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THE TRAVEL ISSUE

21 TOP TRIPS
FOR 2017

FEATURING

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A ROBB REPORT MEDIA PUBLICATION

January

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Moving Pieces

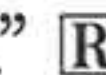
"For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move." —Robert Louis Stevenson



THE PERIPATETIC AUTHOR of *Treasure Island* certainly moved, journeying from Europe to California to the South Pacific. I secretly read this, his first commercially successful novel, in a guest bedroom of my grandparents' home, long after lights and wakefulness were forbidden. Who among us—boy or girl—did not envy Jim Hawkins, who sets sail from Bristol for the Caribbean in search of gold only to discover this bounty grimly wrapped in the arms of a skeleton? I found treasure of a different kind in that region while writing "**Paradise Restored**" (page 96)—some of it in liquid form (left) and also clasped in bony hands.

SOPHY ROBERTS ALSO moves, but not always in the most luxurious circles. She too has encountered remains—not of treasure seekers but of Africa's most endangered species. Her contribution, "**The Wild Philanthropists**" (page 106), documents the expeditions of a handful of conscientious travelers into regions where poachers threaten the existence of whole animal populations. Her journey was not without its perks, however, as her time at a remote airport VIP lounge (below) affirms.



STILL, MOVEMENT—NO matter how enthusiastically prescribed by Stevenson—does not always serve the traveler well, as editor Janice O'Leary learned while researching "**Dream Trips**" (page 117). For her piece, which offers some practical advice for those of us whose slumber is seriously compromised by our wanderlust, Janice underwent a sleep study at Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Ariz., where her nocturnal experience was not a comfortable one. With an octopus of wires attached to nearly every part of her body, she gained one insight: "Deep sleep," she observed, "doesn't come when you're afraid to move for fear of disconnecting yourself." 

Brett Anderson, Editor in Chief

CORRECTION: The Plasma Premium triathlon bike featured in the December 2016 issue's "Man Up" Ultimate Gift was designed and produced by Scott Sports (scott-sports.com).

An aerial photograph taken from the perspective of someone inside a helicopter. The view is framed by the dark, curved metal structure of the rotor hub and blades on the left side. Below, a wide, dark river winds through a vast, flat landscape of savanna. The terrain is covered in a mix of green trees and yellowish-brown grasses. The horizon is flat and distant under a pale, overcast sky.

The Wild Philanthropists

Throughout the African continent, individual donors are reshaping conservation models—and transforming the concept of luxury travel.

BY SOPHY ROBERTS

On a day in late January 2016, a team of antipoaching specialists employed by African Parks flew by helicopter to a GPS point deep in the western reaches of Gambella, a 1,954-square-mile national park in Ethiopia close to the border with South Sudan. They were investigating why one of the four elephant collars that African Parks was monitoring in the area had stopped transmitting. When they arrived on the scene, in a floodplain near the Gilo River, they found five dead elephants, including the collared cow. The animals had been shot by poachers, who had attempted to conceal the carcasses in grass but had yet to remove their ivory.

After an hour's toil in a 5-foot-deep swamp, the African Parks specialists and their colleagues from the Ethiopian Wildlife and Conservation Authority were able to retrieve only one tusk. Recently enlisted by the Ethiopian government, the Johannesburg-based African Parks was functioning with limited resources. The conservation group—which works in eight countries across Africa, rehabilitating 23,000 square miles of wilderness—lacked the full operational mandate to start the boots-on-the-ground antipoaching work for which it is known. In fact, to have the helicopter present at all when the collar's transmission ceased was a curious stroke of luck. The helicopter had been chartered from Kenya for a group of international donors who were visiting Gambella with Peter Fearnhead, the CEO of African Parks. Rather than vacationing at a five-star safari lodge, these five travelers were negotiating a



A ranger (far right) hauls a tusk retrieved from an elephant poached in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Garamba National Park (above and previous pages). In Kenya, Richard Roberts (top right, foreground) and his team tend to a tranquilized elephant.

remote swath of the continent to see what this tract of wilderness had left to save—and if it merited their philanthropy.

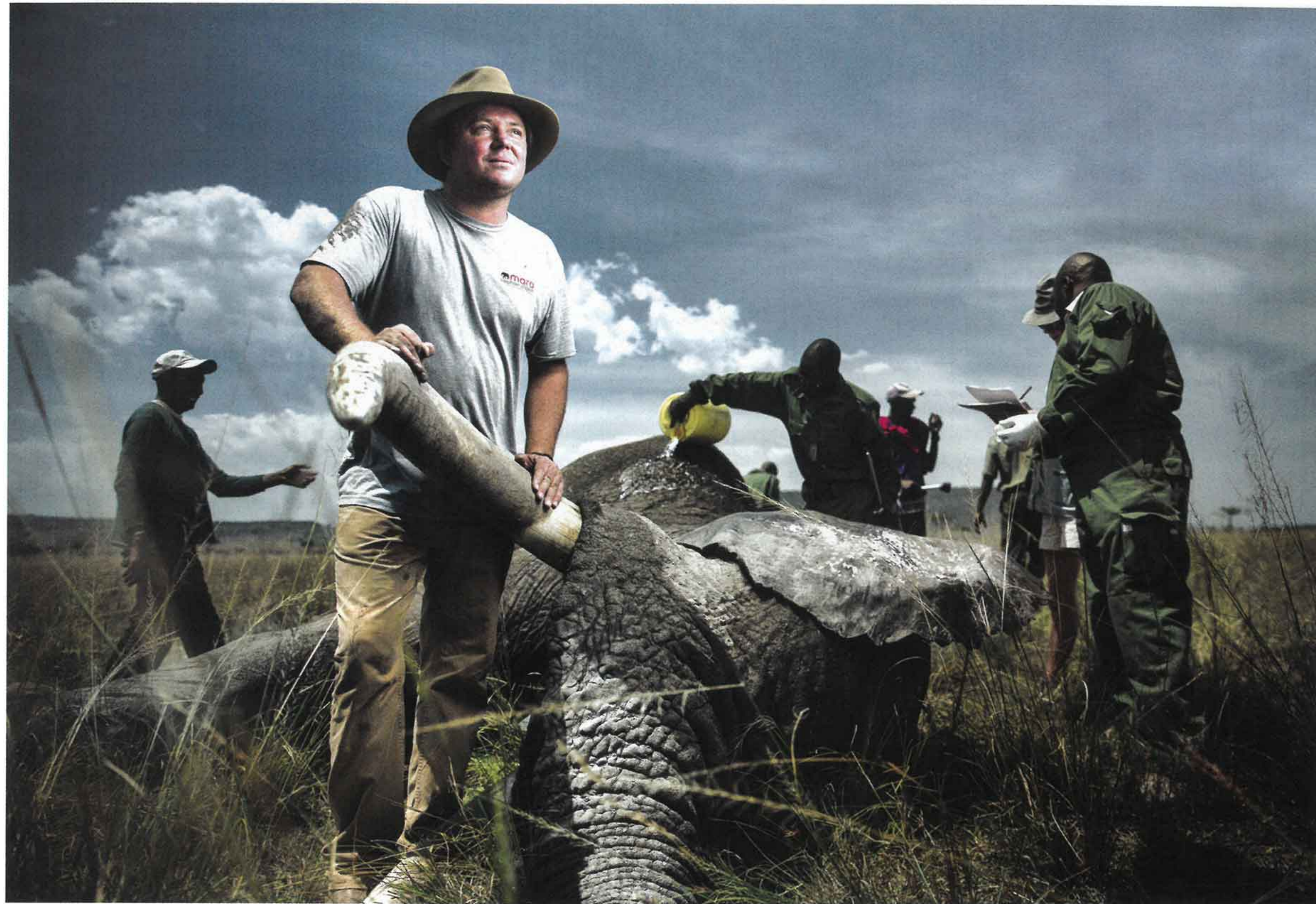
I, too, was in Gambella during the poaching incident. The moment was overwhelming—both for the beauty of the landscape, peppered with rare Nile lechwe and elegant shoe-billed storks, and for the bleakness of the situation. Witnessing the wet blood on the ivory, and the silence of the rangers when they came back into camp carrying the lone tusk, I experienced an entirely different emotional response than I had at any other time in my years of reporting on poaching and conservation issues. I thought of the glittering fund-raisers I had attended for African wildlife, where Prince William and others cast their celebrity magic dust about the room. All of this helps, of course, but to witness the stench of death in the field, to observe the strength of men and women doing this work, to

walk the sun-scorched earth among elephants whose behavior is changing out of fear for their lives, strikes at the core of what makes us human.

It is a story I have been covering closely for the last few years, on trips into parts of the African continent where frontline conservation is taking place but mainstream tourism has yet to penetrate. These assignments, largely for the *Financial Times*, have taken me to 13 African countries, including Chad, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. At times, the facts and figures—an elephant is killed every 15 minutes, a rhino every 8 hours—can be heart-wrenching. But I have noticed a philanthropic trend reaching over all these stories like an umbrella. In its simplest iteration, the trend involves a high-net-worth individual traveling to a remote area, engaging in its conservation, and writing a check—often from a foundation the person has established—to an organization such as African

Parks. Taking it a step further are individuals who are leasing massive tracts of land and providing the financial support to restore and protect them. Facilitating both forms of the phenomenon is a new breed of specialists who help broker deals and, equally important, create the travel experiences to expose potential donors to off-the-radar opportunities.

“I guide all over Africa, experiencing beautiful lodges on \$100,000-plus itineraries,” said Michael Lorentz, the South African safari specialist who brought me to Gambella and whose company, Passage to Africa, arranged the complex logistics for African Parks’ donors. (On their return home, the group committed to an annual donation of \$1 million to \$3 million as a direct result of their trip.) “Most guests want to have a beautiful vacation in the African wilderness, but there are also travelers out there with deep pockets



who want to be exposed to the issues. So I take them to those places. It's by no means always luxurious, but it is sophisticated. It is about the interaction between tourism, conservation, and philanthropy in parts of Africa where they come together in a very real sense."

According to Paul Milton, whose London-based Milton Group advises private family offices on conservation-oriented philanthropy, it is a confluence that gained traction with the financial collapse in 2008. "NGOs could no longer fill the gap with small donations from the man in the street with regards to funding the conservation of large, at-risk environments," he said. "But there has also been another side to the financial collapse. Families are starting to pay more attention to the future economic sustainability of their investments, and the interest their kids hold in projects for the long term. This next generation cares about

the environment; they have a more spiritual, emotional, and holistic approach."

Milton has worked with the U.S. hedge-fund manager Paul Tudor Jones, who leases 350,000 acres in Tanzania as part of a luxury tourism and conservation project called Singita Grumeti. This is a well-documented story, not least because of the quality of the lodges Tudor Jones and his South African partner, Singita's Luke Bailes, have put in place. The property's extravagant suites, swimming pools, spa treatments, and private-guided safaris help lure first-time visitors to Africa in an environment where they can feel safe while still being exposed to some of the conservation issues at play. Offering a completely different perspective is African Parks' project in Chad, which I visited in January 2015.

Bordered by Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Central African



Republic, Chad is a country where security issues and threats to wildlife are very real. In Zakouma National Park, poaching has decimated the local elephant population, which has dropped from around 4,000 to fewer than 500 in the last decade. These numbers have started to improve under African Parks' care, but threats and security issues remain. The dangers are not enough, however, to deter Lorentz—last April he made his sixth



The U.S. industrialist James Coleman helped fund a new tourism and conservation project in Chad's Zakouma National Park (above and right), where rangers work in rivers rife with crocodiles.



visit to Zakouma—or the most intrepid of the new philanthropists.

James Coleman, an industrialist from the United States, donated funds to build a new high-end tourism venture in Zakouma. Called Camp Nomade, it is as beautiful as anything I have experienced in East Africa—eight elegant canvas tents outfitted with rugs from Libya, carved wooden trunks, golden camel bells, and silver jugs—in the last place on the continent I expected to find it. The income from every stay is directed 100 percent back into conservation. "Zakouma is such an exotic landscape," Coleman told me in an interview for the *Financial Times*. "There's quite simply nothing else like it. People need to see it

for themselves and understand the challenges it has overcome."

Coleman's point rang true when, a few months later, I traveled to Kenya to join an elephant-collaring exercise close to the Maasai Mara. Veterinarians working with the Mara Elephant Project were darting the elephants and attaching GPS collars so the organization could track the movement of the animals and monitor their safety. (In the Mara, much of the threat to elephants comes from agriculturalists, who kill the animals when they damage crops.) Also present at the collaring event was a representative of the Irish philanthropist Denis O'Brien, who committed a six-figure sum to the Mara Elephant Project after taking a safari with

Richard Roberts, one of its founders. Roberts launched the organization in 2011 with the Indianapolis-based philanthropist Suzanne Fehsenfeld, who, since falling in love with Africa on safari, has dedicated more than \$1 million to the project.

Two months later, I visited Garamba and Virunga National Parks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, both of which had received significant funding from the Illinois-based philanthropist Howard Buffett as well as sizable donations from a high-profile philanthropist who visited the parks days before I arrived. In Virunga I was guided by Kate Doty, a managing director at the San Francisco-based Geographic Expeditions—another specialist in organizing trips for donors.

Also tapping into this market is Will Jones of the UK-based Journeys by Design. Jones, who has guided the likes of Ralph Lauren, launched Wild Philanthropy Travel in late 2015 to complement his existing safari business. Like Lorentz, he has seen more customers asking to travel deeper into the issues at play in order to give back on a scale that makes a difference to entire ecosystems, not just specific charities. But while Lorentz has worked mostly with large non-governmental organizations, Jones pairs philanthropists with private

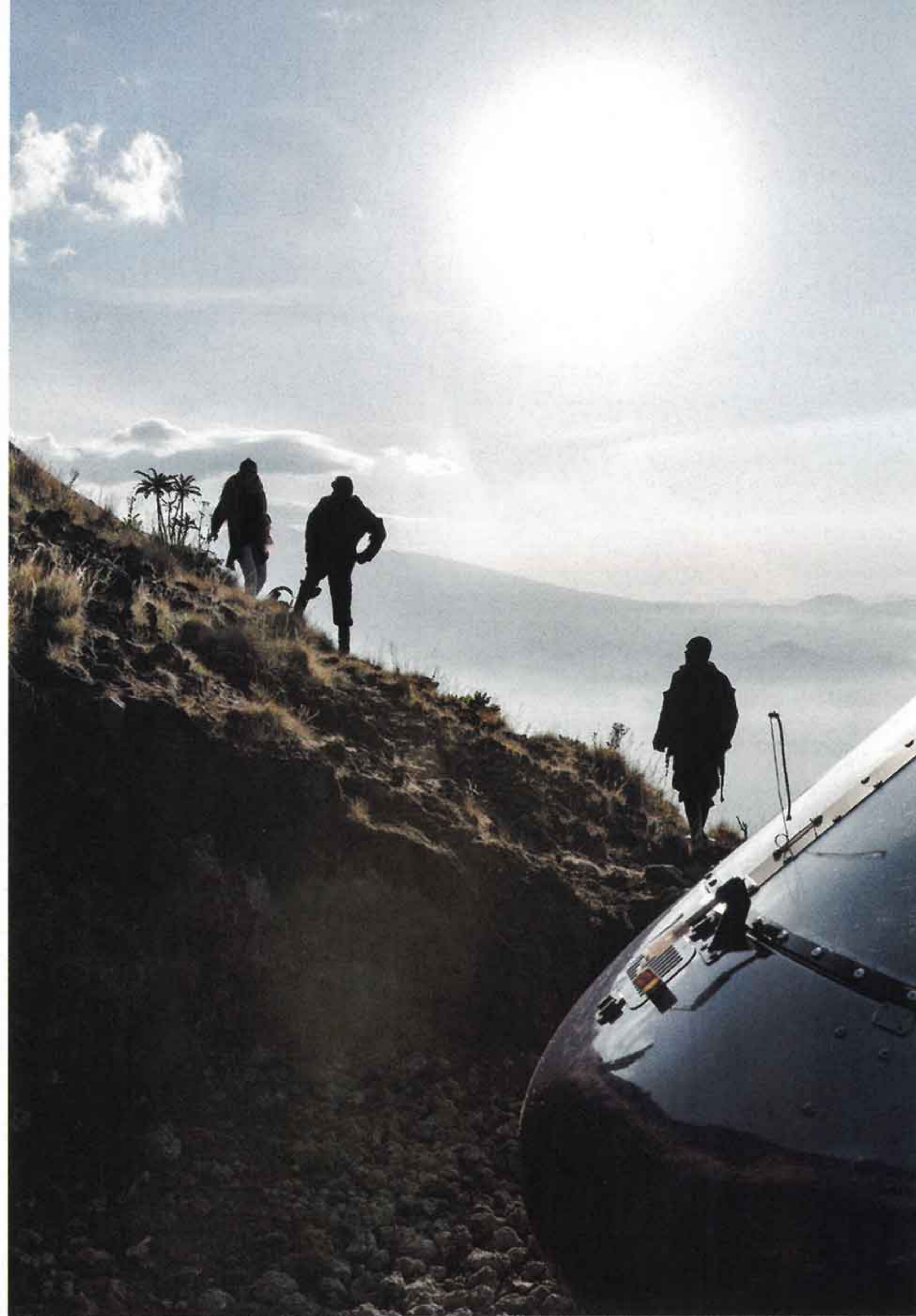
The Wild Philanthropists

conservation projects. Using an intimate network of contacts on the ground, he looks for tracts of land where communities can be enabled to protect the wildlife. In making an investment, the funder can also be a beneficiary by enjoying access to—and even building private homes in—areas other travelers can't easily visit.

There are other benefits too. The business is set up as a members' club, with three tiers of annual fees ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000. With membership, any trip booked to conservation areas Wild Philanthropy is engaged with is charged at cost. In addition, all the membership funds are channeled back to support the company's core projects.

When I first heard about Wild Philanthropy, which has had a few false starts as Jones finessed the model, I questioned whether the club was as much about conservation as exclusivity. So Jones invited me to join him in Ntakata, a remote forest in western Tanzania, to see the model firsthand. The roadless forest is home to the Watongwe, or the

On patrol in Virunga National Park (right and below), where Howard Buffett is helping to fund conservation efforts.



Tongwe people, who consider eastern long-haired chimpanzees to be sacred. (The Watongwe identified apes as humankind's direct ancestors long before modern scientists did.) To elevate our safari experience—there was nothing luxurious about traveling by bike and

foot, camping, and eating bowls of rice—Jones pulled Roland Purcell out of retirement from his rambling estate in Ireland, where he had settled after nearly two decades in the African bush.

Purcell, who is of Irish and Australian descent, left his job as a

fine-art auctioneer in Nairobi in 1987 to work with the mountain gorillas in Rwanda. In 1989 he built Greystoke Mahale, which remains one of the most exquisite lodges in Africa. The lodge is located on the white-sand beaches of Tanzania's Lake Tanganyika, where Purcell lived for 17 years with his wife, Zoe, and two children. Occasionally he guided at a fee of \$1,000 a day, when everyone else in the industry was charging less than half that rate. So when Jones told me he had struck a deal with his old friend to guide me through a hidden forest, which borders the same lake where Greystoke Mahale still thrives, I started to believe he might be offering something off the map. We did the same trip, less a helicopter, that Purcell is leading for Wild Philanthropy members next year—with the intention of locking in a million-dollar endowment to support the forest's protection in perpetuity.

"Just the 5 percent annual interest on this sum will generate the \$50,000

The Wild Philanthropists



Tanzania's Mwiba Lodge is part of a massive conservation project funded by Texas's Friedkin family, which leases more than 5,000 square miles in the country.

needed to run the entire ranger force," said Purcell, who cofounded the Tongwe Trust in 2002. "The forest doesn't need much: some bikes, binoculars, uniforms, and salaries of \$100 a month per ranger for a force of 18."

The 187-square-mile, village-owned reserve suffers from the slash-and-burn incursions of Burundian refugees, as well as poachers. Purcell introduced us to the issues, but also to the forest's lures. We took shade under the flying buttresses of vast 200-year-old trunks. We spent time with the rangers, who carry not weapons but notepads and pens to record the pant-hoots of chimpanzees. We followed the paths elephants had made through thick bush. We lay down and rested by a river close to one of the Watongwe's sacred groves to listen to the apes.

It was a moment of being in wild nature that returned to me a few days later when I was flying in the R44 helicopter operated by the Friedkin Conservation Fund, a nonprofit organization bankrolled by the Texas-based Friedkin family. The Friedkins, who have 5,245 square miles of wilderness under lease in Tanzania, spend more than \$3 million of private funds every

year on community development and antipoaching, including helicopters, microlites, and staff. We were flying in Moyowosi—not far from Purcell's stomping grounds, on Lake Tanganyika's shores—hovering over a gallery forest encircled by swamp with a canopy as thick as Ntakata's.

Jones, who was with me again, ventured that this relic forest might also sequester chimpanzees; at one time, he said, the chimps would have moved freely between these patches of forest, traveling all the way down this western swath of Tanzania. On the 2018 donor trip, which will include a tour of the Moyowosi forest and the Friedkin concessions, he plans to go searching to see if his theory holds true.

"We want to inspire our members with modest opportunities like Ntakata, and giant examples like the Friedkins," Jones said. "Engaging in Africa is about understanding the bigger conservation mosaic. It is a complicated, textured world. For example, Moyowosi is a hunting area, but the Friedkins are also conservationists on a formidable scale. Not everyone can square the two. There are occasions when I can. All this

needs to be discussed in the open with individuals who have enough of a passion for Africa to engage with the realities at the sharp end. The one thing everyone who signs up to Wild Philanthropy needs to understand is that conservation in this century is a dangerous and thankless task."

Jones's words proved prescient. On the same day I was in Gambella in January, the same R44 helicopter we'd flown in Moyowosi was shot out of the sky by elephant poachers—killing the pilot, Roger Gower, with whom I had worked 18 months prior. Thus I was reminded of another reality behind the wild-philanthropy trend at play: how giving is by no means a soft luxury. In modern Africa, it means engaging with the risk of paying the biggest price of all. □

African Parks, africanparks.eu; *Friedkin Conservation Fund*, friedkinfund.org; *Geographic Expeditions*, geoex.com; *Milton Group*, paulmilton.com; *Passage to Africa*, passagetoafrica.com; *Singita Grumeti*, singita.com; *The Tongwe Trust*, tongwetrust.org; *Wild Philanthropy Travel*, wildphilanthropy.com