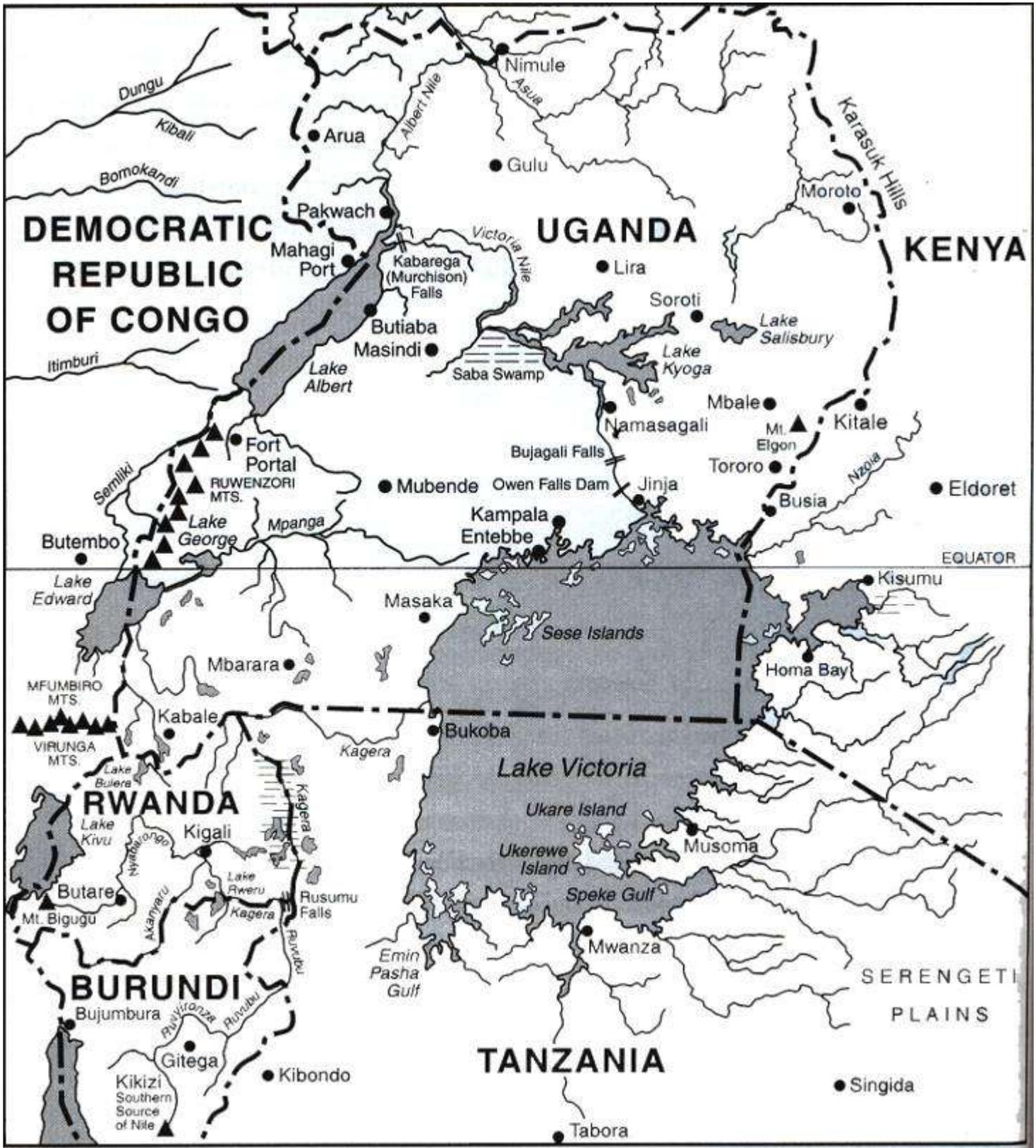


The River Nile – Africa's Longest River

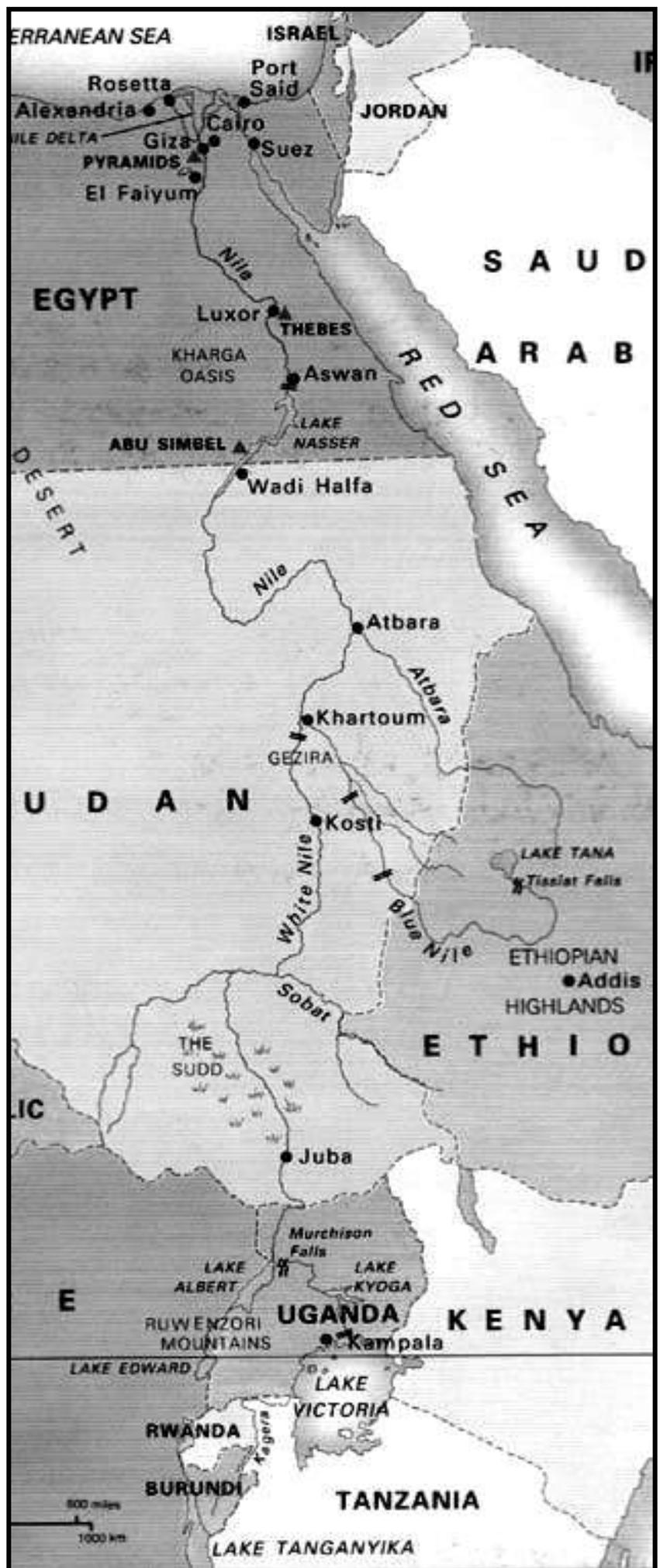


This booklet has been written and printed by Peter Knight of All Terrain Adventures at Bujagali Falls, for distribution to school children on International World Tourism Day 27th September 2010, which this year is being celebrated in Uganda at Jinja, East Africa's Adventure Capital.
eMail: info@atadventures.com

The Nile is (arguably) the most well known and important river on the planet over the last 10,000 years. Some of the World's earliest and most long-lived civilisations, in Egypt and Nubia (now northern Sudan) depended on the Nile to sustain and nourish the societies that evolved there. The narrow strip of flood plains that runs through some of the most arid deserts in the World was also focus for some of the earliest domestication of plants and animals, which evolved into complex agricultural systems. Following the development of agriculture, humans were able to live in larger groupings and the first towns and later cities came into being from around 7,000 years BP (Before Present). The civilisations that developed along the Nile survived for longer than any other civilisations since.

Without the waters of the Nile, this could not have happened. Where was the source of these waters? The river flowed weakly for most of the year but for a few months, regular as clockwork around July, August through September it surged by up to 15 times as much in an annual flood that replenished the narrow, strip of fertile land either side of the Nile. From pre-historic times, the floods have been called the "Gift of the Nile", bringing billions of tons of silt to rejuvenate topsoil, pushing back the desert sand, watering the farms and cities, irrigating crops and washing salt out. The Nile provided the lifeblood that fuelled the evolution of human societies.

The Greek traveller Herodotus, known as the 'Father of History', who lived in the 5th century BP, wrote about the Nile in his books and raised the question of where the water came from. He writes it was believed that the Nile started far south, in the middle of Africa, between two massive mountains. The first question that Alexander the Great asked when he came to the temple of Jupiter Ammon in Luxor on the Nile in Egypt, was 'What caused the Nile to rise?' Julius Caesar said that the one thing he



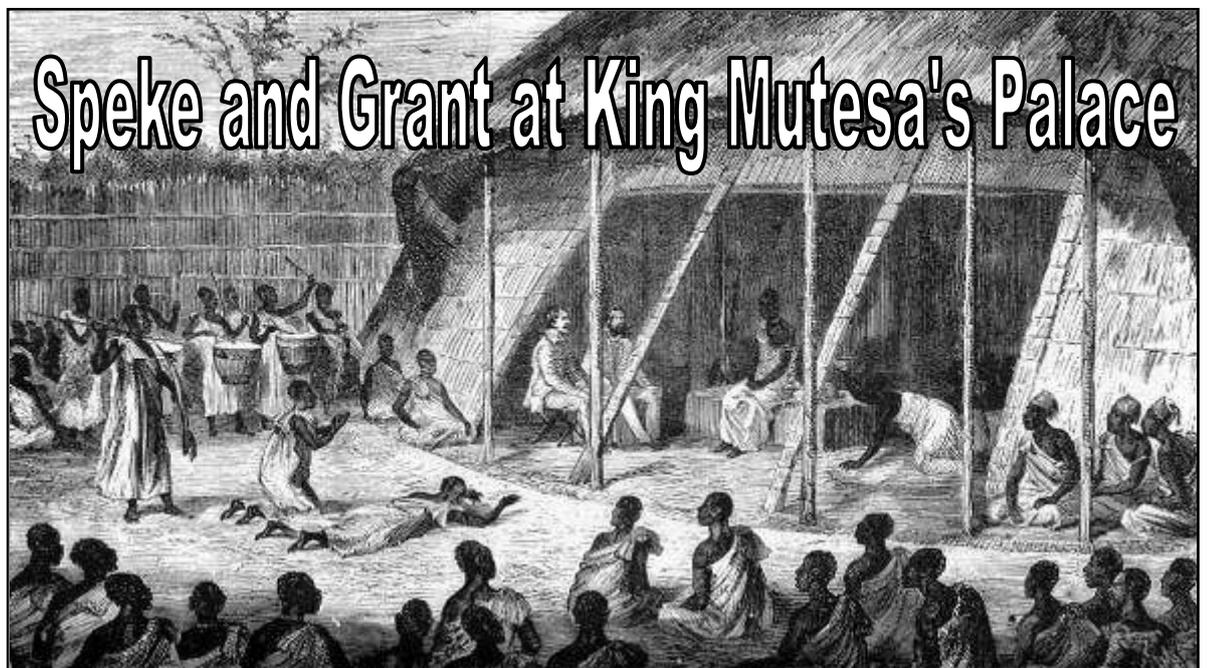
most wanted to know about the world was 'Where was the source of the Nile?' The Roman emperor Nero sent two centurions to follow the Nile to its origin. They returned to Rome and reported that they "came close to immense swamps of which not even the local people knew the end. So tangled and thick are the plants in the waters that it is impossible to proceed either on foot or by boat." The two Romans were blocked by the Sudd in southern Sudan, perhaps the largest swamp on earth. The mystery of the source of the Nile was not solved until 1859. The explorations and the controversy that surrounded them captured the imagination of the Western World for much of the middle part of the last century.

Gradually as the Earth's geography became better known, it became general knowledge that Africa's longest river was formed by the confluence of two main rivers; the White Nile (so called because of the colour of the silt that was washed down) and the Blue Nile that flowed from the mountain plateaus of Ethiopia, joining at what is now called Khartoum. For most of the year the White Nile provided a sluggish flow, some of which reached the Nile delta into the Mediterranean Sea without being evaporated. When the monsoon rains hit the mountain ranges of the Ethiopian Highlands, torrential rains rushed down the deep gorges of the Blue Nile (Abbai to the Ethiopians) and Atbarra Rivers, 6 weeks later bringing the essential annual floods that Egypt depends on to this day.

In the 17th century, attracted by the legend of a Christian kingdom isolated in the heart of Africa surrounded by Islamic warriors, Portugal sent missionaries and soldiers to help the Ethiopian rulers and to protect the Christian faith. A Spanish priest called Padre Páez travelled through the country undertaking many risky expeditions. He was the first westerner to "discover" and to describe the source of the Blue Nile on April 21st, 1618. It took almost another 360 years before the gorges of the Blue Nile were completely mapped.

But the question of where the White Nile flowed from was unanswered. Maps drawn by Arab explorers showing what is now known as Lake Victoria, date back to the late 1100's and the Roman general Ptolemy seems to have drawn a map of the Nile with large lakes near its source, over 2,000 years BP.

Finding the source of the White Nile provided much of the motivation for European exploration of Africa in the 19th century. In the early 1800's explorers again tried to penetrate the Sudd but failed. In 1857, the British



explorers Burton and Speke left Zanzibar on the coast of what is now Tanzania and headed inland to search for mysterious lakes in the interior of Africa. Fighting sickness all the time, Speke separated from Burton to visit a large lake reported to lie to the north. On July 30, 1858, Speke glimpsed the body of water later to be named after Victoria, the reigning queen of England. He guessed that this was the source of the White Nile and rushed back to share the good news with Burton, who argued that Speke had not seen enough of the lake to be sure.

They returned to Zanzibar together, and Speke returned to England alone where he claimed to have discovered the source of the White Nile and began planning for a second expedition, this time accompanied by Grant. Speke and Grant arrived in Zanzibar in August 1860 and travelled inland. They slowly worked their way around the west side of Lake Victoria before glimpsing the Nile issuing from the north side of the lake in July, 1862. Ultimately it was the Welsh-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley who verified Speke's 'discovery', by circumnavigating Lake Victoria and reporting the great outflow at Ripon Falls. There are two monuments to Speke; in London at Hyde Park and in the Nile Gardens on the west bank opposite Jinja in Uganda.



John Hanning Speke

The source of any river is the furthest point for where water flows.

In 1937, the true source was found by the little known German explorer Bruckhart Waldekker. The start of the most distant stream emerges from high in Nyungwe Forest in Rwanda, via the Rukarara, Mwogo, Nyabarongo and Kagera rivers, before flowing into Lake Victoria in Tanzania near the town of Bukoba. The Nile leaves Lake Victoria at Jinja (the Victoria Nile). It flows for approximately 500 kilometres north west through Lake Kyoga and on to Lake Albert. After leaving Lake Albert, the river is known as the Albert Nile. It then flows into Sudan, where it becomes known as the Bahr al Jabal ("River of the Mountain").

Nile Facts:

- The Nile is one of the World's few large rivers that flow from south to north.
- Although a very important river, the Nile's is small compared to most of the other great rivers, only 2% volume of the Amazon, 15% of the Mississippi and 20% of the Mekong rivers.
- The average flow of water through the Victoria Nile varies between 800,000 and 1 million litres per second. The flow is controlled by the Owens Falls and Nalubale Dams.
- In 2011, a new dam called the Bujagali Dam (actually 3 km downstream from Bujagali Falls) will be completed and will flood the river to cover Bujagali Falls forever.
- Until recently, the Nile was thought to be the longest river in the World at 6,695km. In 2007 an expedition of scientists to Peru discovered another tributary to the Amazon establishing a new starting point that puts the Amazon River at 6,800km long.
- The River Nile has 9 riparian countries (countries that border the river or have water sources for the Nile); Burundi, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt.
- According to agreements made in the 1920's Egypt has control over the flow of the Nile through Uganda (and the other riparian countries). An Egyptian engineer is permanently stationed at Jinja to monitor the flow through the dams.
- The Victoria Nile section of the river is the only outlet from Lake Victoria. It was formed about 13,000 years ago when Lake Victoria overflowed at its lowest point beside what is now Jinja and carved its way north west to Lake Kyoga. Rippon Falls (now submerged by the Owens Falls Dam), was the first rocky barrier along the watercourse. Bujagali Falls forms the second large terrace for the waters to cascade over.

