



Carel and some of his team atop the Rwenzori Mountains

Mountain climbers call for preservation of flora on Rwenzori

BY JOHN B. THAWITE

A 10-member team of climbers from the 7 Summits Africa, ended its seven-day trek of the Rwenzori Mountains on Wednesday with a strong call for quick action to prevent further loss of the unique flora and fauna of the mountains of the moon.

"The Rwenzori is a sensitive catchment area not just to Uganda or Africa, but to the world at large. So stakeholders should do what it takes to conserve it," Carel Verhoerf, the 7 Summits director, said.

Verhoerf said the trek was aimed at exposing the Rwenzori to the rest of the world to attract more visitors and specialist mountaineers to promote tourism and conserve the international heritage site.

In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) declared the Rwenzoris a world heritage site because of its rare plant and animal species and a water tower.

"The mountains, which cover about 900sqkm will need to be conserved," Verhoerf said while briefing the media.

Verhoerf said the snow-capped mountain that lies along the equator is little known to many parts of the world, hence the need to market it.

"That is why we need stakeholders such as you in the media, to flash it more to the world,"

According to Verhoerf, the team skated Margherita peak on Mt Stanely and



The 7 Summit team at Sandton Hotel in Kasese after the trek to the Rwenzori Mountains, where they climbed up to Margherita peak. Photos by John Thawite

WHAT OTHERS SAID

Abdallah Beki, a driver from Great Lakes Tours

Unlike other East African communities, Ugandans miss a lot of domestic incomes from tourism due to poor marketing. However, Uganda also faces a challenge of substandard accommodation facilities.

Enock Owerangl, official at the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services Ugandans should stop thinking tourism is only for the whites.

Sally Grierson, a 7 Summit climber

It is hard to put my experience of the Rwenzori Mountains in words, but the disappearance of Rwenzori's rare species of flora and fauna is worrying. It is scary to imagine that one day, we could lose that fascinating creation. It is very gratifying to go through green savanna grassland through the jungles, the cliffs, the mountain lakes and swamps and finally, the challenging glaciers that tease you many times before you hug the Margherita Peak.



Speke using the "tough and challenging" central circuit. "It has been tough, cold and technical, but the mountain is beautiful. The weather has been kind," said Verhoerf, adding that the mountain is

one of Africa's most beautiful. He said his team had so far covered Mviragongo in the DR Congo, Kansiimi in Rwanda, Kenya, Speke, and Stanely in Uganda. "We have two more peaks

to go — Mt Meru and Kilimanjaro, both in Tanzania," he said. It was my second time to climb the Rwenzori and I plan to return in November next year.

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