

MOUNT ELGON FOUNDATION

FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2020

MOUNT ELGON FOUNDATION IS ONE YEAR OLD THIS MONTH!

The **Mount Elgon Foundation** (MEF) has had a busy first year. With the generous support of 55 private donors and three foundations, we are having a range of positive impacts through our key partners, notably:

- **mapping:** our detailed mapping of the location of all the “new” elephant caves, the main elephant movement routes, the hot spots of human-elephant conflict and where the forest is being lost to encroachment / charcoal burning is going extremely well (despite Covid) in our initial operational area,
- **protection:** our close monitoring of the elephants has allowed us to help protect both them and, to an extent, local people – the most dramatic example being the operation to save from a slow and terrible death a female elephant caught in a snare – see more below,
- **community:** our clear policy to help support local people which, together with community meetings we fund, is bearing fruit – our scouts are being alerted of incidents such as the snared elephant, the recovery of some poached ivory was via local people and the flow of helpful information to us is increasing, and
- **advocacy:** awareness of our work and Mount Elgon is growing through a programme of publishing articles, public lectures, on-line webinars, the launch of a MEF website and via social media.

CHEMUKUNG – THE LIMPING ONE

In February, the **Mount Elgon Elephant Project** (MEEP) team of community scouts which we fund were alerted by local herdsmen of a female elephant whose right foreleg was caught in a snare tied to a large log. We believe she had been dragging the log possibly as far as 15km across difficult terrain. The snare had cut deep into her flesh and she was clearly in intense pain.



The MEEP scouts alerted Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and then led their vet flown in the next day to the elephant before helping to ensure a very difficult operation ending in the dark to tranquilise, treat and revive the elephant was successful. Our scouts report she was last seen keeping up with her herd. They have named her **Chemukung** – The Limping One. See our website for the full story that was published in **SWARA Magazine**, a quarterly publication of the East African Wild Life Society.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND CULTURAL HISTORY

In January Dr Emmanuel Ndiema, a trustee of the Foundation and Senior Research Scientist and Head of Archaeology Section at National Museums of Kenya (NMK), led a dig at Kakapel on the southern edge of Mount Elgon. Kakapel is known for its stunning rock art.

Kakapel exhibits a succession of rock art paintings often super-imposed in different styles. This reflects the fact that the site was frequented by a series of different people from late Holocene hunter-gatherers, early Iron Age farmers (thought to mark the arrival of Bantu speaking farmers in the region from western Africa) and other people who were probably livestock keepers. NMK, in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute in Germany, excavated at the site to help trace where, when and how food production strategies first spread into eastern Africa.



OTHER NEWS FROM THE MOUNTAIN (AND COVID!)



In our last newsletter we reported that our scouts had started to use a mobile phone app called CyberTracker to record mapping information. At first, the data was collected manually by MEEP's Project Manager, Lizbeth Mate, and Data Technician, Clarine Kigoli, both based in Nairobi. Covid lockdown would have prevented that but in February they successfully implemented 'SMART Connect' whereby the data downloads over the cloud to Nairobi. They have therefore not had to visit Mount Elgon during the pandemic and our work has continued successfully, almost entirely unaffected by the pandemic.

Through the work of the MEEP scouts and from **Charles Kerfoot's** deep knowledge of the area (a former Elgon resident now in Australia), we are learning of more and more elephant caves across Elgon – around 20 so far, several of which we are yet to reach and verify. How such an extensive network of caves mined by elephants has remained almost entirely unknown to the outside world is extraordinary.

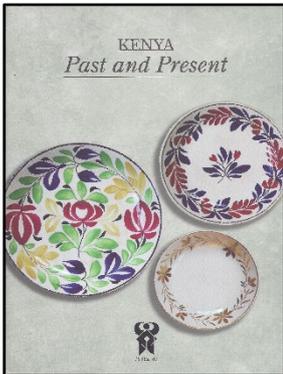
LECTURE PROGRAMME MOVING ONTO ZOOM – SATURDAY NOVEMBER 28

Christopher Powles spoke at the **Muthaiga Club** in Nairobi in January on 'Cave Elephants and the Search for Our Early Human Ancestors on Mount Elgon', hosted by the East African Wild Life Society. The pandemic has not allowed any other physical lectures so we are holding our next one via **Zoom on Saturday November 28 at 5p.m. (U.K. time)**. After the lecture there will be an opportunity to ask questions and chat with others attending. The link is in the email sent with this newsletter and will be recirculated 48 hours before.

The timing is aimed at those living in the U.K., Europe and Africa. Others are most welcome. If anyone from the Americas, Australasia and Asia would like us to hold further Mount Elgon Zoom lectures at times more convenient to them please email Aiden (see below). If there is sufficient interest, we will do it.

WEBSITE AND PUBLISHED ARTICLES

Last month we launched the Foundation's website at www.mountelgonfoundation.org.uk. It describes what the Foundation does in some detail. It also sets our work in the context of Mount Elgon with an overview of the mountain that leads to a publications list for those who would like to 'Learn More'. Do visit it and give Aiden your feedback. A 'must read' publication is on the archaeology at Chepnyalil Cave in Kenya's Mount Elgon National Park that we described in our last newsletter and which has just been published in the **Kenya Museum Society's Past and Present** magazine.



We also particularly recommend the paper written by **Ashley Coutu** who manages to combine elephants, archaeology and Mount Elgon in a fascinating account of her isotopic analysis of tail hair from an elephant shot on Mount Elgon in 1902. The article on Chemukung is also available on the website.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

We are ready to expand our work through having more scouts on the mountain covering a wider area, through developing our community-based conservation and by creating a science research programme. The 55 private individuals who have generously supported MEEP already have given us c. \$15,000 and we thank you all, once again. Any others wishing to help can visit the **Donate** page on our website to click through to our online giving page that makes it easy to donate and, for U.K. taxpayers, to claim the HMRC Gift Aid. Alternatively, please do contact us if you would like to make a **small regular donation by standing order**. This will, importantly, give the Foundation a base level of recurrent income. Please email Aiden, as below, if you would like to support the Mount Elgon Foundation in this way.

Website: www.mountelgonfoundation.org.uk; **email contact:** aiden@mountelgonfoundation.org.uk

Aiden, Antony, Christopher, Emmanuel and Olivia