris, or *Rwenjura*, were believed to be the abode of the Gods. But for the rest of the world they were only a rumour until the colonial discoveries of the 19th-century.

Our knowledge of the Rwenzoris arguably hasn't changed that much since the days of Stanley. They remain to a large extent unexplored, with access hampered by an inhospitable climate and, for much of the 20th-century, the difficult political situation in Uganda and the Congo. In recent years, however, the development of new routes into the mountains has made them more accessible than

Your Financial Protection

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.

For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

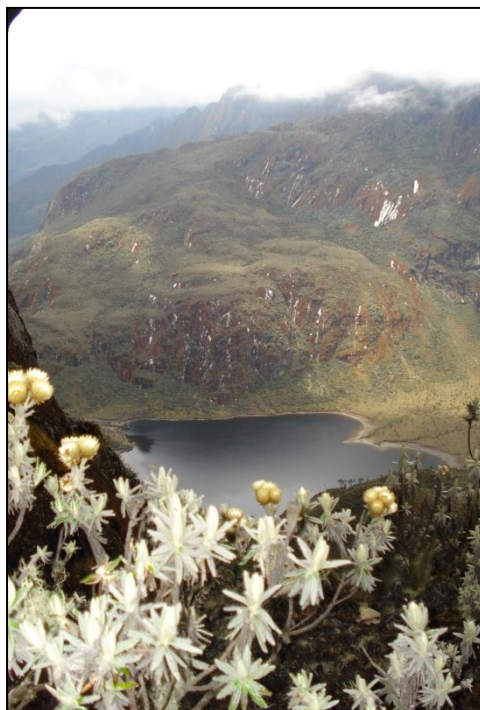
ever. Despite this, they still see only a limited number of visitors each year, and even today it's quite possible to spend a week in the Rwenzoris on one of the main routes without encountering another climbing party.

Landscape and Climate

The Rwenzoris are undoubtedly one of Africa's most beautiful natural environments, montane or otherwise. They are also widely recognised as one of its most unique. The range has an alpine climate, despite its equatorial location, and sees higher levels of rainfall than anywhere else on the continent. These unique climatic conditions – a combination of very heavy rainfall and year-round exposure to the sun – have created in the Rwenzoris an almost primeval landscape, draped in giant tree heathers, extravagant lobelias, rampant groundsel, everlastings, and all manner of colourful lichen and deep moss. This luxuriant vegetation has been described as Africa's "botanical big game".



The Rwenzoris are also the home of some of the world's few tropical glaciers, on Mts Stanley, Baker and Speke. It's only when you reach the top of the Rwenzori range, to its snow-capped peaks that tower over the rainforest below, that its remoteness from equatorial Africa really becomes apparent. Sadly, these glaciers are in rapid retreat, having declined from a total area of 2.5 square miles to less than half a square mile in the last century, and peaks that previously required the use of crampons and an ice axe to climb, like Baker, are now climbed without them.



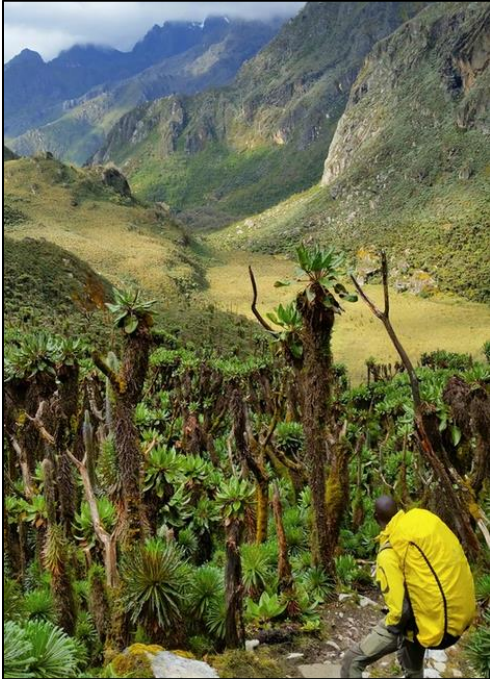
Access

Declared a UN Heritage Site in 1994, the Rwenzoris have for some time been recognised as a unique and extraordinarily beautiful landscape, yet, for better or worse, they haven't attracted anything like the number of visitors commensurate to this status. This is largely due to the difficulty of accessing the region.

Political turmoil has in the past made accessing the mountains difficult from both the DRC and Uganda. While access to the Rwenzoris is still difficult from the Congo and not something that Gane and Marshall has any experience in organising, Uganda, at the time of writing, has been peaceful for two decades with only sporadic violence in the north and on the border with Kenya. There are currently no warnings against travel to the Rwenzoris or the surrounding region.

The other obstacle to access is, simply, the climate. Heavy rainfall accounts for the Rwenzoris' unusual flora, but it also accounts for the infamous, ubiquitous bog, which can make trekking in these mountains an ordeal.

However, if you plan to travel at the right time of year, on the most sensible routes (see below) and with the right equipment, you can hope to avoid the worst of the mud and the rain. Gane and Marshall can help you with this planning.



When to Visit

The Rwenzoris have a short dry season between June and September and another between December and February. These are the best times to visit.

Note, however, that 'dry' is relative and even during these periods you can expect rain, but the showers occur less frequently and more often at night. It's possible to travel outside of these narrow windows—Gane and Marshall staff have visited the Rwenzoris during March and only experienced light rainfall, but conditions in the Rwenzoris are not reliable and it is best to stick to the above travel windows if you want to avoid the worst conditions.

The Rwenzoris are beautiful all-year round. There's no 'green season', as such. The transition from dry to wet season doesn't bring any dramatic changes to the flora and fauna of the range—the only thing that does change dramatically is the depths of the bog that you have to wade through!

Routes

There are two main routes into the Ugandan Rwenzoris, the *Circuit Route* and the *Kilembe Route*.

Managed by *Rwenzori Mountaineering Services (RMS)*, the Circuit Route is the traditional and, until recently, the only established route into the mountains. Approaching the Rwenzoris from the east, it provides access to Mts Stanley, Baker and Speke.

Managed by *Rwenzori Trekking Services (RTS)*, the Kilembe Route is much newer, having opened in 2009. This is a longer trail, approaching the Rwenzoris from the south. It's possible to visit Mts Stanley and Baker on this route, and also Weismann's Peak, a comparatively approachable, sub-5,000m peak that can be completed in 5 or 6 days.

At Gane and Marshall we have a good grasp of the Kilembe Route and this is what we recommend to our clients. Though longer than the RMS route, particularly if you want to reach Speke, it has a number of advantages. It provides a good acclimatisation profile, with a fast ascent at the beginning of the trail, taking you through the rainforest and bamboo forest into the 3,000m+ giant heather zone within the first two days, but thereafter levelling out with a slower, undulating ascent. You also avoid some of the worst of the bog, particularly the notorious Bigo bog of the Circuit Route (though parts of the Kilembe Trail can be very muddy also!)



The service provided by RTS on the Kilembe Trail is very good, generally comparable to what you will get on Kilimanjaro. Accommodation is in huts equipped with either sleeping mats or bunks and light mattresses.

There are approachable trekking options on the Kilembe Route, including a short circuit trail with the option to climb Wesimann Peak. This can be completed in less than a week and is a good option for those who want to experience the Rwenzoris but not on an arduous, 4,000m+ mountain climb.

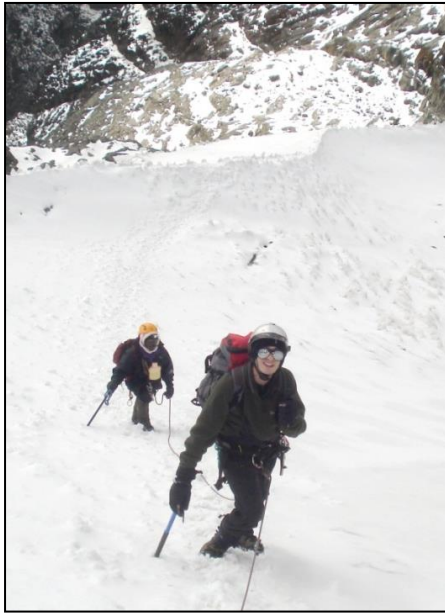


Peaks

Mt Stanley – Mt Stanley is the highest mountain in the Rwenzori range and the third highest in Africa. It has eleven peaks, and two primary summits: Margherita Peak (5,109m) and Alexandra (4,990m). Margherita is the most accessible and the most often climbed.

Margherita Peak is a technical climb, requiring a knowledge of basic snow and ice climbing techniques. The approach involves crossing the Stanley Plateau – the primary glacier – followed by a challenging ice climb up onto the Margherita glacier, during which you will need to employ ice axe and crampons, and finally a rock scramble to the summit of Margherita Peak. As the ice retreats, Margherita Peak has become a more complicated climb, and should only be attempted if you have prior experience of snow and ice climbing. For trekkers without such experience, there is the option to stay on the Stanley Plateau and climb up to a good vantage point on a rocky outcrop on the southern edge of Alexandra Peak, from where you can enjoy fantastic views out to the Congo and the lower mountain ridges. Please see our [Margherita Peak climb itinerary](#) for more detail.





Mt Baker – Mt Baker is the third highest mountain in the range. Mt Baker is an exposed climb, with steep drop-offs, requiring you to be roped up for the ascent. The climb to the summit is primarily a rock scramble. Up until relatively recently it was necessary to climb Baker with the support of snow and ice equipment, but due to the rapid retreat of the Baker glacier crampons and ice axe are no longer required. See our [Mt Baker climb itinerary](#).

Due to their proximity, Baker and Stanley can easily be combined. Experienced climbers will sometimes climb both peaks in a single day, though we advise allowing an additional day if adding Baker to a standard Margherita Peak itinerary (9/10 days total) to ensure you have time for both.

Weismann Peak – Weismann Peak is a sub-5,000m trekking peak accessible via the Kilembe Trail. We offer it as a moderate trek in contrast to the demanding peaks of Mt Stanley and Baker. There is no glacier on Weismann and no

need for ropes or technical equipment, except in very poor conditions. On a clear day, the view from the top of Weismann to the Kachope Lakes below and to Mts Stanley and Baker in the distance is marvellous. The route to Weismann Peak from Kilembe and back takes 6 days. See our [Weismann Peak climb itinerary](#). Weismann Peak can be climbed en route to Margherita/Baker – allow an extra day. Though more approachable than Margherita Peak and Mt Baker, the challenging nature of the Rwenzoris and the high levels of rainfalls mean that many will still find Weismann to be a very demanding trek, both during summit night and during the walk-in.

Other popular peaks include Speke, the second highest mountain in the range. Speke is not as easily accessible from the Kilembe Route as it is from the Circuit Route. However, it's possible to include Speke with a climb of Margherita and/or Baker—allow one, or ideally two, extra days.

What to bring

See our recommended [kit list for trekking in the Rwenzoris](#).

Cost

View our [Rwenzori price guide](#) for the latest climb rates. Please note that these are basic climb costs only, and do not include park fees (to be paid locally), and accommodation and transfers before and after the climb. See our published itineraries for more detailed costings inclusive of accommodation and transfers.

To give you an idea of the total cost of your climb when you factor in the above, the 8-day ascent of Margherita Peak costs approx. £1,700 per person in a group of 2. This includes mid-range accommodation before and after the climb (budget options are also available), park fees, and air transfer from Kampala to Kilembe.

These costs can be reduced for larger groups, as both the climb costs and the transfers are shared. Groups willing to share a dorm before/after the climb can reduce costs further. In a group of 4 or more it is possible to climb for approx. £1,450 per person.



Why book with Gane and Marshall?

Gane and Marshall was founded in 1991 as a climb operator specialising in East Africa, with a particular focus on Kilimanjaro. We have since expanded to offer treks and climbs throughout East Africa, including to Kenya, Ethiopia, the Tanzanian Rift Valley and, most recently, Uganda. In the process we have acquired a knowledge of trekking and climbing in Africa that few other UK companies can offer.

All of our trekking holidays are managed personally by Gane and Marshall director, Jeremy Gane. Jeremy has organised countless treks and climbs in Africa over the last 25 years, including high-profile events for Comic Relief, the BBC, and the Elton John Aids Foundation, among others. He gives the same personal attention to all of his clients.



Our risk management, safety, and back-up are first rate. We are ATOL-bonded, insured as a tour operator with Travel and General, and we hold comprehensive catastrophe insurance.

Finally, we work closely with Rwenzori Trekking Services on the ground and as their main agent in the UK. We offer the RTS rack rates with no mark-up, meaning you won't pay a premium for booking through us as opposed to booking directly on the ground, and you have the additional protection that comes with booking your holiday through an ATOL-bonded UK operator, as well as a point of contact in the UK. We can also organise all of your travel arrangements, including international flights and any extensions in-country, when you book your Rwenzori trek or climb through us.

Client Testimonials

Mike B and his son Josh, who climbed Mount Stanley in July 2014

"We asked Gane and Marshall to organise our climb to the top of Margherita Peak. It was a good decision, not least because they gave us useful advice having recently climbed the peak themselves. There's nothing more helpful than talking to people who know the realities of trekking and climbing in such a testing environment. Gane and Marshall also provided us with transport either side of the climb and organised an easy going safari to nearby Queen Elizabeth National Park followed by a visit to one of the gorilla families in Bwindi National Park. I've travelled to many places in Africa and there are times when it's better to use the services of a knowledgeable travel company like Gane and Marshall. That way you can focus on the people, places and experiences rather than the hassle and uncertainty of making your own way."

Joanna S climbed Mt Baker in Jan 2013 (and was struck by the infamous Rwenzori rains!)

"Apart from this little mishap, everything was perfect. You probably know by now, that I made it to the top of Mt. Baker, although I had a feeling that my two brilliant guides were carrying, pulling and

pushing me for the last 1/2 hr... I have never waded through mud like in the Rwenzoris, these wellies were a salvation although the mud still managed to get inside them and quite often the foot went forward whilst the boot stayed behind! It was the wettest dry season I had ever seen! ... I had never been so tired and had such aching legs in my life! Kilimanjaro is a walk in the park, comparing, you can put in on your Gane & Marshall website! After all this exhaustion I very much enjoyed the relaxing time in Bwindi Lodge and the gorilla tracking... Thank you very much for organising, yet again, a brilliant time and for all your concern. Special thank you to John Hunwick for having a great team of staff."

Journalist and travel writer Francis Tapon climbed Mt Stanley with us in Feb 2015

You can read Francis' wonderful account of his journey on [maptia](#). You can also [view footage from his expedition](#) on youtube.



Reading/viewing list

Sebastian Schutyser, *Flowers of the Moon* – Beautiful picture book capturing the Rwenzoris in black and white. A selection of images from the collection can be viewed [here](#).

H.W. Tilman, *Snow on the Equator* – An early account (1937) of an expedition into the Mountains of the Moon – reading Tilman's description of the extensive glaciers present on the Rwenzori peaks in the early decades of the century really highlights the effect that climate change has had on the range.

Guy Yeoman, *Africa's Mountains of the Moon* – Another picture book, beautifully capturing the stunning scenery of the range.

EWP Map and Guide to the Rwenzoris – One of the only available maps of the Rwenzoris, it also functions as a guide with lots of information about the mountains.

David Else, *Trekking in East Africa (Lonely Planet)*

Snows of the Nile – This 2013 film directed by Neil Losin and Nathan Dappen follows the two scientists/photographers as they venture into the range, retracing the steps of the first ever ascent of Mt Stanley by Prince Luigi Amedeo in 1906.

See our [Rwenzori Price Guide](#) for group and individual rates. Alternatively, contact us directly at info@ganeandmarshall.com. We offer competitive rates for individual and group bookings.