

PEARL of AFRICA

SPECIAL TRAVEL SECTION



THE SAD LEGEND OF MUTUUMA AND LAKE NYABIHOKO

◆ Lake Nyabihoko

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This is a story from Mpororo that will make your jaw drop like that of a famished mongrel eyeing steak through a fence.

Once upon a time, there lived a man called Mutuuma, son of Kinyonyi. Mutuuma was a Muhororo cattle keeper and a trader, who dealt in cattle products such as ghee and cow hides in Rwanda, Zaire, Tanzania and Buganda.

It was a life that not only made him popular, but also put food on the table.

Little did he know that his cattle-keeping occupation would one day lead to his family's demise under a mass of water, which would form a lake.

That lake is now known as Nyabihoko, located about 372km south of Kampala, in Ntungamo district.

It is shared by the sub-counties of Nyabihoko (named after the lake) and Bwongyera, both in Kajara county) and Rubaare in Rushenya county.

THE LEGEND

According to Mzee Pharaoh Macuho, 96, it is believed that there once lived a man called Mutuuma on a vast piece of grazing land, which made him one of the most respected cattle keepers of his generation.

Among his large herd of cattle was this particular cow, Njeru (pure white cow), which he loved so much. One day, it fell sick when Mutuuma was to travel to Omubwera in Nshenyi, which is today found in Rwanda,



The writer aboard a boat to Mutuuma Islands. Left are the baskets used to catch fish



to see a friend who had promised him a bull to mate with his heifers so he could get crossbred calves. Before he left, he administered some herbs to Njeru and strictly warned that if the cow died, it should not be eaten, but buried. The servants agreed and off Mutuuma left for Nshenyi. A few days later, Njeru died and the servants consulted Mutuuma's

wife about the burial plans. However, the servants knew it was their chance to feast, so why bury meat just because their absent boss said so?

The whole family, including Mutuuma's wife and children, did not bury the cow and partied for days after cooking the meat. What was left of the poor cow was dried up, a practice in Ankole called *okukara* to prepare *emikara*.

At 3:00am on the third night, Mutuuma's wife woke up as usual to churn milk for ghee. While she was at it, she heard the sound of walls falling in water, but thought nothing

of it.

By the time she realised that the world around her was sinking, it was too late to do anything. She was swallowed last as she wailed for help in vain.

In the morning, the neighbours were shocked to discover that Mutuuma's land was sub-merged.

On reaching Kyabukuru, present-day Byasha on his way back, Mutuuma heard the bad news and could not believe it. He had to see it for himself.

When he saw his whole land submerged, he was overwhelmed by

HOW TO GET THERE

One can get there via Ntungamo town. Follow the first turn on the right after Ntungamo town, then head to Rukungiri and stop at Rwashamire trading centre to get the best directions to the lake. Lake Nyabihoko is about 10km from Rwashamire trading centre. Transport from Kampala to Rwashamire town is sh25,000 and a bodaboda to the lake will cost you sh5,000.

sorrow and sat down at a place called Muhoro on a big rock at the edge of the lake. After crying for some time, he decided to go visit his best friend Mwamba, who was also a cattle keeper in Kayera, Kooki (present-day Rakai district).

His friend sensed something was wrong, but Mutuuma did not say a word. For weeks, he refused to drink the milk that was given to him, but Mutuuma asked his friend to let him graze his cattle for a few days. Mwamba instead gave him calves as they would have to be brought back to their kraal by 11:00am. He did not want Mutuuma to suffer under the sun.

Every morning, Mutuuma set off to graze the calves. He would sit on a rock and watch them feed, as he murmured to himself: "*Byaba byababyo kuwona tibabya byo*", meaning "Things almost seemed real, but they are not" referring to the cattle lost in the flood. This is the only way he could find solace — in pretending that the calves he was rearing were his.

Mwamba's grandchildren heard