



# **International Boundary Study**

**No. 52 – June 15, 1965**

## **Democratic Republic of the Congo (*Zaire*) – Rwanda Boundary**

**(Country Codes: CG-RW)**

**The Geographer  
Office of the Geographer  
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

**INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY**

**No. 52**

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (Kinsasha)  
[ZAIRE, CONGO (Leopoldville)] - RWANDA BOUNDARY**

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**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (Kinsasha)  
[ZAIRE, CONGO (Leopoldville)] - RWANDA BOUNDARY**

**I. BOUNDARY BRIEF**

The Congo (Leopoldville) - Rwanda boundary has a length of approximately 135 miles. Southward from the Uganda tripoint on Volcan Sabinyo (Sabinio), it crosses an area of volcanic mountains for about 37 miles, passes through Lac Kivu for 71 miles, and follows the thalweg of the Ruzizi (Rusizi) for 27 miles. The Burundi tripoint is located at the junction of the Ruzizi and Luhwa (Ruwa) rivers.

**II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Berlin Conference of 1884 - 85 recognized King Leopold II of Belgium as the sovereign head of state for an International Association of the Congo. On July 1, 1885, the entity was renamed the Congo Free State, and in 1908 the state was accorded colonial status as the Belgian Congo. A declaration by the Administrator-General of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Congo Free State stated on August 1, 1885 that the eastern limits of the entity, which included the sector adjacent to Rwanda (then known as Ruanda), were determined southward from the intersection of the 4th parallel of north latitude with the 30th meridian of east longitude as follows:

The 30th degree of longitude east of Greenwich up to 1°20' of south latitude;

A straight line drawn from the intersection of the 30th degree of longitude by the parallel of 1°20' of south latitude as far as the northern extremity of Lake Tanganyika, ...<sup>1</sup>

A tripoint with Uganda was established initially in 1890<sup>2</sup> following a compromise agreement between the United Kingdom and Germany relative to their respective spheres of influence west of Lake Victoria. Article I, Paragraph 1 of the agreement provided that the boundary between British and German territories should follow the parallel of one degree south latitude across Lake Victoria and thence should continue westward, deflected only to include Mount Mufumbiro<sup>3</sup> in the British sphere, to its intersection with the 30th meridian of longitude east of Greenwich. At this point the 30th meridian was the self-defined limit of the Congo Free State.

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<sup>1</sup> The limit of the state adjacent to Rwanda was phrased similarly in a declaration of neutrality by the Congo Free State in December, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Agreement between the British and German Governments, respecting Africa and Heligoland, Berlin, July 1, 1890. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909) Vol. 3, pp. 899 - 906.

<sup>3</sup> Mount Mufumbiro later was found to be a region of volcanoes lying both south of 1° south latitude and west of the 30th meridian.

Prior to 1910 boundaries established between Lac Kivu and Lake Albert were based on limited landform information. Data were sparse particularly in the mountainous areas such as the Mufumbiro and Ruwenzori and initial boundaries were drawn without adequate knowledge of the actual surface conditions. In 1910 an Anglo - German - Belgian conference was held in Brussels,<sup>4</sup> which resulted in agreement on Volcan Sabinyo as the tripoint of the territories of the three states, delimited the present Congo - Rwanda and Burundi - Congo boundaries, and delimited the parts of the Congo - Uganda and Tanzania - Uganda boundaries adjoining the tripoint.

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<sup>4</sup> The following treaties, printed in the British and Foreign State Papers, were promulgated as a result of the conference.

**Belgium - United Kingdom:**

- (1) Agreement between Great Britain and Belgium Settling the Boundary between Uganda and the Congo. Signed at Brussels, May 14, 1910, Vol. 107, Part I, 1914, pp. 348 - 349.
- (2) Protocol between Great Britain and Belgium describing the Frontier between the Uganda Protectorate and the Belgian Colony of the Congo. Signed at Busenda, May 4, 1911, Vol. 107, Part I, pp. 349 - 351.
- (3) Agreement between Great Britain and Belgium respecting the boundary between the British and Belgian Territories in East Africa, from Mount Sabinio to the Congo - Nile Watershed. Signed at London, February 3, 1915 [Ratifications exchanged at London, October 20, 1919]. Vol. 110, 1916, pp. 487 - 490.

**Belgium - Germany:**

Convention between Belgium and Germany confirming the Agreement signed at Brussels, May 14, 1910, settling the Boundary between German East Africa and the Belgian Colony of the Congo. Signed at Brussels, August 11, 1910, Annexe-Arrangement signe a Bruxelles, le 14 mai, 1910. Vol. 103, 1909 - 10, pp. 372 - 375.

**Germany - United Kingdom:**

- (1) Agreement between Great Britain and Germany Settling the Boundary between Uganda and German East Africa. Signed at Brussels, May 14, 1910. Vol. 107, Part I, 1914, pp. 394 - 397.
- (2) Protocol between Great Britain and Germany Describing the Frontier between the Uganda Protectorate and German East Africa. Signed at Kamwezi, October 30, 1911. Memorandum attached to the Protocol List of Boundary Pillars on the Anglo - German Boundary, Sabinio to River Chizingo, with approximate Co-ordinates. Vol. 107, Part I, 1914, pp. 397 - 402.

### **III. POLITICO - GEOGRAPHIC SETTING**

The Congo - Rwanda boundary between the Burundi tripoint and about 17 miles northward of Lac Kivu is located in the western branch of the Great Rift valley, and the remainder of the boundary extends across an upland surface between high peaks. Peaks eastward and northeastward from the Great Rift valley include Mont Hehu, Volcan Karisimbi, Volcan Visoke, and Volcan Sabinyo. The Ruzizi between the Burundi tripoint and Lac Kivu is characterized by numerous meanders.

With an area of approximately 1,100 square miles, Lac Kivu drains southward through the Ruzizi into Lake Tanganyika. Lac Kivu has a surface elevation of about 4,788 feet and water depths of approximately 1,600 feet. There are a number of islands, of which Ile Idjivi is the largest. An important waterway, the lake is served by the ports of Bukavu and Goma in the Congo and Gisenyi in Rwanda. Although few roads cross the boundary, a road connects Bukavu and Shangugu south of Lac Kivu and another road extends between Goma and Gisenyi north of Lac Kivu.

Located only a short distance south of the equator, the boundary area has two wet and two dry seasons. Steppe conditions prevail in much of the Great Rift valley, but adjacent uplands receive between 40 and 55 inches of precipitation. Temperatures are moderated by elevation and a wide range of climate conditions exists in the tropical highlands.

Population densities range between 100 and 250 persons per square mile along most of the boundary. Coffee, tea, and cotton are the major cash crops, and rice, cassava, vegetables, and peanuts are important crops grown for local consumption. The most numerous people of Rwanda, the Bahutu, apparently migrated eastward from the Congo centuries ago to their present location. A number of Batutsi, the second most numerous group of people, have recently crossed the boundary into the Congo as political refugees.

### **IV. BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT**

The Burundi tripoint is located at the junction of the Ruzizi and Luhwa rivers between Lake Tanganyika and Lac Kivu. There are no known treaties establishing the tripoint and the Burundi - Rwanda boundary appears to be a traditional line between the two states.

The convention signed by Belgium and Germany on August 11, 1910 gives the alignment of the Congo - Rwanda boundary as follows:<sup>5</sup>

It then takes the thalweg of that river [Ruzizi] to the point where it flows out of Lac Kivu.

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<sup>5</sup> The convention also included the alignment of present Burundi - Congo boundary.

At those points where the river divides into several branches, the local authorities shall determine, as soon as possible, the principal branch whose thalweg will form the boundary.

Across Lac Kivu:

The boundary follows the line indicated on Map I, attached. That line, starting at the Russisi [Ruzizi], terminates on the north at a point on the shore equidistant from Goma (post) and Kissegnies [Gisenyi] (boma) [compound].

It leaves to the west, in particular, the islands of Iwinza, Nyamaronga [Nyamaranga], Kwidjwi [Ile Idjwi], and Kitanga, which shall belong to Belgium, and to the east, the islands of Kikaya, Gombo, Kumenie, and Wau (Wahu), which shall belong to Germany.

North of Lac Kivu:

First -- taking a northerly direction in so far as possible -- the boundary follows the meridian of the point halfway between the Belgian station of Goma and the German compound of Kissegnies up to a distance of 500 meters south of the highway marked in red on Map II, attached, extending from Goma, through Bussaro, Iwuwiro, Niakawanda, and Buhamba, to the pass between Rukeri and Henhu. In tracing this meridian, account should be taken of the native settlements that this line would cross, so that, in so far as possible, they remain in German territory.

From this point, the boundary bends in a northeasterly direction and runs at a distance of 500 meters east of the above-mentioned road up to the Niakawanda parallel marked in black on Map II.

Wherever the terrain permits the use of natural markers for the boundary, it may depart from the above-mentioned section of road as much as 1,000 meters eastward.

It is only when a departure would mean the separation of the native settlements from German territory that a departure of 500 meters from the said road may not, in principle, be exceeded.

North of Niakawanda, the road is indicated only roughly on the attached Map II.

It shall be understood that if the road departs eastward more than is shown on the map, the boundary may not run east of the lowest depression between the slopes of the Niragongo and the Karissimbi, roughly indicated by a green line on Map II, attached.

North of the parallel of the Bihira hill, the boundary must be traced in such a way that, curving eastward and, in so far as possible, using the unevenness of the terrain; and passing about halfway between Bihara and Buhama (see Map II, attached), it reaches the northern summit of Hehu.

The section of the boundary described herein, commencing at the northern bank of the Kivu and running to the parallel passing by the northern summit of Hehu, shall be fixed and delimited in the field by a mixed commission according to the principles established above.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning at the northern summit of Hehu, the boundary runs in a straight line toward the Karissimbi peak [Volcan Karisimbi] (Barthelemy Spitze). From the Karissimbi peak, the boundary runs in a straight line toward the Vissoke [Volcan Visoke] (Kishasha) summit. From there it reaches the principal summit of Sabinio, following the crest of the chain of small craters that extends between these two volcanoes.

The summit of Sabinio marks the point where the German, Belgian, and British territories join. East of that point, the British - German boundary begins, and north of it, the British - Belgian boundary begins.

## **V. PRESENT SITUATION**

There are no known boundary areas disputed officially by the Congo and Rwanda. Recently unofficial Congolese claims were made to the small islands of Ile Gombo, Ile Wa, and Ile Kihaya in Lac Kivu.

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<sup>6</sup> The boundary is known to be demarcated by pillars numbered I through XXII northward from Lac Kivu to Mont Hehu.

## APPENDIX

### DOCUMENTS

1. Circular of the Administrator-General of Foreign Affairs of the Independent States of the Congo, declaring the Neutrality of that State, within its Limits as defined by Treaties. Brussels, August 1, 1885. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 vols. 3rd ed. (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909) Vol. 2, pp. 552 - 553.
2. Declaration of the Neutrality of the Congo Free State. Brussels, December 28, 1894. Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 557 - 561.
3. Convention en vue d'approuver l'arrangement signe a Bruxelles, le 14 mai 1910, fixant la frontiere entre le Protectorat allemand de l'Afrique Orientale et la Colonie du Congo belge; signee a Bruxelles, le 11 aout 1910 (Les ratifications ont ete echangees a Bruxelles, le 27 juillet 1911). De Martens, G. Fr., Recueil De Traités, Troisieme Serie Tome VII, pp. 372 - 375.
4. Protocole concernant l'abornement de la frontiere entre la Colonie du Congo belge et celle de l'est Africain allemand; signe a Goma, le 25 juin 1911, approuve par un Echange de notes du 7 juin 1912. Ibid., Tome VII, pp. 372 - 375.
5. Jentgen, P., "Notice de la Carte des Frontieres du Congo Belge." Atlas General du Congo (Bruxelles, 1953).
6. Jentgen, P., "Les Frontieres du Congo Belge, "Institut Royal Colonial Belge, Memoires, Tome XXV, 1952.
7. Atlas of Uganda, Department of Lands and Surveys, Uganda, First Edition, 1962.

### MAPS

1. Ruanda - Urundi: scale 1:200,000; Service Cartographique, Ministere des Colonies; published 1937 by Institut Cartographique Militaire, Bruxelles, Belgium; sheets 4 and 6.
2. Ruanda - Urundi: scale 1:100,000; Service Cartographique, Ministere des Colonies; published 1936 by Institut Cartographique Militaire, Bruxelles, Belgium, sheets 15, 10, 9, 11, 5, 1, and 2.
3. Rwanda and Burundi: Series 1301, Edition 2, scale 1:500,000; published 1964 by United States Army Map Service.



This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Research in Economics and Science, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

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