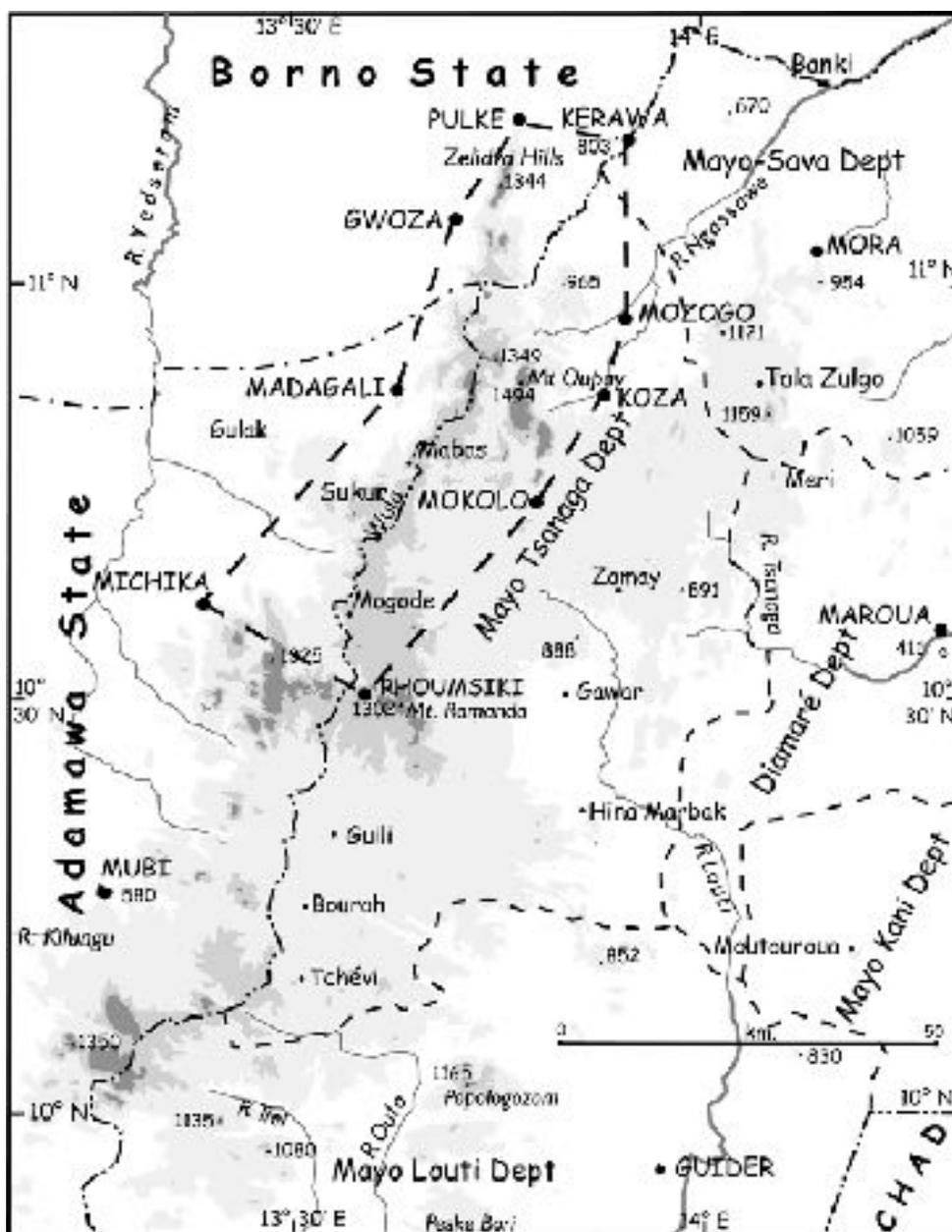


**A Mandara International Peace Park:  
a proposal respectfully submitted to the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon**

A proposal for eco-cultural tourism and sustainable development in the Mandara Mountains of Northern Cameroon and Northeastern Nigeria (revised Sept. 2022).

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The Mandara Mountains, showing Nigerian states and Cameroonian departments, and with the area of the proposed park indicated. Contours at 2000, 3000 and 3500 feet with spot heights in meters. (The international boundary shown predates recent minor adjustments.)

### ***Abstract***

*The Mandara mountains are the home of numerous ethnic groups who have over the centuries developed forms of agroforestry that have continued to sustain high population densities in the face of raiding and other threats from states based in the surrounding plains. The demonstrable sustainability of the montagnard way of life is unfortunately associated with extreme poverty. Average incomes, affected since 2009 by the Boko Haram insurgency, are probably still less than US\$1 a day.*

*In this situation, we suggest, Mandara communities' remarkable socio-cultural capital constitutes an investment that can, in conjunction with elements of the natural environment, be mobilized to support eco-cultural tourism. Besides the participation of local and national authorities – we recommend the establishment of an International Peace (or UNESCO World Heritage Trans-Boundary) park – the involvement of Mandara mountain communities is a necessary and integral part of any such development. This will require a sensitive, anthropologically informed, approach to local communities.*

*Only a pro-poor approach can render eco-cultural tourism viable since the montagnards' lifeways constitute a primary resource capable of attracting national and international tourist clientele. But montagnard experience of the wider world has since precolonial times been for the most part unpleasant and marked by exploitation. Grassroots involvement, with specific educational and formational goals, is required if tourism is to contribute to sustainable development and conservation of a unique environment.*

*Such an international park can, through its social and economic effects, be a significant element in the defeat of Boko Haram.*

### ***The region and its cultures***

The Mandara Mountains are a rugged, low altitude, mountain range that straddles the international boundary between northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon.

We are concerned here primarily with the northern and western portion of the Mandara mountains, bordering the plains of Borno and Lake Chad, and particularly with the area that contains the range's highest peaks and finest sites. As shown on the map, this lies within an area delimited by the towns of Pulke, Gwoza, Madagali and Michika in Nigeria and, in Cameroon, Mozogo, Koza, Mokolo and the village of Rhoumsiki.

Over the centuries the region's numerous ethnic groups have dealt with Sudanic states of the plains. They have survived raiding and trading, a jihad, German, French and British colonization and administration, eventual incorporation into the independent nations of Cameroon and Nigeria and, since 2009, the horrors of Boko Haram. Despite locust-induced famines, at times brutal policies of taxation and resettlement, limited transport, health, and education infrastructure, and the impacts of Islam and Christianity, these communities have maintained themselves and, over the decades, increased their numbers – to a far greater extent than their standard of living. Where not catastrophically impacted by Boko Haram, they continue to provide excellent models of sustainability under objectively adverse circumstances.

### **A remarkable agricultural system**

In a boulder-strewn and often spectacular mountain landscape, sandy granitic soils, relatively higher rainfall, and cooler temperatures have been expertly exploited by the montagnards who have

transformed their rocky environment by intensive terracing of slopes on which they cultivate a richly elaborated range of sorghums and millets, besides legumes, tubers, and other crops of both African and exotic origins. Even in the most densely populated regions where fields rarely lie fallow and chemical fertilizers are virtually unused, ‘The mountain farmers have perfected an effective agricultural system which is suited to their specific environment, maintains soil fertility and would seem difficult to do better. When rainfall is normal, they cover their own food requirements and earn modest incomes’ (Hallaire 1991). Combined with the raising of livestock – focusing on bulls and small stock necessarily contained half the year in stalls – management of trees and shrubs that approaches gardening, and cash-cropping of cotton and peanuts, this system maintains densities that can reach 200 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> at production energy costs of less than a quarter those of Euro-American agribusiness.

The beauty and interest of cultural landscapes produced by centuries of montagnard effort have been recognized by UNESCO which in 1999 listed the Sukur Cultural Landscape as Nigeria’s first World Heritage site. Sukur, an ancient center of the iron trade, is located just across the border from spectacular volcanic plugs in Kapsiki territory around Rhoumsiki and within sight of one of the monumental DGB sites on the Oupay massif in Cameroon. The scenery is magnificent, and while mammalian wildlife is limited, there is a rich avifauna and a fascinating botany.

Montagnard agroforestry is sustained by vigorous local crafts, and among the Mafa and several other ethnic groups, there are casted specialists. While the smelting of iron ore in a unique form of furnace is nowadays undertaken only in the form of re-enactments, smiths produce a full range of tools, weapons and ornaments. Brass casting is practiced by Kapsiki. Potters, often the wives of smiths, manufacture high quality terracotta wares for utilitarian, social and ritual purposes. Cook pots, beer jugs, brewing vats, and other, including figured ritual, types are produced for local use, and sold in regional markets and beyond. Many types of craft products including basketry, made by women or men depending upon ethnic affiliation, are produced in every household, and while the mud domes of traditional rooms are often formed by experts, most of the remarkable compound architecture is built by family members.

### ***Vigorous cultural life***

This thriving material culture is complemented by an equally flourishing cultural life that looks back to prehistoric roots in the Neolithic and Iron Age of Central Africa. About five hundred years ago the DGB sites, remarkable stone-built monuments, were being constructed near Koza on the flanks of the Oupay massif, at 1449 m. the highest point of the mountain chain. Recent research indicates that they were built during a period of extreme drought and served as shrines related to fertility. They are on the Cameroonian tentative list of sites nominated for World Heritage status.

These and later integrative institutions did not inhibit the development of a kaleidoscopic array of local cultures. Amongst other manifestations, including a remarkable musical tradition, these maintain varied and often photogenic ceremonial cycles – bull and harvest festivals, the initiation of young men, the warding off of evil – while jealously retaining a degree of independence despite integration of traditional structures of authority into the modern states.

### ***Tourism today and its potential for tomorrow***

By judicious choice of connecting flights to Maroua (Cameroon) and Yola or Maiduguri (Nigeria), travelers can reach the proposed park from London and Paris in a day. Even before Boko Haram, international tourism in the Nigerian side was virtually non-existent. Although Sukur received visitors, mostly school and college students, non-Nigerian tourists were few and far between. Boko Haram has also disrupted tourism on the Cameroon side of the border. On the Diamaré plain in Cameroon, Maroua offered tourism infrastructure, but its hotels and guides catered much more to visitors to Waza National Park and to big game hunters than to hikers and others who might enjoy the Mandara mountains. While bus tours occasionally passed through Mokolo and stopped off for half an hour at the Djingliya artisanal cooperative, the contribution of tourism to the local economy is best gauged by the fact that the latest statistics on “tourism” in Cameroon available on the web relate to 2015 when under a million “tourists” (about a quarter of whom were Cameroonians) visited the country spending an average of less than two days in the Extreme-North region. In other words most visitors from abroad were not in the country long enough to visit the Mandara mountains. Those who went to Rhoumsiki, the most “developed” tourist site in the mountains used to number only in the low hundreds. Far fewer participated in locally advertised treks through the Mandara mountains. This is hardly surprising since information available from travel agents was and remains sparse and phenomenally inaccurate.

### ***The Mandara region on the World Wide Web***

Despite a wealth of geographical, anthropological and other data on the Mandara mountains and its peoples, as seen for example on the [www.mandaras.info](http://www.mandaras.info) and [www.sukur.info](http://www.sukur.info) web sites, much of the information intended for tourists is muddled, misleading, and perpetrates the worst stereotypes of a pristine Africa existing out of time.

According to [columbusguides.com](http://columbusguides.com) ‘the village of Rhoumsiki ... features a maze of paths linking the small farms known as the Kapsiki: the Kirdi live here, whose customs and folklore have changed little for centuries.’ [farfungplaces.com](http://farfungplaces.com) tells us ‘There are 120 tribes or so in this northeastern region. At one time they were part of Old Sudan, then they migrated to Nigeria, then over into Cameroon.’ Under the heading ‘Rhoumsiki is a village,’ [jat.esmartweb.com](http://jat.esmartweb.com) informs us that ‘.. most people here are Muslims. Cameroon law presently allows each man to have four wives at one time. For Muslims, this is quite a restriction to impose ....’

Clearly any attempt to develop tourism in the Mandara region will require the education of international tour guide firms besides the formation of the host communities.

### ***Developing tourism***

The development of eco-cultural tourism that can help sustain Mandara mountain communities requires international, trans-national, national, and local action and initiatives. We will deal with each of these, focusing on the local situation with which we are most familiar and best qualified as anthropologists to comment. We conducted archaeological and anthropological research in the region between 1984 and 2008.

#### **International aspects**

While it is clear that little can be done on the ground until the threat of Boko Haram is past, we should not defer planning for the future. Importantly, Nigeria and Cameroon not only accepted the World Court decision relating to their common boundary but a Nigeria-Cameroon Mixed

Commission has peacefully and cooperatively implemented the ruling. To celebrate this triumph of diplomacy, we recommend the establishment of an International Peace Park or alternatively a UNESCO World Heritage Trans-boundary Park. The area is qualified for the latter designation since, besides the World Heritage status of the Sukur Cultural Landscape, the Cameroonian DGB sites are on Cameroon's tentative list.

#### Trans-national aspects

The establishment of a trans-border Mandara mountains park would facilitate the development of tourism to the benefit of both nations. 'Several transboundary parks are specifically designated as Peace Parks, intended to provide a peaceful solution to a conflict or potential conflict or contribute to the rehabilitation of an area after a conflict. There has been a dramatic increase in transboundary parks in recent years.'

Visa requirements for both Nigeria and Cameroon currently make it hard for tourists who are not part of organized groups to enter their countries, and it is difficult to cross the international frontier. A trans-border park within which visitors from either country could freely circulate would transform tourism in this area.

Before Boko Haram, there was active and friendly interaction across the frontier at all levels, from administrators attending each others' national holidays to formal and informal trade and social interactions. These provided the context of cooperation needed for the development of an attractive eco-cultural tourism package – and can surely be reconstituted.

#### National aspects

There already exist in both countries the administrative institutions at the national, state/provincial, and local government levels required to develop and implement policies regarding tourism. These include amongst others: the Nigerian Commission on Museums and Monuments, the National Museum of Cameroon, Arts Councils, Tourism Boards, and Community Associations. Their disparate and piecemeal activities will need to be integrated and reoriented in order to stimulate and to facilitate initiatives generated at the local level.

#### Local initiatives

Above all there must be local action and initiatives. In what follows we focus on the question of how montagnard communities can become effective hosts in a small scale tourist industry. There already exist in the region a great variety of institutions and individuals whose dispersed activities could productively be mobilized and integrated into a broader program of the kind we advocate. Here we can only point to a small sample of these, both positive and negative.

The Sukur Development Association was founded in 1976 and in 1992 established the Sukur 'Mini' Museum with support of the Adamawa State Arts Council. The 'museum' was a large room with a mud domed roof. A second structure was built in 1996 with traditional 'furnishings' incorporated - a grinding stand, hearth - with the prospect of objects being hung on the walls. A local man employed by the Arts Council of Adamawa State as 'interpreter/guardian' later attended a course on museum management at the National Museum at Jos. Until his untimely death, he worked in Sukur for the National Museums of Nigeria. The site was declared a State Monument in 1997 before becoming a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999.

In subsequent years tourist accommodation was provided by the private sector at the base of the mountain. This was largely destroyed by Boko Haram in 2014. The Sukur Yawal festival usually held in February has become Sukur's public face with a more traditional phase on the mountain and another, bringing many ethnic groups together, on the plain below. Despite interruption by the insurgency, Yawal still attracts prominent sons and daughters, government officials, experts from the UNDP and visitors from far and near.

In Cameroon tourism has been longer but scarcely better established. In 1986 van Beek described how in 1970 German, French and Italian travel agencies offered tours through the Mandara mountains as 'the touristic highpoint of a trip in Cameroon'. Such tours were monopolized by Norcamtours, a government agency. A hotel was built at Rhoumsiki where tourists could visit the chief, a smith's forge, consult a diviner, and 'take pictures of women at the village well'. When the visitors complained that the locals wore clothes, Norcamtours solved the problem by advising them to 'take off their modern clothes, and emerge in traditional (un)dress'. A few people, mostly smiths, diviners and young men who acted as guides, earned money from these exchanges. Since 1970 Rhoumsiki is said to have the distinction of being 'the only village that we have visited in Cameroon that has special "staged" demonstrations for tourists. ... All were created for the "show" to raise funds for the village.' Rhoumsiki remains a tourist destination, and a local entrepreneur has built up a reputable tour company which now operates throughout Cameroon.

The 'route touristique' through the Cameroon Mandara includes a visit to Mabas (iron smelting furnaces, charming houses and a fine view from the top of the escarpment down to Madagali in Nigeria) and a stop at a privately run Campement (motel) in Mokolo and the craft shop/artisanat at Djingliya (simple accommodation available) run under the auspices of the Catholic mission. At the nearby village of Gousda there is a motel and a weaving cooperative overseen by nuns of the Catholic mission at Koza. Local women also make baskets, pottery and other craft products, some of a non-traditional "tourist art" nature.

Other initiatives have been taken independently by communities and even by individuals. The people of the Ziver massif, once hostile to outsiders, now bring soft drinks and bottled beer from Mokolo to sell to thirsty trekkers. Here visitors must engage local guides in order to avoid sacred sites and the wrath of locals – sometimes enforced by bows and arrows. Near Mokolo, on the main road from Maroua, Dokwaza, an enterprising master smith, built a 'traditional' Mafa furnace and performed 'mini-smelts' for tourists. After his death, a son continued these performances.

And there are many other examples ... but nothing that links these initiatives in a larger framework. The superb network of paths – hiking trails already and often superbly constructed – remains to be discovered.

### ***The necessity of a 'pro-poor' approach to tourism***

In order for eco-cultural tourism to succeed, enabling montagnards to remain in their mountains while enjoying a better and sustainable standard of living, a 'Pro-poor' approach is essential. Pro-poor tourism is tourism that generates net benefits for the poor. Benefits may be economic, but they may also be social, environmental or cultural. This approach has much in common with other alternative forms of tourism: sustainable tourism, eco-tourism and community-based tourism, and fair, just, equitable tourism. The differences are to be found in the emphasis on countries of the South, on the poor rather than on the environment, and on their desire for access to opportunities beyond those of the local community.

A set of six principles characteristic of pro-poor tourism has been identified by Ashley, Roe and Goodwin (2001). Here we address the two most critical to the current discussion, *participation* and *holistic livelihood*, and suggest how they might be realized in the Mandara mountains. Through *participation* poor people must participate in tourism decisions if their livelihood priorities are to be reflected in the way tourism is developed. "Education and mobilization of village communities is essential and must be tackled with sensitivity to cultural norms." Thus for example an initial meeting with chiefs, ward heads and elders is a prerequisite to any and all forms of cooperation. Montagnard communities have suffered a long history of exploitation and are sensibly skeptical of proposals from beyond their hills.

*Holistic livelihoods* means that 'the range of livelihood concerns of the poor -- economic, social and environmental, short-term and long-term -- needs to be recognized. Focusing on cash or jobs is inadequate.' The founding of the Sukur Museum was a local initiative of the Sukur Development Association. This comprises men and women living at Sukur who continue to live by farming, as well as Sukur practicing a variety of jobs and professions in nearby towns and in cities elsewhere in Nigeria. There may be differences of opinion about what is best for Sukur, but the wishes of those living at Sukur generally have priority. In Cameroon every jurisdiction, rural and urban, has locally elected councilors. Consequently, elders living on the mountain slopes as well as educated younger people living in new settlements below may come together to discuss tourism strategies acceptable to all concerned. These will include respect for traditional ways and sacred sites, the formation of local guides, masons and conservators, the creation, maintenance and upgrading of 'campements' and rest houses, and other supplemental forms of local employment for men, women and children. None of this can be achieved in a heavy-handed, top-down manner.

A pro-poor approach to tourism has the potential to enable montagnards to continue to live in their mountains, rather than relocating to the hot and less salubrious plains to be nearer roads, schools and health centers, or to the towns in the region. This 'descent from the hills' began forcibly in colonial times and has continued since independence in 1960. Such downward migration has environmental as well as social consequences: "When the people descend, the soil follows." But such resettlement is slowed or even reversed by the construction of dirt roads accessible by motorbikes and 4x4 vehicles and the building of health care centers and primary schools in hard-to-reach mountain villages, all already in progress in some areas. The well established system of terrace agriculture can be augmented with income generated from an approach to tourism that enables and requires peasants and artisans to become teachers of sustainability, and of traditional skills and knowledge.

Under present security conditions, the development of a transboundary park offers the prospect of employment and a future that offers hope of a better life for the young, particularly men, who otherwise may in despair be attracted by Boko Haram. A Mandara Mountains Transboundary Park can be a significant element in the economic, socio-political and permanent, as opposed to military, defeat of the insurgency.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Our field research was been carried out between 1984 and 2008 with the permission of the Cameroonian and Nigerian authorities and supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Universities of Calgary and London. We are happy to express our gratitude to all those in both countries who have been so generous with their time, hospitality, and

often friendship. We hope that the preliminary material presented here will one day contribute to their welfare.

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