

Guidebook

Gishwati-Mukura National Park



Forest of
Hope

CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM
PARTNERSHIP FUND

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1. ABOUT GISHWATI-MUKURA NATIONAL PARK

Gishwati- Mukura National Park at a glance

- Location: Rutsiro & Ngororero Districts, Northwestern Rwanda
- Nearest towns: Rubavu and Karongi
- Coordinates: 1°49' S, 29°22'E
- Altitude: 2000 – 3000 m
- Area: 35,58 km² (Gishwati: 15,70 km²; Mukura: 19,88 km²)
- Annual rainfall: 1200 – 1500 mm
- Established as national park: February 2016
- Key attractions: Chimpanzees, monkeys, birds, waterfalls, mountainous natural forest, community-based activities
- Managing body: Rwanda Development Board (RDB)
- Websites: <http://www.rdb.rw/rdb/tourism-and-conservation.html>

Gishwati-Mukura National Park (GMNP) expands on 35.58 km² in Rutsiro and Ngororero Districts of Western Province. Its hilly landscape gives a wonderful lateral and top view. GMNP is one of the few remaining natural forests and biodiversity hotspots in the Congo-Nile Divide within the Albertine Rift Region. Its biodiversity includes eastern chimpanzees, mountain and golden monkeys, serval, genet, civet, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, more than 120 species of birds and more than 250 plants species.

The two forests have known a long period of degradation due to human encroachment, more significantly Gishwati forest. For instance, from its original size of 700 km² in 1930s the core forest of Gishwati was reduced only to 6 km² in 2002. Thanks to collaborative conservation efforts, Gishwati forest now expands on about 15,70 km². Furthermore, in February 2016, the Government has decided to uphold the conservation effort of Mukura and Gishwati forests from Forest Reserves to a National Park.

Visiting GMNP park is a precious opportunity to explore its biodiversity, community products and enjoying hiking, trekking and biking in various trails in and around the park.

2. KEY INFORMATION

Useful contacts

Rwanda Development Board
 Phone: +250 252 502 350/573 396 (Kigali)
 +250 788652971 (Rubavu)
 Email: reservation@rwandatourism.com

Getting there

Depending on the departure point, road transport facilities are available to reach the park. Both common and private facilities are provided. From Kigali, regular buses depart from Nyabugogo Bus Station to Rubavu (Gisenyi town) (3hrs) via the road NR2 or to Karongi (2hrs) via NR1. From Rubavu or Karongi towns, Kivu Belt road (NR11) that connects Goma-Rubavu-Karongi-Rusizi and Bukavu towns leads to the Gishwati-Mukura National Park. Moreover, from any of those towns, visitors can use boat services available in Kivu Lake and meet booked cars to reach the park. Get more information at <http://www.rwandatourism.com>.

About suitable visiting seasons and weather

Being a mountainous country, Rwanda enjoys a cool and sunny tropical climate. Visits to GMNP can be done any time during the year. Clothing should be adapted to seasons. Light clothes in warm dry season whereas rain-proof clothes are mandatory during the rainy seasons spanning from October to December and from March to May.

About accommodation

There are two possibilities for accommodation around the park. For adventurers, homestay, farmstay, and low cost secure camping sites are available around the park. The three base camps are located at Kinkanda, Satinski Village and Gatenga. In Gishwati area, researchers can stay at Sunshine Gishwati Research Center. There are also various hotels in the nearest towns of Rubavu and Karongi. For details visit <http://www.rwandatourism.com>.

About banking services and currency

The nearby Rubavu and Karongi towns can provide you with banking services. Banks are open from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays. ATM

machines accept VISA cards, Master cards and American Express cards for cash withdrawal 24h/day. Rwandan Francs (Frw) is the main accepted currency for paying any services. US dollars, Euro and Pound can be exchanged in any Forex Bureau. Hotels accept payment in US dollars.

About shopping

As souvenirs, beautiful art handicrafts and local products are available at the park reception center, Community Exhibition Center, and at nearby shops. For other market and resto services, the nearby towns provide the best opportunities to experience African and Rwandan art galleries, colors and food flavors.

About health and safety

None can visit the forest if he/she has diarrhea, fever, coughing, sneezing, cold sores (herpes outbreak), and sore throat or if he/she has been exposed to known communicable diseases within the 48 hours prior to arriving at the park. Let the guide know if you feel sick just before the tour begins. During the visit, the guide carries a first aid kit to provide basic first aid in the event of any medical emergencies. He/She also have both radio and cell phone contacts with support staff based at the reception center. You shouldn't hesitate to tell the guide ahead of time if you have any medical conditions that he/she should know about. A helicopter is ready for any emergency.

About fees, visa & language

- *Fee:* Visitors are charged little amount of money ranging from US\$10 to US\$35 depending on the activities/services.
- *Getting the Visa:* VISA processing is easy, cheap and quick in Rwanda. It can also be online. Citizens from all countries can get a 30 day visa upon arrival without prior application. For EAC visitors, valid IDs are enough for them to enter in Rwanda. For more information please contact Rwandan embassy in your country or visit www.immigration.rw.
- *Official languages:* Kinyarwanda, English, French and Swahili.

3. ACTIVITIES DURING THE VISIT OF GMNP

GMNP can be visited all the days during business hours. Visitors may choose from a menu of products that mainly includes guided forest hike, tracking primates and exploring various community-based projects and activities.

Inside the park

Guided nature hike

This is an insightful walk inside the park along the trails that enter less disturbed forest, darker, and more humid areas. A trained guide accompanies a group of 8 persons maximum. Along the trail, you experience many large, often flowering trees, vines, giant earthworms, flashing birds, giant tree ferns and amazing waterfalls. Charming chameleons, golden and mountain monkeys and even chimpanzees might be encountered. Night walks are also organized as some animals are nocturnal.

Guided chimp and monkey tracking

Primates provide a joyful experience. As a visitor, you will learn about their whole life in the wilderness, either on ground walking or in branches of trees resting, jumping and even feeding.

Bird watching

The park offers exciting opportunities to watch a wide variety of Albertine Rift endemic bird species coupled with the hilly terrain which allows good views of the forest canopy. With over 126 bird species, the park is a “*Great Birders Destination*”. You will be provided with bird watching trails and signage, maps and brochures.

Community based activities in the park area

Cattle rearing and farm stay

This is more developed in Gishwati area. Farmers’ cooperatives share their practices. Tourists may discover different cattle rearing related activities and traditions such as caring for cows, milking and milk treatment and preservation, etc.

Live cultural dance

Near the park (Gishwati area) lives an indigenous community of historically marginalized people. Their cultural group named “*Indashyikirwa*” perform local dance and drive you into the move.

Experience traditional medicine

You should not miss to learn how the healers use natural plants to support the 21st century medicine and synthesized drugs. Cooperatives of traditional healers stand as great destination for experiencing traditional Rwandan medicine. The members lead you on forest walks of one to two hours to see medicinal plants, and later in their plots to see the finished medicines and learn about their uses. The guides ensure mutually respectful conversations.

Handcraft making and beekeeping

In the park area, there are various local cooperatives that are worth to visit such as UNICOAPIGI for bee-keeping and honey processing, COOVAKARU for handcrafts, etc. Visitors meet cooperative members and learn about their contribution to park conservation. It is an occasion to purchase natural honey, baskets, traditional mat and dung art, and colorful handbags. The guides facilitate interactions during a roughly one to two hours visit.

Sightseeing tea plantations

Get into the tea plantations to interact with farmers and to satisfy your curiosity on the whole process of tea planting, tending and harvesting. Tea plantations stretch into hundreds of hectares in hills around the park offering a wonderful landscape view.

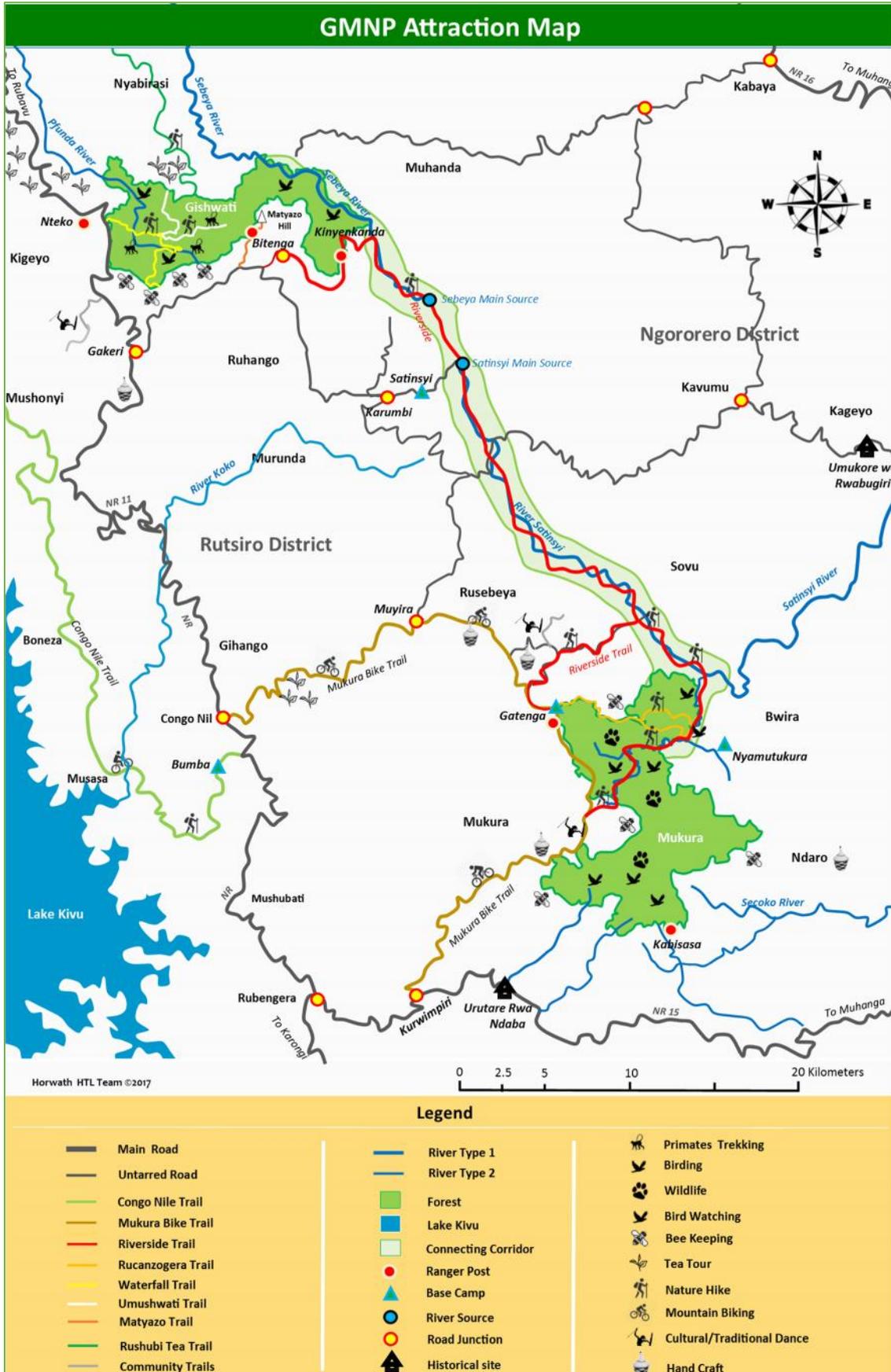
Visiting protocols

- Hiking starts in the morning at 7 am;
- Chimpanzees & monkeys are visited from 7:00 to 10:00 a.m. local time;
- No time and number restrictions during the day for bird watching and community-based tourism;
- Visiting in group is allowed but some activities require that large groups be divided into small groups to allow friendly and insightful learning experiences between them and the forest guides. A group comprising 8 people maximum is suitable for hiking, biking, visiting chimps, monkeys or waterfalls.

4. ATTRACTIONS INSIDE AND AROUND THE PARK

Key attractions	Location	Activity
Wildlife		
Key attractive animals: Eastern chimpanzees and golden monkey	Gishwati forest	Tracking
Other animals: mountain monkey, serval, genet, African civet, side-striped jackal, Ruwenzori sun squirrel, frogs, Great Lakes bush viper, Chameleons, skinks, Giant earth worm	Gishwati & Mukura forests	Wildlife exploration
Birds: Sunbirds, Turacos, Handsome francolin, Martial Eagle, Grey-crowned crane, etc.	Gishwati & Mukura forests	Birding
Flora: <i>Carapa grandiflora</i> “Umushwati”, <i>Symphonia globulifera</i> “Umushishi”, Giant tree fern “Igishigishigi”	Gishwati & Mukura forests	Wildlife exploration
Trails		
Riverside trail	Corridor from Gishwati to Mukura	Trekking, community-based tourism, nature hike, Camping & Birding
Waterfall trail (Kazeneza), Umushwati & Matyazo hill trails	Gishwati forest	Hiking & biking
Rushubi tea trail	Gishwati forest area	Biking, nature exploration & community-based tourism
Mukura Bike trail	Mukura forest	Biking & hiking
Rucanzogera trail	Mukura forest	Hiking, wildlife exploration & birding
Community trails	Gishwati & Mukura forests areas	Community-based tourism
Water falls		
Pfunda & Sebeya Rivers	Gishwati	Hiking & wildlife exploration
Satinsyi, Rucanzogera & Secoko Rivers	Mukura	
Community-based projects		
Pastoralism, traditional medicine, handcraft, beekeeping and honey processing, traditional dance, tea plantation and production	Park area	Hiking, learning, exploring & shopping local products





5. LEARN MORE ABOUT GMNP ATTRACTIONS

Attractive features in GMNP area include primates, colorful birds and shy and nocturnal mammals. A beautiful environment with spectacular trees, rushing waterfalls inside the forest is also part of the park's uniqueness. Stunning hilly tea-planted landscape and local community products are indeed so amazing to explore.

Key attractive animal species

Chimpanzees and Golden monkeys are the two attractive wild animals in GMNP. With the Mountain monkey, they are the three primates found in the park.

Eastern chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*, *Impundu*

More than 25 eastern chimpanzees are recorded in the park. Adult may weigh between 40 and 65 kg. Males are taller than females, 160 cm and 130 cm respectively. They are recognized by their sound which carries far. They can be heard hooting with excitement as they discover a *Myrianthus* tree filled with fruit or if males realize that a female is sexually receptive.



Eastern chimpanzee © FHA

Chimps are messy eaters. As you walk in the forest you might discover a chimpanzee "feeding site" on the trail. Although they may feed on *Pennisetum* grasses, the pith of giant tree ferns or the bark of *Dombeya* tree, chimps particularly like figs and the fruits of the *Myrianthus*. They also occasionally eat

honey and animal protein. You can find sticks next to the ground bee nests that appear to have been used to probe into the nests.

Golden monkey *Cercopithecus mitis kandti*, *Inkima*

Golden monkeys get their name from a distinctive yellow-gold back. They approximately weigh between 3.5 to 7 kg. Their height ranges between 45 to 70 cm. In Rwanda, they are frequently found in the Volcanoes and Gishwati-Mukura National Parks. They are an endangered subspecies on the IUCN Red List. Individuals live in large groups and each group is always guided by a dominant male.



Golden monkey © Chris Rocher

More than 18 different groups of Golden monkeys are encountered in Gishwati forest accounting for a total number of more than 100 individuals. They are scattered throughout the forest, but they are mostly concentrated in the north-eastern part in their preferred bamboo habitat. For their behavior, the adult males spend more time feeding and resting than other age and sex categories. The adult females devote more time moving than others. Juveniles are frequently seen playing. Their opportunistic activities include aggression, copulation and vocalization with dominance of "Pyon" call emitted only by adult males.

Other wild animal species

Mountain monkeys *Cercopithecus lhoesti*, *Inkende*

Mountain monkeys live in social groups with Golden monkeys and sometimes both kinds of monkeys are seen together in mixed groups.



Mountain monkey © FHA

There are more than 13 groups of mountain monkeys with a cumulative number of more than 150 individuals. The mountain monkey also known as “L’hoesti monkey” possesses a brilliant white ruff that frames its delicate black face. Its second most striking feature is the deep-set, orange eyes, surrounded by a bare skin that is pale violet in adult males. The body and long legs are black with grizzled grey, except for a chestnut coloured saddle. The long tail is thick at the base and tapers to a black brush. Mountain monkeys are semi-terrestrial guenons. Individuals are observed at different sites, but they are more present in the western part of Gishwati forest. They eat fruits and leaves of about 16 plant species with *Dombeya goetzenii* being the most frequently consumed.

Side-striped jackal, *Canis adustus*, Ingunzu/Nyiramubali

The side-striped jackals are dog-like social predators that are primarily nocturnal weighing between 7 and 12 kg. They are omnivores eating fallen fruit, small mammals, the remains of dead animals, terrestrial birds such as the Handsome francolins or/and their eggs.



Side-striped jackal ©Karim

Serval, *Leptailurus serval*, Ibisamagwe; imondo

The serval, a small cat that can weigh from 13 to 18 kg. Typically found in grasslands, servals have very long legs, a long neck and large ears that give them acute hearing. Although mainly nocturnal throughout their range, servals may sometimes be active during the day.



Serval© FHA

Ruwenzori sun squirrel *Heliosciurus ruwenzorii*, Agatinyi

It is endemic to the Albertine Rift, and found in montane forests above 1600 m of altitude. Though it is arboreal, it feeds near the ground.



Ruwenzori sun Squirrel, ©iNaturalist 2017

Servaline Genet, *Genetta servalina*, Urutoni

One species of genets is observed in Gishwati-Mukura National Park. That is the servaline genet. Its body fur has black spots on neck, back and sides, and has a long tail banded with wide black and narrow white rings.



African civet *Civettictis civetta*, *Impimbi*

This is a solitary mammal with a unique body coloration characterized by black and white stripes. It is omnivorous and prefers riverine habitats and woodlands.



Forest frogs, *Platymantis* sp., *Igikeri*

The forest frogs along with multiple species of toads are some of the park amphibians.



Great lake bush viper, *Atheris nitschei*, *Impiri*,
Three-horned chameleon, *Chamaeleo johnstoni*,
Ururu & **African striped skink**, *Trachylepsis striata*,
Umuserebanya

In the family of reptiles, GMNP hosts the great lakes bush viper among snakes, multiple species of chameleons including the Ruwenzori three-horned chameleon and Skinks such as African striped skink.



Giant earthworm, *Dichogaster* sp., *Umunyorogoto*



As you walk inside the wet parts of the forest, you may find the crawling worms, mostly represented by the genus *Dichogaster*. This one may measure over 30 cm in length. Along the trail, you may also encounter safari ants.

Key Birds in GMNP

Over 126 bird species live in the GMNP. Some of them, approximately 14 species, are of special conservation significance because they are found endemic to the Albertine Rift. Purple-breasted sunbird represents the highest population density. Some big-size birds that are found in the forest include turacos, cranes and eagles.

Sunbirds, *Umununi*

The sunbirds are small (from 5 to 45 g of weight), slender passerines with a down-curved bill adapted for feeding on nectar. Many species have long tail feathers. They are strongly sexually dimorphic with the males being larger and having brilliant plumage and long tails. Three species are frequently observed: Regal sunbird (*Cinnyris regius*), Blue-headed sunbird (*Cyanomitra alinae*) and Purple-breasted sunbird (*Nectarinia purpureiventris*).



Regal sunbird. ©Rhys Marsh



Blue-headed sunbird. ©Dr. M. Zieger



Purple-breasted sunbird. ©Rhys Marsh

Turaco, *Sarukondo*

In the GMNP, two species of turacos are seen: The Great blue turaco (*Corythaeola cristata*) and the Ruwenzori turaco (*Gallirex johnstoni*).

Great blue turaco, Corythaeola cristata

The great blue turaco is the largest species of turaco measuring 70 to 76 cm long with a mass of 800 to 1,230 g.



Great blue turaco. ©Lawrence Neo

Ruwenzori turaco, Gallirex johnstoni

This turaco is about 45 cm long and can have 210-260 g of weight. It is herbivorous preferring fruits.



Ruwenzori turaco. ©Mārk Lilje

Dusky crimsonwing, Cryptospiza jacksoni, Ifundi



Dusky crimsonwing, © 2009–2017 ESTU Ltd

Handsome francolin, Pternistis nobilis, Inkware

The handsome francolin is a large, up to 35 cm long, ground-dwelling forest bird with a dark reddish-brown plumage, red bill and legs. Both sexes are similar. This bird is primarily a seedeater preferring montane bamboo and patchy habitats. It used to supplement the diet of people living around the park.



Handsome francolin, © Jason Anderson

Martial Eagle, Polemaetus bellicosus, Kagoma

The martial eagle is a large, booted eagle having feathers over its tarsus. Its total length is 85 cm in average, with a wingspan ranging from 180 to 260 cm. They are highly sexual dimorphic, with females being larger than males. Males can weigh from 2.2 to 3.8 kg whereas females can weigh from 4.5 to 6.5 kg. Martial eagles are opportunistic predators that vary their prey selection between mammals, birds and reptiles.



Martial eagle, © 2012–2017 Fine Animals

Grey-crowned crane, Balearica regulorum, Umusambi

The grey crowned crane is about 1 m tall and weighs about 3.5 kg. The body plumage is mainly grey with the head bearing a crown of stiff golden feathers. Sexes are similar although males tend to be slightly larger. It can roost in trees.



Grey-crowned crane, © Chrumps

Sightings checklist

There are more species in Gishwati Mukura National Park than those reported in the table below. Here are just those which are usually identifiable. Throughout your visit, tick off the ones that you identify. Record other species that you spot which are not listed in the table below.

Primates:				Endemic birds			
Eastern chimpanzee <i>Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii</i>				Handsome Francolin, <i>Pternistis nobilis</i>			
Golden monkey <i>Cercopithecus mitis kandii</i>				Ruwenzori Turaco, <i>Gallirex johnstoni</i>			
Mountain monkeys <i>Cercopithecus l'boesti</i>				Ruwenzori Batis, <i>Batisdiops</i>			
Mammals				Mountain Sooty Boubou, <i>Laniariusbolomelas</i>			
Serval <i>Leptailurus serval</i>				Stripe-breasted Tit, <i>Parus fasciiventer</i>			
Servaline Genet, <i>Genetta servalina</i>				Red-faced Woodland Warbler, <i>Phylloscopus laetus</i>			
African civet, <i>Civettictis civetta</i>				Ruwenzori Apalis, <i>Oreolais ruwenzorii</i>			
Side-striped jackal, <i>Canis adustus</i>				Mountain Masked Apalis, <i>Apalis personate</i>			
Ruwenzori sun squirrel <i>Heliosciurus ruwenzorii</i>				Kivu Ground Thrush, <i>Zootbera tanzanicae</i>			
Amphibians				Archer's Ground Robin, <i>Dessonornis archeri</i>			
Forest frogs, <i>Platymantis</i>				Red-throated Alethe, <i>Pseudalethep oliophrys</i>			
Annelids				Blue-headed Sunbird, <i>Cyanomitra alinae</i>			
Giant earth worm, <i>Dichogaster sp.</i>				Purple-breasted Sunbird, <i>Nectarinia purpureiventris</i>			
Reptiles				Regal Sunbird, <i>Cinnyris regius</i>			
Great Lakes bush viper, <i>Atheris nitschei</i> ,				Ruwenzori Double-collared Sunbird, <i>Cinnyris stublmanni</i>			
Three-horned chameleon, <i>Chamaeleo johnstoni</i>				Strange Weaver, <i>Ploceus alienus</i>			
African striped skink, <i>Trachylepsis striata</i>				Dusky Crimsonwing, <i>Cryptospiza jacksoni</i>			

Record below the identified species not mentioned in the table above

-				-			
-				-			
-				-			
-				-			
-				-			

About the flora

GMNP flora consists of ombrophylous montane forest that gives a colorful view due to a mix of vegetation types: the mixed forest, bamboo forest, swamp forest and grassland. There is a variety of tree species such as *Harungana montana*, *Prunus africana*, *Potocarpus latifolius* and *Polyscias fulva*; *Macaranga kilimandscharica*, *Carapa grandiflora*, *Entandrophragma excelsum*, *Hagenia abyssinica*, *Dracena afromontana*, *Symphonia globulifera* and the charismatic giant tree ferns (*Cyathea manniana*). *Carapa grandiflora*, *Symphonia globulifera* and the giant tree ferns (*Cyathea manniana*) attract the attention due to their predominance and ecological functions:

Carapa grandiflora, Umushwati

This is one of the most common trees found in Gishwati after which the forest was named. Fruits can weigh up to 800 g in average, and each fruit contains about 10 seeds. Freshly fallen fruits have fibrous indehiscent husks that are green with red coloration on ridges, turning brown after several days. The fruits of this tree have seeds that scatter everywhere contributing to the expansion of the tree in the forest. *Carapa grandiflora* is typically 20-30 m in height. Flowering peaks between May and September with fruits typically produced in July-September.



Carapa grandiflora © FHA

Symphonia globulifera, Umushishi

Its canopy provides an environment where many kinds of animals, especially chimps and purple-breasted sunbirds, live. Chimpanzees may make their nests in the branches of *Symphonia*, and also eat both its flowers and fruits. *Symphonia* soars up to between 30 and 40 m. Its fruits are oval-shaped

and green or crimson when young but turn brown later. It remains by far one of the dominant large and tall trees in Gishwati because it was not attractive to the woodcutters who eliminated most of the original trees from Gishwati over the past decades. Its wood exudes a sticky yellow latex, which makes it unsuitable for lumber and charcoal production.



Symphonia globulifera © FHA



Symphonia globulifera © Chris Roehrer

Giant tree fern, Igishigishigi

They occur in shallow and wet areas. They tower over a normal person and represent one of the world's oldest plant lineages.

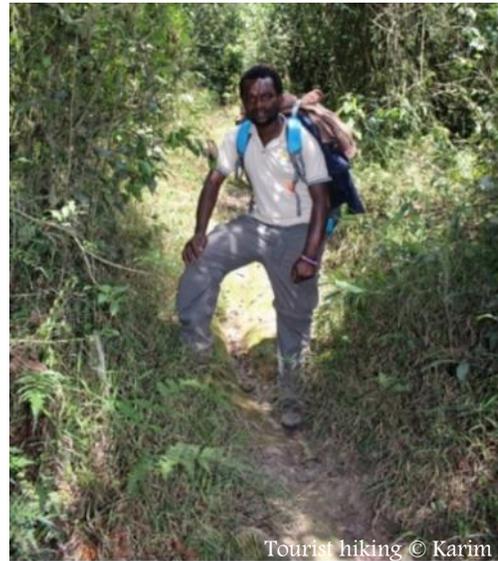


Giant tree fern © FHA

Trails and waterfalls

Trails and waterfalls are part of the most attractive features of GMNP. Along the trails, tourists can enjoy hiking, trekking, biking, birding, as well as nature, wildlife and local community products exploration. There are clearly identified from the three main tourism zones (see maps below):

- **Umushwati Tourism Zone** that includes the western zone of Gishwati natural forest and its buffer zone, the Umushwati Trail, the Pfunda River waterfalls, the Rushubi tea trail.
- **Bitenga/Sebeya Tourism Zone** includes the East part of Gishwati forest, the Matyazo Hill trail, the Kinyenkanda Ranger Post and the Sebeya riverside trail starting point.
- **Rucanzogera Tourism Zone** includes the North part of Mukura Forest and its buffer zone, the Rucanzogera Trail, the Mukura/Congo Nile mountain bike trail linking Mukura forest to Lake Kivu, and Mukura community trail.



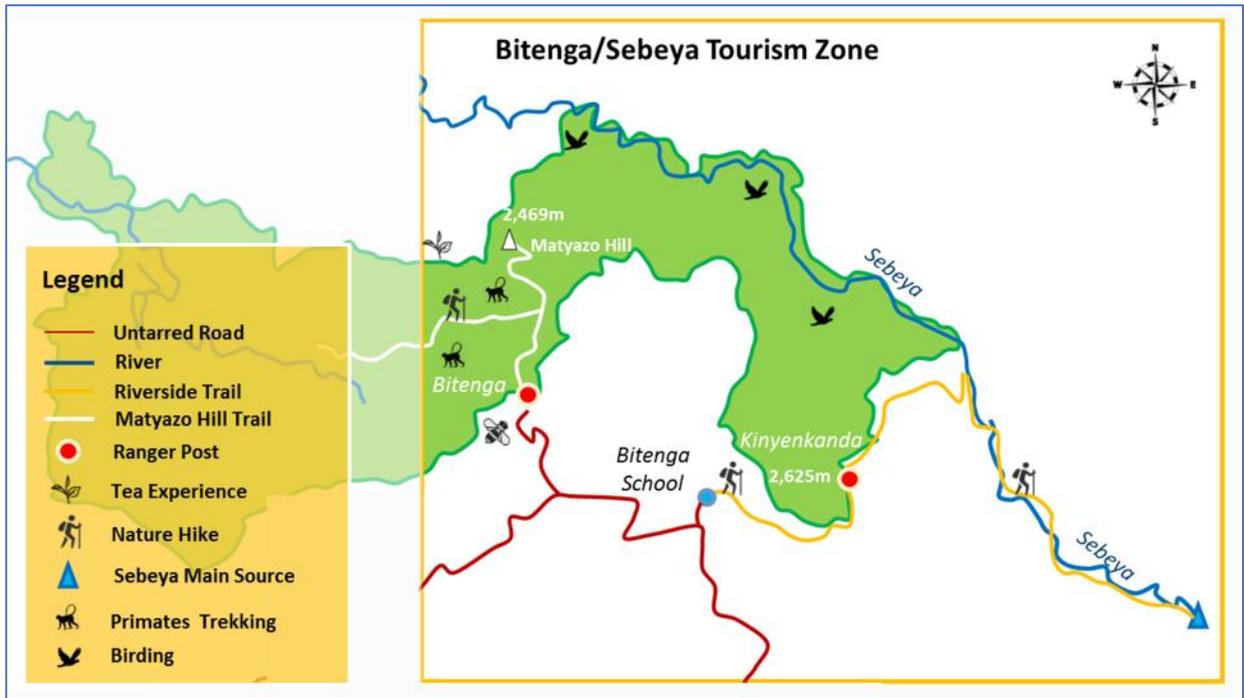
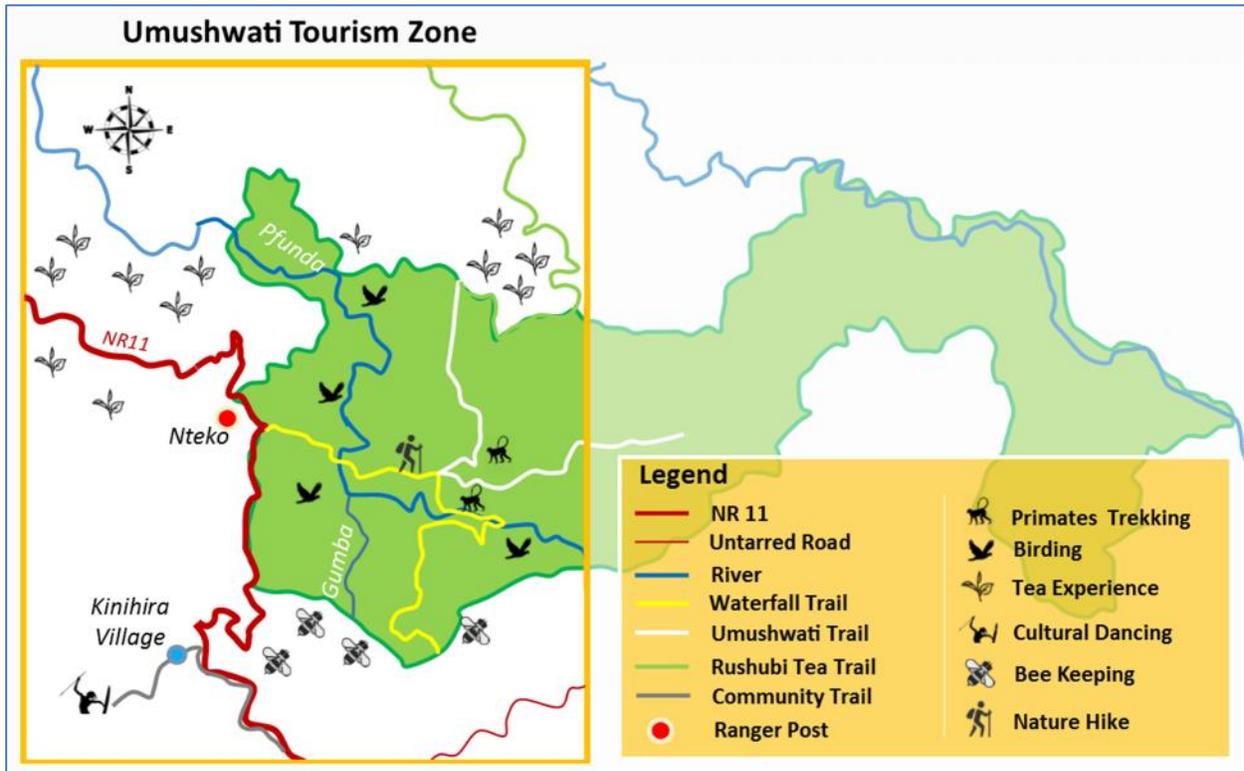
Waterfalls are located on the different Rivers namely Pfunda, Sebeya, Satinsyi, Rucanzogera and Secoko. For example, Pfunda River drops over a series of sloping rock ledges and boulders in the heart of Gishwati forest from southeast to northwest. It has a beautiful **Kazeneza falls** which were named with the local language word for “Welcome”.

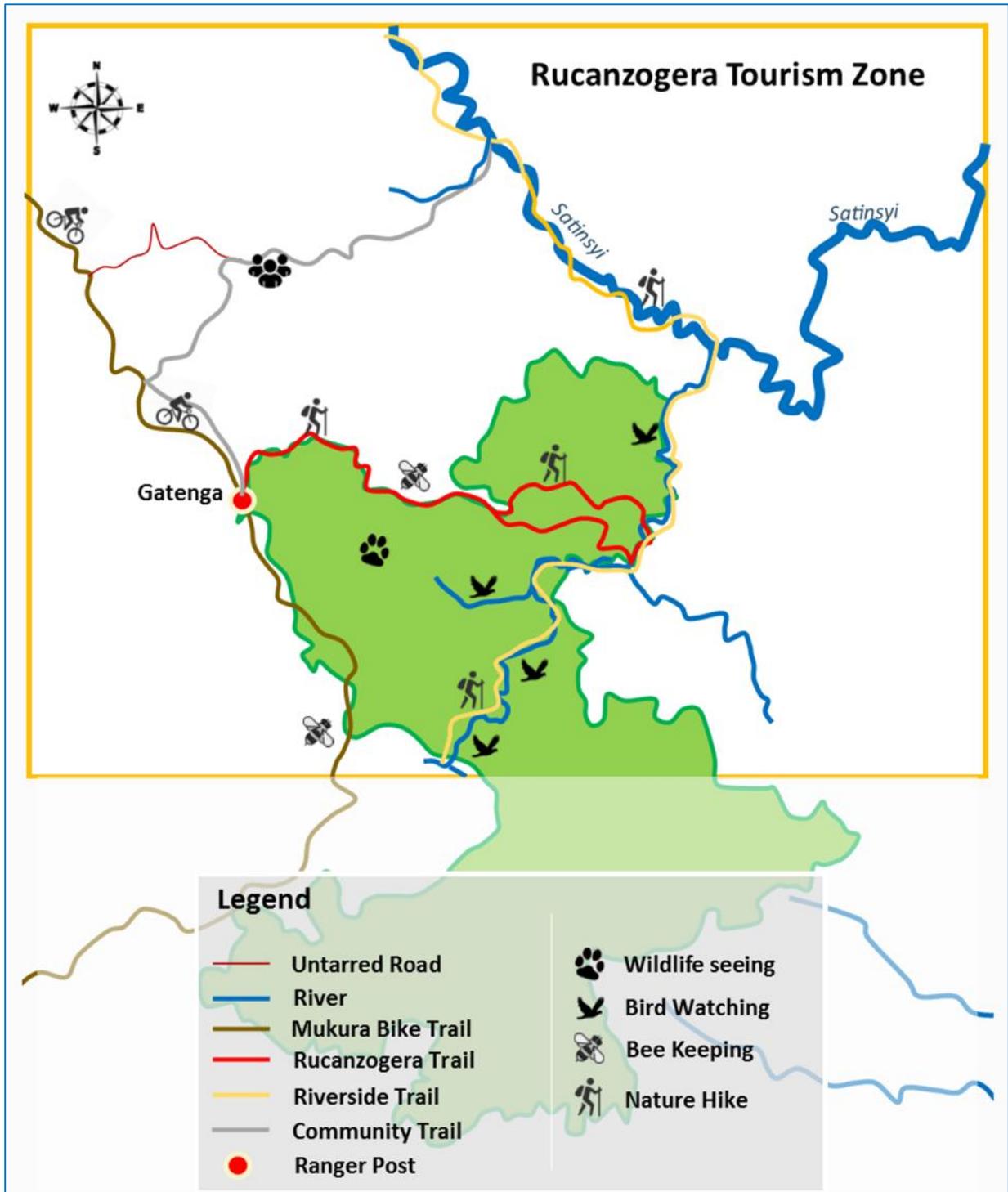
There are numerous trails inside and around the park. The Riverside trail is the most important as it links the two patches of the park, Gishwati and Mukura forests. It goes along Sebeya River in Gishwati area connecting to Satinsyi River in Mukura area stretching the Congo Nile watershed.



Details about the trails

Name of the trail	Accessible from	Length	Elevation	Trail type	Rating
Waterfall Trail	Kivu Belt Road & Nteko Ranger Post	7 km	2,229 m	Loop	Easy
Umushwati Trail	Waterfall trail inside Gishwati forest & Bitenga Ranger Post	8 km	2,337 m	Out and back	Moderate
Rushubi Tea Trail	Mahoko Junction	24 km	2,372 m	Out and back	Moderate
Gishwati Community Trail	Kinihira Village	One-day hike	2,578 m	-	Easy
Matyazo Hill Trail	Waterfall and Umushwati trails & Bitenga Ranger Post	3 km	2,469 m	Out and back	Moderate
Mukura Bike Trail	Congo-Nil center junction & Kurwimpiri Junction	50 km	2,554 m	Out and back	Moderate
Rucanzogera Trail	Gatenga Village & Mukura Center	3-6 hrs hike	2,398 m	Out and Back	Moderate
Riverside Trail	Congo Nil road at Muyira and Karumbi Villages & Kageyo	30 km	2,665 m	Out and back	Moderate
Mukura Community Trail	Riverside Trail	Half day hike	2408 m	-	Easy





Community-based tourism

There is a variety of local community products and projects that count much for visitors' entertainment, exploration and discovery. They include: traditional medicine, handcraft, bee keeping, cattle rearing and farmstay, homestay, traditional dance and camping. These products are offered by the park neighboring population who contribute much in park conservation in the framework of Community Partnership Programme. This is best exemplified by Indashyikirwa Cultural Association. The members of this association used to live a nomad lifestyle in Gishwati Forest. The FHA educated them for forest conservation. They entertain the tourists in traditional dance while getting share from tourism income.

Community-based activities

Activity	Cooperative/ group	Park area	Contacts
Traditional medicine	KOAGIRU	Gishwati	0785731640
	Mukura Traditional Healers Association	Mukura	0786772443
Handcraft	COOVAKARU	Gishwati	0782975760
	Duce Amasashe	Mukura	0788965737
	Women Association	Mukura	0784976090
	COABU	Mukura	0784939498
Bee keeping	UNICOAPIGI	Gishwati	0788804604
	TUZAMURANE Ndaro	Mukura	0782975760
	COARABERU Rusebeya	Mukura	0785305299
Traditional dance	INDASHYIKIRWA	Gishwati	0783491512
	Women Traditional Dancers Group	Mukura	0784976090
Cattle rearing	Jyambere	Gishwati	0788593558
Tea production	Rutsiro Tea Growers Cooperatives Union	Gishwati	0788744316, 0783520865





Traditional beehkeeping © Karim



Traditional healers © FHA



Tea plantation in Gishwati area © FHA



Cattle rearing in Gishwati area © FHA



Traditional dance by Indashyikirwa © FHA

6. BEYOND GISHWATI MUKURA NATIONAL PARK

Visitors of GMNP can take the opportunity to visit some historic sites around the park such as the *Umukore wa Rwabugiri*, a historic site located in Ngororero District, the *Urutare rwa Ndaba*, a historic site located in Karongi district and the *Matyazo* historic site in Rutsiro District. Beyond the visit, the tourists can relax at the Lake Kivu beaches, visit BRALIRWA brewery and explore the Kivu Belt Road (National Road 11) and the Congo-Nile Trail (see details in the table below).

Destination	Brief description	More information
Lake Kivu	Only 30-minutes drive from Gishwati. Relax and refresh on beautiful sandy beaches, enjoy boat trip to visit towns along Kivu shores of Rubavu, Karongi, Rusizi, Goma & Bukavu.	www.rwandatourism.com www.rdb.rw
Kivu Belt Road (Road 11)	Through Gishwati forest, enjoy 3-4 hours drive and explore hills, mountains, rural settlements and lifestyle.	www.mininfra.gov.rw
Bralirwa	The main and oldest brewery in Rwanda located in Gisenyi town.	http://www.bralirwa.com
Congo-Nile Trail	A 227 km (141 miles) of lovely landscapes trail alongside the Lake Kivu extending from Rubavu, through Rutsiro via Karongi and Nyamasheke districts to Rusizi District	www.rwandatourism.com



7. CONSERVATION HISTORY OF GISHWATI AND MUKURA FORESTS

The two patches of Gishwati and Mukura used to be part of a complex system of rainforests through the middle of Africa. It extended west beyond Lake Kivu connecting with the rainforests of the Congo, the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, and in the south connecting with Nyungwe National Park and Cyamudongo forest in Rwanda, and the contiguous Kibira National Park in Burundi. This forest complex system has been fragmented due to population increase and deforestation. The merge of Gishwati and Mukura forests as a National park was in line with their sustainable protection and regeneration. Each patch of the park has its long history especially Gishwati forest.

Gishwati Natural Forest



Gishwati was established as natural reserve since 1930 covering about 70,000 ha. It has been gradually depleted to 28,000 ha in 1960, to 8,800 ha in 1990 and to 600 ha in 2002. The establishment of the forestry industry alongside cattle ranching in 1980s led to the conversion of 70% of the forest. By the 1990s it has been further depleted to about 61.7 % of this size because of human encroachment, large-scale cattle ranching projects, cattle grazing within the forest, resettlement of returnees after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, and clearing of the forest for small-scale farming. Only 2% of what the forest was in 1970s was remaining in 2005. From 2006 the restoration

projects extended the forest up to 1,484 ha. The gazetted actual size of Gishwati Forest is 1,570 ha.

Year	Area (km ²)
1930	700.00
1960	28.00
1980	23.00
1990	8.80
1996	3.80
2002	6.00
2008	8.86
2012	14.84
2016	15.70

The Gishwati history was reversed thanks to different government and non government initiatives. Those include the *Projet d'appui à la reforestation au Rwanda* (PAFOR) (in 2006) of former Ministry of Environment and Human Resettlement that increased the size of the forest from 600 ha to 886 hectares. *Gishwati Area Conservation Program* (GACP) (2008-2012) followed and increased the size of the forest from 886 ha to about 1500 ha. The *Landscape Approach to Forest Restoration and Conservation* (LAFREC) project of Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) is restoring the forest since 2014. As part of Gishwati-Mukura National Park, this forest is now under the mandate of Rwanda Development Board (RDB). Forest of Hope Association (FHA) works on conservation of Gishwati forest since 2012 mainly in the framework of Community Partnership Programme, environmental education and research for wildlife monitoring.

Research allows to identify and map fragile ecosystems, and habitats of key species, to understand the behavioral ecology of the primates and to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. For details about research reports conducted so far visit: http://www.fharwanda.org/IMG/pdf/GISHWA_TI_-_bibliography_2015-06-15.pdf





Community Forest Protection Initiative Agents ©FHA



Environmental education in Gishwati area ©FHA

Mukura forest



Mukura forest ©Karim

Like Gishwati, Mukura forest was part of forest complex in the western part of Rwanda extending from Volcanoes in the north to Cyamudongo in the South. It was gazetted as a reserve in 1951. The surface area decreased over time due to human encroachment through mining activities and deforestation for settlements. Currently, the gazetted surface area covers 1988 ha whereas it was 3000 ha in 1960s. Mukura forest is also under restoration by the LAFREC project of REMA and under governance of RDB as part of national park.