



FIRST CHOICE

RIDICULOUSLY GOOD VALUE

BOOK NOW

Africa's jumbo hike! Joining a four-day trek to find Uganda's CAVE elephants - and they are worth every step

- Cave elephants spend nights in caves, scraping salt off the walls with their tusks
- The 'etchings' were first thought to be the work of ancient Egyptian gold diggers
- These elephants can be found in little-explored areas of Uganda and Kenya

By CAROLINE PHILLIPS FOR THE DAILY MAIL
PUBLISHED: 08:27, 29 September 2018 | UPDATED: 09:16, 29 September 2018

Share 9 shares View comments 5

Today you'll climb the ladders and cliffs known as the Wall of Death,' says Peter, chief warden at Mount Elgon's National Park office in Uganda. 'Nobody,' he adds, 'has yet died on them.'

My daughter, Anya, 22, and I look at one another. It's too late to turn back. We've already flown eight hours to Nairobi, then another 75 minutes to Entebbe.

Next, a six-hour car journey — covering just 165 miles to East Uganda — past Lake Victoria, sugar cane fields and men sitting on pavement sofas, their roadside 'shops'.



Majestic: Cave elephants are known to spend nights in caves and scrape salt off the rocky walls with their tusks

Eventually we reach Mbale town, sleep six hours at Mt Elgon Hotel — with its panoramic view of Mt Elgon, a 24 million-year-old extinct shield volcano — then get up at 5am to start our expedition.

TOP ARTICLES 3/5

PROSECUTORS REVEAL FAKE RESUME LORI LOUGHLIN'S DAUGHTER OLIVIA JADE USED TO GET INTO COLLEGE

READ MORE >>

Our goal is to hike for four days in this little-explored area of Uganda, and then across to Kenya. We're searching for cave elephants. They're unusual because they tend to spend their nights in caves, scraping salt off the rocky walls with their tusks.

Soon we're bumping along a dirt track to Bumasola, the trailhead for the Sasa Trail. It's the park's most popular route, although a mere 908 people walked it last year.

Here we meet our ranger guides, cook and porters. The two guides sport army fatigues, rifles and wellies. Three porters carry sacks on their heads: our food, water, rented tent, sleeping bags and mats. One, Moses, clutches a live chicken.

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

RELATED ARTICLES

'Dinner,' he explains. We start our hike, clambering up a slippery, rocky path alongside sweet potato and cassava plots. Will the 32 miles from start to finish be as strenuous? Children and barefoot Bagisu tribesmen stagger down with sacks of 'Irish potatoes' on their heads. 'Mulembe [hi],' they say. Three miles on, we reach the 'ladders' ascending the 984 ft-high Mudange Cliffs — the 'Wall of Death'.

'People used to climb the cliffs by rope,' explains Alex, head guide. The terrain is so difficult that we take five hours to walk 3.4 miles on the first day. But despite that, you don't have to be super fit.

At Sasa River Camp, the first of our two overnight camps, the porters pitch our tent inside a hut. The chef cooks beans and rice over a big log fire, and the chicken lives to see another day.

That night, I shiver in three pairs of trousers, four T-shirts and an anorak in our lightweight sleeping bag. It's three degrees in June.



Epic trek: Climbing Mt Elgon in search of cave elephants is tough but the views along the way are spectacular

'Monkeys came when you were asleep,' Alex tells us, over breakfast. It's possible to spy leopards, baboons and buffalo, too.

On day three, I get 'air hunger' — altitude sickness. We're now on our second night in Mude Cave camp. Anya charges up Wagagai peak to 14,177 ft — later declaring it her Sir Edmund Hillary moment.

Over four days, we hike past subsistence farming (coffee, maize and bananas), tropical montane (orchids and ferns), mixed bamboo (dense forest above 2,000 metres) and heath (shrubby moorland).

Then there's Suam Gorge, dotted with coffee smugglers' caves and the five-mile-wide caldera with its Jurassic Park-style landscape.

Finally, we reach Kenya, Kitum Cave's location, where elephants and antelope go for their salt lick. It's pitch-black, the ground carpeted with elephant dung, the air filled with fruit bats screeching. As we shine phone torches, a thousand yellow eyes gleam spookily from the ceiling.

We marvel at the 'tusk art', where elephants have scratched off the walls for salt. When these 'etchings' were first discovered, they were reckoned to be the work of ancient Egyptian gold diggers.

At last the rangers locate the elephants. After an hour's bumpy car ride, we scramble with 40 locals to the top of a rocky hillock. Soon Babar and family hove majestically into view 50 ft away, moving slowly, tearing down branches. It's an awesome sight — and a grand finale.

TRAVEL FACTS

Wild Frontiers (020 8741 7390) offers a six-day Mt Elgon trek from £1,645 pp, with one night at Mount Elgon Hotel. **Kenya Airways** flies to Entebbe from £390.

Read more: Adventure Tours and Holidays | Wild Frontiers Travel Kenya Airways - United Kingdom

Site Web Enter your search Search

SPARK LIFE TO YOUR WALLS WITH POWERFUL CANVAS WALL ART

Click To Shop

intuitive

Like Daily Mail Follow Daily Mail Follow @DailyMail Follow Daily Mail Follow @travelmail Follow Daily Mail

TOP STORIES IN TRAVEL

Mesmerising hyper-lapse footage shows the brand new \$1billion Celebrity Apex cruise ship taking shape

Saga cruise ship with 89 passengers suffering from diarrhoea, vomiting and fever is due to dock in Southampton - days after it was turned away from Gibraltar

The cream of your farm holiday crop: Enjoy five-star luxury on a working sheep farm or bed down next to alpacas in a wooden glamping pod

Has YOUR handwriting deteriorated through lack of use? Try a holiday with a calligraphy masterclass

Exclusive for Mail On Sunday readers: A unique tour discovering the beauty of rural France with Chocolat creator Joanne Harris - the author of 15 bestsellers

Rajasthan romance: From bewitching sunsets to a hot tub on a palace tower, unearthing a dozen dreamy hotels in this enchanting corner of India

Britain at its best: An Anglo-Irish agreement! Discovering the fascinating history of County Down, from Stormont to the Queen's residence

'When we landed, eight tyres burst and we skidded down the runway': Singer Engelbert Humperdinck recalls his travel adventures - including a scary landing on Concorde

What are the best snowy destinations with non-ski activities and when is the best time to book flights to Orlando? The Holiday Guru tackles traveller queries

An Inspector calls... at London's new Ruby Hotel, which has a 'cramped' bar and cafe 'resembling a creche' - but impressive rooms

Sparkling secrets of five-star luxury: How the world's most glamorous hotels earn their stripes

Sunweb

Last Minute ski holidays Save up to 30% from £159 p.p. incl. lift pass Book now

Hot water! From mountain-view infinity pools to glass-bottomed swim spaces - the world's most photographed pools revealed

With more than 6,000 Greek islands to explore, why just stick to one when you could have a... happy hopping holiday

They promise discounts, free transport and entry to top-notch attractions, but... do city passes really add up?

Colombia's colonial riot of colour: Marvelling at ancient sites and basking in luxury in the walled city of Cartagena

Full sail ahead: Two yachts, three families, five children - and one epic voyage around Croatia's craggy coast

Riga for under £100 a night! How to visit the wonderful Latvian capital on the cheap

Rock the Kasbah! Tangier's walled fortress is a heady blast of Moroccan charm - and getting there has just got easier

A wheely good recovery: Globetrotter celebrates beating cancer by embarking on a 62,000-mile round-the-world bike ride to 67 countries with her partner

Spanish court orders Ryanair to reimburse a passenger who was charged a fee to take hand luggage on a flight from Liverpool to Alicante

Kefalonia with kids? Yes please! Why this Greek island villa (with a beautiful infinity pool) is paradise for parents

