



# ME STANLEY, YOU JANE

Fifty years after Jane Goodall began to study chimpanzees in the wild in Tanzania, Stanley Johnson — father of Boris — meets a dedicated researcher risking her life for her passion



**T**here are at least two good reasons for going to Kigoma, a dusty Tanzanian town situated on the eastern side of Lake Tanganyika, about 25 miles south of the Burundi border. First, it was here, on November 10, 1871, that Henry Morton Stanley famously met David Livingstone. A mud-hut museum in nearby Ujiji contains a larger-than-life plaster-of-Paris model of the two men and other flyblown memorabilia. Second, Kigoma is the jumping-off point for the amazing Gombe National Park, where, in 1960, at the age of 26, Dr Jane Goodall first began to study

the behaviour of chimpanzees in the wild. She was sent there by Dr Louis Leakey, the renowned paleontologist, who spotted her potential. “He watched me, he saw how I behaved with animals, he realised that I didn’t care two hoots about the things that lots of girls care about – clothes, hairdressing. He saw I was very tough and I could make do with very simple things: every day we had just one cupful of water for washing. He also realised I had an absolute passion for animals.”

Fifty years on, it’s hard to think of any long-term wildlife research that has achieved such

great worldwide recognition. The fact that chimpanzees are our closest living relatives, sharing 99% of our DNA, has made insights into their behaviour and social structures especially relevant. “They can be loving and compassionate, and yet they have a dark side,” Jane has said.

Goodall has been criticised by the scientific establishment for giving the chimps names, not numbers; for distorting their behaviour by feeding them bananas; and indeed for having no scientific training. Her fans, however, argue that it was her fresh approach and empathy that ►►►

enabled her to make new discoveries in the field. “There’s no sharp line dividing us from the rest of the animal kingdom,” she maintains. It was she who learnt that chimpanzees not only use tools but also make them, for instance, stripping twigs to “fish” for termites. This challenged many scientists’ belief that we humans are unique in our tool-making abilities.

I have seen chimpanzees in the wild in Kibale, in Uganda, and in the Ngamba Island sanctuary on Lake Victoria. But for me Gombe has long been some kind of Mecca. To track Jane Goodall down was no mean feat. She travels for more than 300 days a year, campaigning for conservation. So when I learnt that she was to visit Gombe, I asked to meet her there.

I flew into Dar es Salaam, and after a night’s recuperation at the magnificent Kilimanjaro Hotel Kempinski, I continued on to Kigoma. And finally, there she was, on the veranda of the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) headquarters. “Stanley, I presume?” she joked. Then she gave me a great bear hug and invited me in for a cup of tea.

Anyone who has read Jane’s books, particularly *In the Shadow of Man*, her account

of her early years at Gombe, will know how she first came here. But to hear her retell the tale right there at Gombe made it especially piquant.

**‘I STILL HAVE MY MOTHER’S ASHES IN A DRIED-MILK TIN. I’M PLANNING TO SCATTER THEM IN ALL HER FAVOURITE PLACES AT GOMBE’**

Brought up in Bournemouth after her parents’ divorce, Jane left school at 18, took a secretarial course and a couple of different jobs, before jumping at the chance to stay at a school friend’s parents’ farm in Kenya. There, in Nairobi, she met Dr Leakey, who was the curator of what is now the Nairobi National Museum, and was offered, with one other girl, the opportunity to accompany Leakey and his wife, Mary, on one of their annual paleontological expeditions to Olduvai Gorge in the Serengeti plains.

**I**t was Leakey who told Jane about a chimpanzee population at Gombe, suggesting that she might undertake an unprecedented study of them in the wild. In those days before women’s liberation, the proposal must have been highly unusual. The (then colonial) authorities certainly felt so. They were not happy about an unaccompanied white woman camping for months in the bush. But Jane had wanted to live with animals since reading the Tarzan books as a child, and she had the support of her mother, Vanne, who told her: “If you work hard and really want something and never give up, you’ll find a way.”

“Louis Leakey helped find the funds to finance my first field work,” Jane recalled. “But the authorities wouldn’t let me set up camp on my own.” Fortunately, Vanne was able to come with her. Her presence at Gombe during Jane’s first

stint in 1960 was absolutely central. Vanne helped out in many ways, looking after the camp while Jane was in the hills, running a clinic for nearby villagers, above all just being there. “I still have some of my mother’s ashes in a dried-milk tin at the camp,” Jane confided. “I’m planning to scatter them in her favourite places at Gombe.”

We journeyed across the lake to Gombe itself, joined by a guide, Bernard Gichobi, and by Dr Anthony Collins, a director of her institute, who has worked with Jane since the 1970s, but still manages to look after his wife and family in north London. “It’s hard,” he confessed as the boat got underway, “but somehow after so many years I feel more at home here than in England.”

Lake Tanganyika is the second-deepest lake in the world, containing 17% of the world’s fresh surface water. It is bounded to the west by the Democratic Republic of Congo. Over the years there have been frequent incursions, even invasions, by refugees both from the Congo and from Burundi. The signs of population pressure are obvious: hillsides denuded of vegetation; dramatic gullies where the exposed soil has been eroded from the hills in heavy rains. At the

boundary of the park, however, the change is dramatic. At last you see the luxuriant sweep of trees that you expect of a tropical rainforest.

Jane and Anthony were to stay in the house Jane and her first husband, the photographer Hugo van Lawick, built in the early 1970s. They divorced, and in 1975 she married Derek Bryceson, a former RAF hero and director of Tanzania’s national parks. Five years later, he died of cancer, a tragedy that is still raw.

I was staying a mile or two away in the Gombe Forest Lodge, a privately run tented camp. Jane and Anthony came up there in the boat. After sunset, we lit a fire on the beach and opened a bottle of whisky. We looked out over the flat-calm surface of the lake to the lights of a line of fishing boats, extending as far as the eye could see, and I found myself thinking about the ripple effect of the Jane Goodall phenomenon. The importance of Jane’s research certainly helped to ensure Gombe’s designation in 1968 as a national park. This in turn increased the protection not just for Gombe’s chimpanzee population, but for other denizens of the forest — baboons, monkeys, egrets, herons, eagles, vultures... and, crucially, for the forest itself.

Last December Jane was in Denmark at the Climate Change Summit. “A lot of things went wrong in Copenhagen — or didn’t come right — but I think everyone recognised how vital the forests are. I was with Chief Almir of the Surui tribe from Amazonian Brazil. We were part of the South-South Initiative, which trains indigenous and local people to monitor their forests using



Jane Goodall (above) Grub. Below: hats off today, and (below right) with Hugo van Lawick and their son, — Stanley greets Dr Livingstone



Google Android cellphones. This information goes straight up to a satellite. It will enable them to prove they are indeed protecting their forests and thereby qualify for international assistance.”

What an extraordinary journey it has been for her! The 26-year-old dragging up her boat onto the shore, with “one ex-army tent, one pair of lousy binoculars and a couple of tin mugs and plates”, has turned into a star of the international circuit. Hectic as her life now is, she doesn’t want to be known simply as “the chimpanzee lady”. In 2002, Kofi Annan, the then secretary-general of the UN, appointed her, with other notable personalities, as a messenger of peace. She told



me: "I was the only one who actually showed up in New York for the ceremony."

As the whisky bottle went round again, Jane remembered the moment in May 1975 when the Congo exploded into their lives. "It was the middle of the night. The kidnappers came in by boat, parked on the beach down there" – she waved towards the spot. "They grabbed four of the students. They sent one of them back almost at once with a message. The parents came out. I think money was paid, because the next two were released. I think the figure was \$250,000. But the fourth didn't come back for some time." She was evidently deeply marked by that event.

In practical terms, it meant she had to give up full-time residence at Gombe. "We had to go: the authorities wouldn't let us stay." But even without the abductions, one wonders how long Jane and Hugo could have remained. Kidnappers were not the only menace. They had a son, Grub, to bring up, and Gombe is not safe for an infant. Jane had noted early on that chimpanzees were omnivores. She showed me "Grub's cage": a wire-netting enclosure, it was designed to protect the boy, but was not a long-term solution.

Later, Anthony was to tell me how Frodo, a male chimpanzee, once grabbed, killed and partially ate a village woman's child.

Next day, I took a trek up through the Gombe hills to find a group of chimpanzees located by trackers earlier that morning. "That's Freud," Anthony told me. "He used to be the alpha male, but he's been supplanted by Ferdinand. And here comes Frodo, watch out!" I had put my backpack on the ground and Frodo was out to get it. He had also been an alpha male and was now making a bit of a comeback.

A mother and daughter chased each other around a tree. Groups of chimpanzees called to each other across the clearing, "pant-hooting". The alpha male shook the trees and the females submitted to his will. "If they don't come at once," said Anthony, "Ferdinand will beat them up."

When we met up with Jane, we gave her a full account of the day's events. The last chimpanzee of those she first met in 1960 died three years ago, so she has known all 106 of the current Gombe chimpanzees since their birth. Her

thinking about her extended family has evolved over the years. If she ever idealised them, she has moved on. She has witnessed terrible internecine fighting, as one group all but obliterated another. She watched a deadly rampage as one female took her daughter on a killing spree, murdering and devouring any infant chimpanzees they came across.

When we told her that Frodo had charged my backpack, she shook her head. "I'm afraid to go out now if Frodo's around. He makes a beeline for me and tries to knock me down. He almost killed me once, dragging me to the edge of a cliff and pushing me over. Mind you, I think he knew there were trees that would block my fall."

Despite such fears for her safety, even today she insists on walking the hills alone, hour after hour. I remarked that nobody wants to hear on the news that she is dead. She smiled. "It would be quite a story, wouldn't it? I wonder what it would do for the cause of conservation, 'Jane Goodall killed by chimpanzee!'"

It would be more than a personal tragedy. Goodall is still desperately needed, not just in Tanzania, but in the wider world. While we were in Gombe, the US announced a grant of \$5.5m to her institute, to support community development in more than a score of villages, extensive forest regeneration and corridors linking Gombe with other areas with important wildlife populations including chimpanzees. The new grant is intended to build on, and to expand, JGI's programme of community-based conservation, known as Tacare (Take care: Lake Tanganyika Catchment Reforestation and Education).

"It has changed the attitude of every village around Gombe," Jane said. Local people are eager to protect the animals they now view as "their" chimpanzees from the bushmeat trade.

The culmination of her life's work lies in mobilising rising generations. Twenty-one years ago, sitting with young Tanzanians on the terrace of her house in Dar es Salaam, she conceived the idea of the Roots and Shoots programme, aimed at encouraging children all over the world to develop their own clubs and associated projects. Today it has a network of tens of thousands of participants in more than 100 countries. And she continues to campaign with evangelical zeal.

That night at dinner, she said: "Think of the most beautiful tree you know. Then think of how that tree began. When little shoots try to reach the sunlight, they can break through the cracks in the wall. Actually, they can bring the wall down."

We all knew what Dr Jane Goodall CBE meant. We raised our glasses. "Happy 50th anniversary, Jane," we chorused ■ *Stanley Johnson went to Gombe with Kuoni (www.kuoni.co.uk). His memoir, Stanley I Presume (Fourth Estate, £9.99), is available at the Booksfirst price of £8.99, inc. p&p. Tel: 0845 2712 135. The Jane Goodall Institute, UK, is at www.janegoodall.org.uk*