

DIAN FOSSEY'S RESEARCH WITH RWANDA'S MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

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Rare and unique African Studies materials in the Smathers Library Grand Reading Room invite genuine connections with historical events that are unlikely with secondary sources. With information increasingly “born digital” (or digitized and migrated online), rare book and manuscript collections have taken a more nostalgic place in popular culture. Fictional protagonists are often featured penetrating dark alcoves draped with cobwebs, questing for arcane knowledge in dusty tomes. While I enjoy the drama of *Buffy*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Librarian*, for me the thrill of research with primary sources is in encounters with unique, authentic objects that can raise goose bumps with no need for dramatic staging. More significantly, primary sources provide a chance to discover unrecognized facts or offer new perspectives on stories we thought we knew well.

Over the past 10 years, primary source acquisitions for the African Studies Collection have created a significant cluster of manuscripts centered on 20th century



African wildlife conservation, with a distinctive focus on the history of community management approaches. Newest among these is the Bob Campbell Papers—a donation including 18,500 photographs relating to African wildlife of all kinds—which has been my focus at the George A. Smathers Libraries for the past 18 months. Campbell is among the best-known wildlife photographers in Africa and in 1968 he became a key member of Dian Fossey’s team studying mountain gorillas at the Karisoke Research Center, located within Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park.

Campbell’s task of photographing furtive, jet-black gorillas in dense foliage was practically impossible given the low sensitivity of color film available at the time. To capture publishable pictures, he had to gain Fossey’s trust before convincing Fossey to approach her powerful, but generally shy, 400+ pound subjects more closely. Their innovative methods eventually resulted in the first documented, peaceful contact between a human and a gorilla: in January, 1970 the adult male Peanuts reached out and touched Fossey’s hand. National Geographic featured Campbell’s images of Dian and Peanuts as the cover

story. The original slides from those first moments of contact literally raised goose-bumps for me when I first saw them. More important for UF’s academic programs in conservation, however, are many lower profile shots documenting Fossey’s early, idiosyncratic efforts to implement her concept of “active conservation.” Rounding out the collection are images of agricultural encroachment on park areas; natural tree, plant, and animal species present on the research site; and scenes of everyday life while conducting research in the Virunga Mountains, including work with Rwandan staff and local residents, provisioning the camp, and training student assistants.

The Bob Campbell Papers are currently open for research onsite at the Department of Special and Area Studies Collections in Smathers Library. The materials are fully processed, with a finding guide available. A selection of nearly 1,500 images from Campbell’s slides also have been digitized with support from the Center’s Title VI grant. These open access files will appear online under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivative License [cc by-nc-nd] on the UF Digital Collections site during Fall Semester 2016. Finally, a public exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Karisoke Research Center founding is planned for September 2017.

Daniel Reboussin is the African Studies curator at the George A. Smathers Libraries, and a Center for African Studies affiliate. African Studies materials collections and digital projects are supported by the CAS Title VI grant in collaboration with the Libraries.