



International Boundary Study

No. 72 – June 1, 1966

Burundi – Rwanda Boundary

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BURUNDI – RWANDA BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

Extending from west to east between the Rusizi (Ruzizi) and Kagera rivers, the Burundi–Rwanda boundary has a length of about 180 miles. Most of the boundary follows streams, of which the Ruwa (Luhwa), Kanyaru (Akanyaru), and Kagera are the principal rivers. It also passes through Lac Cohoha (Lac Cyohoha–Sud) and Lac Rweru (Lac Rugwero) and utilizes a number of straight-line segments between streams. There are no known boundary pillars demarcating the boundary.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Between 1885 and World War I, Ruanda–Urundi was a part of German East Africa along with Tanganyika.¹ In effect a de facto boundary existed between the ancient kingdoms of Ruanda and Urundi prior to and during German administration. Following World War I Ruanda–Urundi became a Belgian mandate of the League of Nations and Tanganyika a British mandate. A Belgian law of August 21, 1925, joined Ruanda–Urundi with the Belgian Congo administratively, which law was implemented by Royal Decree on January 11, 1926. After World War II the two entities were made trust territories of the United Nations with no change of administrators. Ordinance No. 21/258 issued by the Vice-Governor General of Ruanda–Urundi on August 14, 1949, officially delimited the boundary between the two residencies of the Belgian trusteeship. Both Ruanda and Urundi became independent on July 1, 1962, as the Republic of Rwanda and the Kingdom of Burundi, respectively.

The tripoint with Congo (Leopoldville)² is located at the confluence of the Ruwa and Rusizi, presumably at the junction of the thalwegs of the two rivers. The Rusizi was established by Belgium and Germany as the boundary between their respective territories by a convention signed on August 11, 1910. Fourteen years later a protocol between Belgium and the United Kingdom established the common boundaries of Tanganyika and Ruanda–Urundi at the point where the present Tanzania tripoint is located at the confluence of the thalwegs of the Mwibu and Kagera.³ Prior to World War I, the tripoint of Ruanda and Urundi with the remainder of German East Africa was apparently at the confluence of the Ruvuvu and Kagera. Following World War I, the Kisaka or Kissaga (now known as Gisaka) district in northeast Ruanda was included in the Tanganyika mandate for a short time as the possible location of an all-British route for a railroad to Uganda. Likewise, the Bugufi area between the Ruvuvu and Kagera

¹ Tanganyika was granted independence on December 9, 1961. The United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar was constituted by a merger on April 27, 1964, and the name of the state was changed to the United Republic of Tanzania on October 29, 1964.

² The Congo (Leopoldville) was granted independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960.

³ Note an Anglo–Belgian treaty in 1934 stated that where the Kagera is the boundary between their respective trusteeships, the thalweg is the demarcation line and not the midstream as in the protocol of 1924.

and westward to the present Burundi–Tanzania boundary, which apparently had been previously administered by Urundi, was included in Tanganyika.

III. GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

In general the boundary traverses a highly dissected plateau surface with numerous ridges and valleys. The Congo tripoint is located in the Rift Valley at an elevation of about 3,200 feet. Eastward from the tripoint, forested elevations exceed 8,700 feet along the Nile drainage area divide and then decrease to about 5,000 feet at the Tanzania tripoint. From east to west along the boundary, stream drainage is primarily westward, northward, and then eastward. Many areas are poorly drained and swamps and marshes are common.

The boundary is located between 2° and 3° South latitude. The area has a tropical climate with two wet and two dry seasons. In general annual precipitation amounts to between 40 and 60 inches, although steppe conditions prevail in the Rift Valley. Annual mean temperatures range greatly between the Rusizi valley and the high peaks. Except for poorly drained or limited forest lands, most of the area along the boundary is cultivated or grazed, and population densities range between 100 and 250 persons per square mile. Ethnically Burundi and Rwanda are inhabited by the same peoples, the Bahutu and the Batutsi. A number of the Batutsi have been dispossessed in Rwanda and have migrated to adjacent states including Burundi. There is a slight linguistic difference between the two states marked roughly by the international boundary. The two principal roads crossing the boundary connect Bujumbura with Kigali and Bujumbura with Cyangugu, the latter located mainly in the Rift Valley. Numerous tracks and trails also cross the boundary between the small towns and villages.

A projected hydroelectric scheme on the Kagera would entail the cooperation of both Burundi and Rwanda for its completion. It would be necessary to construct a tunnel partly in Burundi to drain swamps in both states and to provide hydroelectric power.

IV. BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

The Burundi–Rwanda boundary is discussed from east to west or between the Tanzania and Congo (Leopoldville) tripoints. Unless otherwise specified it is assumed that the parts of the boundary comprised of rivers follow the thalweg or median. The alignment of the Burundi–Rwanda boundary is determined by Ordinance No. 21/258 of August 14, 1949, which gives the southern limit of the Rwanda Residency as follows:

... the Kagera to the overflow of Lac Rugwero named Nyakarambo;

the Nyakarambo to Lake Rugwero;

a straight line through the aforesaid lake to the mouth of a tributary river [Agatete] on the lake which runs between the hills Songwa (Ruanda) and Mulehe (Urundi);

this tributary to its source;

a straight line connecting this source with the northern source of the Urwanda;

this river to its confluence with the Urwanda–Sud;

this river to its source;

a straight line connecting this source with the source of the nearest tributary of Lac Cyohoha–Sud;

this tributary to its mouth;

the thalweg of the aforesaid lake to the outlet of the overflow named Kamahozzi;

this river to the Akanyaru;

the Akanyaru to its confluence with the Muremure River; this river to its source;

a straight line connecting this source with the source of the Kiliba and crossing the pass [Akabuga] separating the regions of Nyarusange (Ruanda) and Musumba (Urundi);

the ravine of the Kiliba to the Mutimiranzogera;

this river to its mouth on the Mugere;

this river upstream to the outlet of the Rugomero;

the ravine of the Rugomero to its source;

a straight line connecting this source with the mouth of the Mwaniradorimana on the Umadasomwa and separating the regions of Lemera (Ruanda) and Buvumu (Urundi);

the Mwaniradorimana to its source;

a straight line connecting this source with the source of the Ubimbu;

the Ubimbu to its mouth on the Kakunamba;

the Kakunamba–Sumu to its confluence with the Kaburantwa;

the Kaburantwa to the left ravine [Kaziramihunda] upstream of the Nyabihondo;

this ravine to the ridge line of the [Colline] Umufu;

this ridge line to where it turns eastward;

the second left ravine ending at the Kaburantwa;

the Kaburantwa to the point where it receives a right tributary and turns westward;

a straight line connecting this point with mount Twinyoni;

the ridge line of this mountain, then the ridge line of the last spur which terminates it on the north and extends westward to the source of the ravine of the Mabano;

the Mabano to its confluence with the Luhwa,

the Luhwa to its confluence with the Rusizi.

V. PRESENT SITUATION

There are no known disputes relative to the alignment of the Burundi–Rwanda boundary.

APPENDIX

DOCUMENTS

1. 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.
2. Protocol respecting the Boundary between Tanganyika Territory and the Belgian Mandated Territory of Ruanda–Urundi, Kigoma, August 5, 1924; and Notes Exchanged between the British and Belgian Governments, Brussels, May 17, 1926. United Kingdom Treaty Series No. 6 (1927) Command 2812 (three boundary maps included).
3. Treaty between His Majesty in respect of the United Kingdom and His Majesty the King of the Belgians regarding the Boundary between Tanganyika and Ruanda–Urundi. London, November 22, 1934, Belgium No. 1 (1936). United Kingdom Command 5075.
4. Ordonnance no. 21/258 du 14 aout 1949 fixant l'organisation territoriale du territoire du Ruanda–Urundi. 1950. Bulletin Administratif du Congo Belge, 1950, pp. 138–155.

MAPS

1. Ruanda–Urundi: scale 1:100,000; series Z621; printed 1962 by United States Army Map Service; sheets 15, 16, 12, 13, and 14.
2. Ruanda–Urundi: scale 1:100,000; printed 1936 by Institut Cartographique Militaire, Bruxelles, Belgium; sheets 15, 16, 12, 13, and 14.
3. Ruanda–Urundi: scale 1:200,000; series Z522; printed 1962 by United States Army Map Service; sheets 4 and 3.
4. Ruanda–Urundi: scale 1:200,000; printed 1937 by Institut Cartographique Militaire, Bruxelles, Belgium; sheets 4 and 3.

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