

FORT LUBA - THRUSTON HISTORICAL SITE

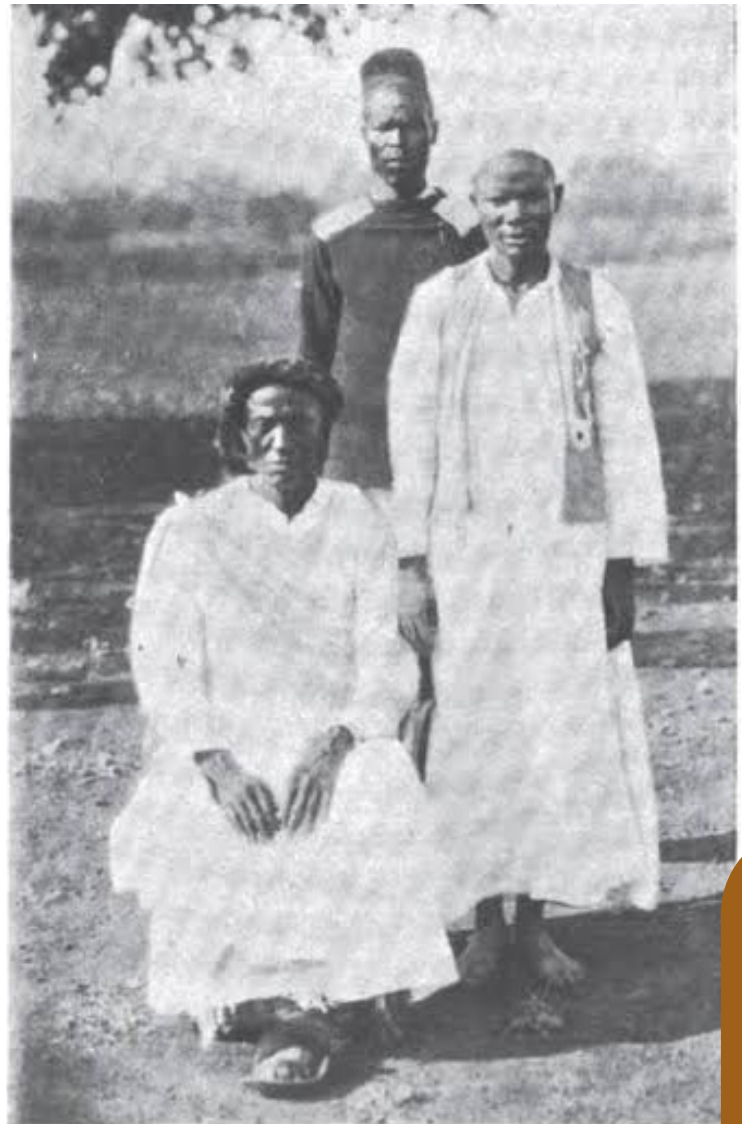


WELCOME TO FORT LUBA - THRUSTON

Luba - Thruston Fort is an important historical site near Lake Victoria that offers visitors an extraordinary opportunity to learn about the rich histories of the site that inform the identity of the people of Bukaleba, Busoga, and Uganda. The site's attributes enrich visitors' experiences and knowledge about the Basoga of Eastern Uganda as well as traumatic events in the early colonial history of Uganda. This site was declared a National Historical monument by the Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Hon Tom Butime, and officially unveiled after reconstruction with the Ambassador of the United States of America to Uganda, Natalie E. Brown, on 25th February 2021.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FORT LUBA - THRUSTON

Fort Luba - Thruston was once in the political territory of Chief Luba of Bunya Chiefdom in Usoga (Busoga). The shoreline near the British fort was a landing site for canoes by which men and goods were ferried to and from the Kyagwe shore on the western side of the Napoleon Gulf. Starting in 1891, the British commander Fredrick Lugard recruited Sudanese troops ("Nubians") as armed mercenaries to help administer what became the Uganda Protectorate in 1893. That year a British colonial garrison was established at Luba's with the posting of 40 Sudanese troops strategically situated near the caravan trade route that crossed the Napoleon Gulf between Bunya and Buganda. This was partly to reduce insecurity associated with the eastern caravan route and to monitor foreign traders, including any possible slave trading activity that may have continued in the region. After the fort's construction, Chief Luba moved his compound "a gathering point for traders" to an area several hundred meters to the southeast of the fort.



Chief Luba of Busoga (seated), his son standing on the right, and one of the Sudanese Mutineers (background) who revolted at Luba - Thruston Fort

In October 1897, the Sudanese soldiers mutinied in much of the Uganda Protectorate over pay, rations, and clothes that were in arrears. The rebellion started with the Sudanese troops garrisoned in Kenya. They marched west from Kenya to join those at the British garrison at Luba's. Major Thruston was sent to prepare the fort for attack. Some of the earthworks, the bastions at opposite corners, were constructed during that period. Once the mutineers reached the fort, they gained entry by subterfuge, as they were known to those inside. Once inside, they took as their prisoners three Europeans, including Major Thruston, who had 160 Sudanese under his command. Hot in pursuit from the east, Major MacDonald launched an attack to retake the fort.

During a pause in the battle, the Sudanese troops left the fort under false pretenses to negotiate the prisoners' release and when their ruse was discovered, they were driven back after a fierce battle. The Sudanese officers then brought out Major Thruston, a civilian administrator named Wilson and a British small steamer captain, Scott, who had blundered into the event when he brought a Maxim Gun (machine gun) to Major Thruston. Once outside the fort, they were shot dead without provocation. At the end of October, a series of unsuccessful assaults were launched against the fort with many Baganda troops under the command of the Katikiro (Prime Minister) of Buganda, Apolo Kagwa.

Thereafter, the fort was besieged for two months, with the British dug in at the top of Bukaleba Hill. Trying to gain tactical advantage, McDonald had a small fort constructed in early November overlooking the British Fort to the West (see temporary fortification in picture, below). But Baganda commanders refused to post their troops there, so the fort was not used for long.



Major features of the Luba - Thruston Fort and surroundings

A disastrous loss of hundreds of Baganda troops occurred at the end of November when luminaries like C.L Pilkington, a CMS missionary (who translated the Bible into Luganda) died. Finally, in January of 1898, the British forces with Swahili porters, Sikh mercenaries and many Baganda troops launched a full scale assault. The mutineers evacuated the fort at night, hiding in nearby caves, and escaped by canoes on the 9th January 1898. The British Fort was abandoned. Later at an official inquiry, it was learned that the bones of the murdered men were dumped into the lake inside a basket. The bones were located and buried in the graveyard at Namirembe Cathedral, Kampala. A memorial was built in 1900 for those who lost their lives during “the war at Bukaleba”. Chief Luba died of sleeping sickness on 17th July, 1906, during the first outbreak of the epidemic that ravaged the region.



The British Fort, known as Luba - Thruston Fort, is in lower left, marked by ditches and embankments. The memorial is immediately to the East



The ditch and embankments of the fort

The site's cultural landscape consists of caves, man-made fortification ditches and embankments at the British Fort, a temporary fort constructed by Major McDonald as well as significant scatters of iron slag, pottery, and the Walumbe sacred tree. During the implementation of the United States Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation project, there were additional discoveries connected to the site. These include the location of Luba's compound, and Mweso board games engraved on rock outcrops.

SIGNIFICANT ATTRACTIONS

Luba - Thruston Monument

This monument was constructed in 1900 to remember those who lost their lives during "the war at Bukaleba". It was reconstructed in 2021 with support of the United States Ambassadors' fund for Cultural Preservation.



An aerial view of the memorial monument

The British Fort



Walls and ditches at Fort Luba - Thruston

Caves

Near the lake are two natural caves that visitors can access. The first cave measures 2.25m high, 5.5m wide, and 7m long. Fishermen and cultivators currently use it as a resting and cooking place. Ceramics and iron slag fragments were recovered from this cave; just below the cave a trade bead was documented above the ruins of a docking point along shoreline.



Cave to the west of Fort Luba - Thruston

Walumbe Shrine Tree



Walumbe Shrine tree, a sacred site for the Maganda Clan, a precolonial religious center



Walumbe Shrine tree

The Commons: Temporary fortification and Omweso Board Games

A small, fortified structure, today marked by shallow ditches, was intended as an intermediate position for a mixed force of Swahilis, Baganda, and six Europeans, though it was little used during the battles to retake Fort Luba - Thruston. It is surrounded by a number of Omweso Board games on rock outcrops. According to oral history, this was a leisure space with many board games.



One of the Mweso Board games

THE BUKALEBA COMMUNITY

“Bukaleba” is a name of a hill after which the area is named. A smaller village near the lake shore later came to be known as Walumbe, meaning death locally, after the outbreak of sleeping sickness that caused the deaths of many local people. Walumbe Village borders the historical site. It is a fishing village, although the community engages in agriculture as well.



Walumbe Fishing Village

According to the locals, the stone-built monument was partly named “Fort Luba” because Luba’s palace was at Bukaleba. They claim that near the adjacent cave below the fortifications there was a walkway built with stones, now submerged by rising water and believed by locals to have been used for boarding Arab ships that passed by the fort. Its construction materials show that it was a landing jetty for off-loading supplies and transporting personnel associated with the fort.

Oral tradition also has it that at a certain time, the whites came with the Nubians from South Sudan as their servants. When they arrived at the fort, they had some misunderstandings and the Nubians who had been given some guns by their masters rebelled. The Nubians dug the ditch to hide in during the war, as they were at the lower part of Bukaleba Hill and the whites were at the upper side. The whites won the war because the Nubians bullets were finished. Their victory could have ended any possible slave trade in the region as the Europeans who were against that activity had now taken over the fort. These traditions are an interesting but different versions of the historical events that took place at and around Fort Luba - Thruston.

DOCUMENTING LUBA - THRUSTON FORT AND SURROUNDINGS

According to Joyce Grace Kermu, a local resident, she and her husband once found a chain years ago while they were cultivating in the area. She imagines that the chain may have been used to detain slaves, but it long ago disappeared. She described what it looked like: "The chain resembled that found in hardware stores today, except there were 5 large round rings placed at regular intervals." Joyce supposes that the rings were intended to hold the necks of slaves. Joyce added that they sometimes found spears, arrows, and broken pots they thought were evidence of earlier settlement. These finds were similar to items encountered by other village residents.

As part of the Museums and Monuments Department's study of the area around Luba - Thruston Fort, an archaeological survey was conducted in Walumbe Village. Fieldwork involved community members who had artifacts they collected during cultivation. Mzee Dhikusoka Samuel, a resident of Walumbe Village, kept and curated artifacts at his home. Among these were coins ranging from the 1840's to 1962, pottery, iron objects such as axes and hoes, a smoking pipe, bullets, fragments of elephant teeth and skull, a wooden mortar, and game balls used by the Europeans, and probably the later occupants. One Indian Rupee of 1840 was recorded as the oldest in the collection.



Coins from Mzee Samuel's collection



Smoking pipe from Mzee Samuel's collection



Ceramic Vessel from Mzee Samuel's collection



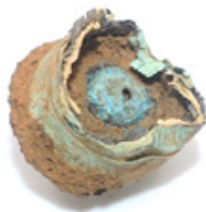
Iron Axes from Mzee Samuel's collection

Mzee Samuel took the Museum archaeologists to sites he knew. A nearby forest was rich in pottery and metal objects, such as an iron blade and axe; this is also where elephant bones were previously collected. Collectively, these objects point to the processing of elephant ivory, domestic activities, and other industrial activities, all likely in a Chief's compound populated by a cosmopolitan group of foreign traders, wives, children, and large numbers of retainers. This important evidence was provided by knowledgeable residents who helped the project team recreate the site's history.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Three test excavations were conducted in the vicinity of Luba-Thruston Fort: two to the East of the British fort and one inside. These were conducted to document a small fortress built by Major McDonald in the Commons during the siege of the fort, and to document activities inside the fort. Two excavations were within the temporary fortification. One produced very small sherds of pottery and lithic material, likely Late Stone Age.

The second excavation also produced some materials related to the events of 1987 – 98. Two artifacts of significance confirm that the site was a location of military activities: one percussion cap and one oxidized brass bullet cartridge. This confirms that the temporary fortification was used for military purposes during the siege of Luba - Thruston Fort.



Bullet percussion cap



Oxidized brass bullet cartridge

The third test excavation was placed inside the eastern ditch of the fort. The results did not pertain to the military nature of the fort. Rather, they documented a rich and important early history of the site, long before a British garrison was built. A variety of ancient materials were excavated, including iron smelting evidence: slag (waste products of iron smelting), tuyeres (blowpipes that conduct forced air from bellows to inside a furnace); and furnace bricks from the outside structure.



Inside view of Tuyere



Outer view of Tuyere



Piece of Iron slag



Furnace brick

Pottery called Urewe dates this industrial activity to about 200 - 500 AD. Also documented was Kansyore pottery, which is older than the industrial deposits and is found around eastern Lake Victoria.



Transitional Urewe pottery



Kansyore pottery

Of interest, too, were the Late Stone Age and Middle Stone Age artifacts, all of which make this an important ancient and significant colonial history site.



Sangoan hand axe

The site has attracted the attention of both locals and international visitors. In 2018, it was visited by the Kyabazinga (traditional ruler) of Busoga who promised that it would be developed into an effective tourist attraction, a goal that the Ministry of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities through its Department of Museums and Monuments is working to accomplish. The community welcomes these positive steps towards development.



Kyabazinga of Busoga visits Fort Luba - Thruston

CONSERVATION EFFORTS

The site is susceptible to natural disasters (heavy rains) and vandalism. In 2020, the Department of Museums and Monuments received a grant from the U. S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation to address some of the conservation concerns. Pathways were defined and signage installed for visitor management. The Luba - Thruston Monument was restored, and research conducted to establish the site's significance to Uganda's history.

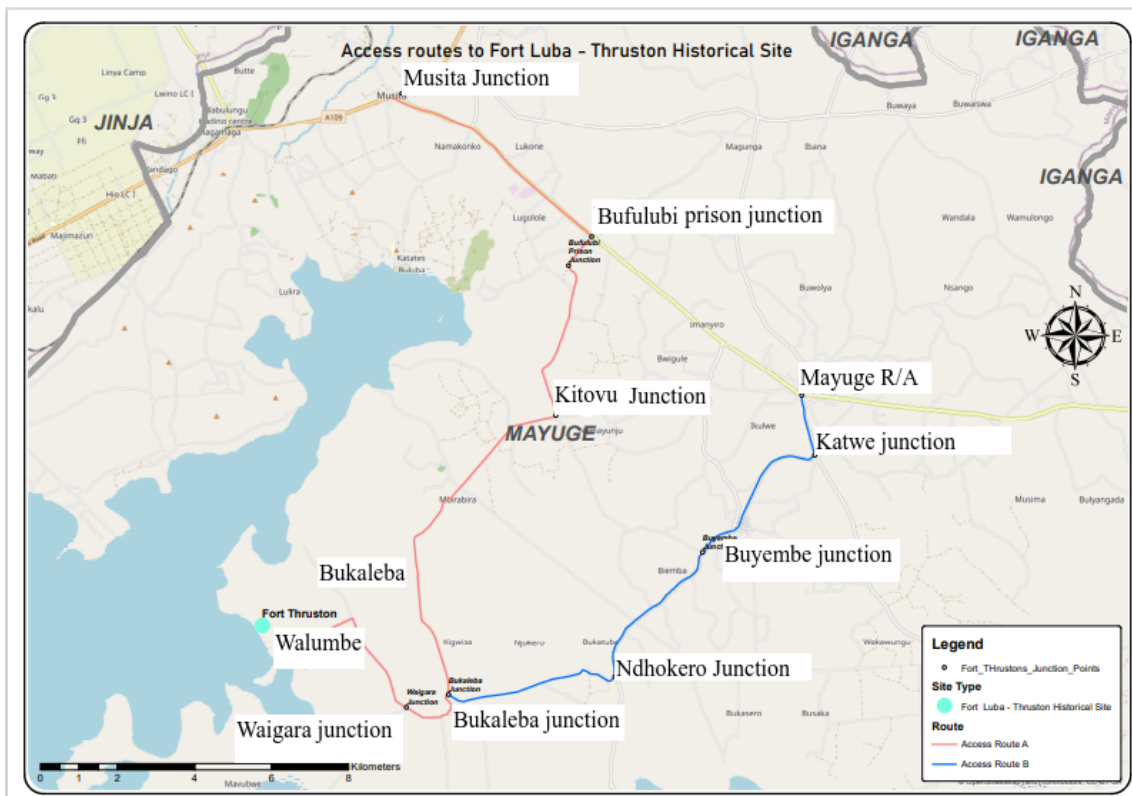
VISITOR CODE OF CONDUCT

The different attributes of the site are susceptible to damage, vandalism, and permanent loss if visitor guidance is neglected. The following therefore need to be noted;

- This is a National Monument protected by the National Law (The Museums and Monuments Act 2023) that should be followed.
- The community should be respected.
- Artifacts should not be picked up or removed from the site.
- Only designated pathways should be used.
- Litter should be kept out of the environment by use of the trash bins.
- No mark or writing should be left on any object. Such behavior is vandalism.
- Any form of vandalism should be reported to the site guide.

HOW TO GET THERE

The site is located in Walumbe Village, on the shores of Lake Victoria in Mayuge District Eastern Uganda. From Jinja town, take Iganga road for 14 km to Musita. Turn right onto Mayuge road for 6 km to Bufulubi. There, turn right and follow the signposts for 35 km to Walumbe village. The site will be on the left.



ENTRY

Entry is free, and a guide will be found on site.

For more information,

Contact <https://www.ugandamuseums.or.ug/>
ugandamuseums@tourism.go.ug / +256 414 232707.

For modest accommodation.

1. Bulamu Highway Hotel
Mayuge Town
+256 758370763
2. One Coin Gardens Hotel
Giri Giri along Musita - Namayingo Road
+256 755 201893
3. Zeu Resort Hotel
Mayuge Town
+256 704218263

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