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The Afrika Odyssey: A Year of Adventure and Hope Across Africa

by Ashleigh Nefdt [@goodthingsguy](#) December 1, 2024



Photo Credit: Supplied — Zimbabwe Matusadona team and the Holgates

South Africa's father-and-son explorers, Kingsley and Ross Holgate and their team have recently completed their 41st expedition—The Afrika Odyssey. This incredible adventure saw them provide humanitarian aid to 100,000 people, malaria relief and notes of hope for conservation!

Africa (01 December 2024) — When it comes to adventure, geographic achievements and humanitarian efforts, it'd be a feat to top South Africa's father-and-son explorers, Kingsley and Ross Holgate and their veteran team. Recently, the team completed their 41st expedition, The Afrika Odyssey, in what will surely go down as one of the greatest and most inspiring adventures in recent history.

Kingsley, AKA the 'Greybeard of Adventure', is one of the most respected explorers of our time. He's travelled all 54 countries in Africa, has enjoyed a lifetime of journeys on foot, in boats, and by traditional Swahili dhow, and boasts immense humanitarian efforts and a cracker immune system.

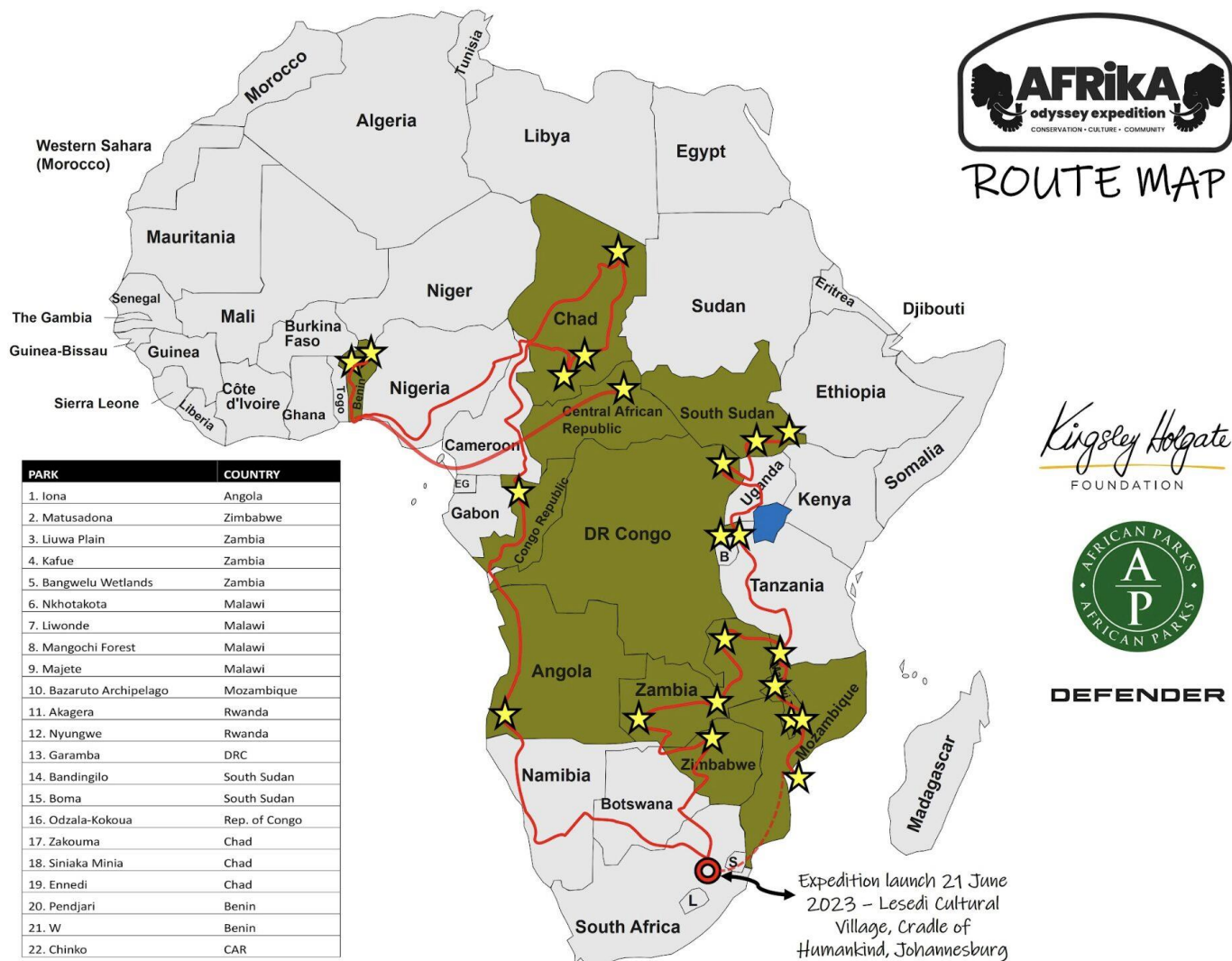
Kingsley is tied to a myriad of world-firsts, including tracking the entire outline of Africa through 33 countries in 449 days, being part of the first exploration team to reach all 7 of Africa's extreme geographic points and discovering the geographic centre point of Africa, amongst many others. Not to mention, he has survived malaria over 50 times.

The Afrika Odyssey

This latest quest saw a 62,000-kilometre journey that spanned a year and reached some of the wildest and most remote regions on our continent.

The mission? To connect 22 diverse wildlife areas in 12 countries spanning more than 20 million hectares, which are managed by conservation NGO African Parks in partnership with national governments, leaving behind an immense mark of humanitarian relief and hope for communities as well as generations to come.

“Over the past 30 years, we’ve witnessed the frightening loss of Africa’s pristine landscapes and iconic wildlife,” says Kingsley. “For many years we’ve been asking the question: is there hope for Africa’s wild spaces and unique fauna and flora, as well as for the communities that depend on them? That’s what spawned the idea for this expedition.”



Hard Work Discovers Hard Work

“The good news is we’ve seen first-hand, the incredible work being done across Africa to protect and restore vast tracts of wilderness, and stop wildlife poaching, illegal logging and mining. We’ve heard gut-wrenching, personal stories of loss from rangers on the front line, alongside uplifting stories of hope that bear witness to the revival happening thanks to proactive governments, and the positive impact this is having on both conservation and communities,” Kingsley shares.

It took a lot of hard work to discover the hard work being done; the expedition had to traverse 22 countries to reach all geographic locations!

Starting in the Iona desert plains of Angola, the adventurers crossed seven southern African countries, reached the highest and furthest source of the Nile in the Nyungwe forests of Rwanda, tackled dense rainforests in the DRC and Republic of Congo and war-ravaged regions in South Sudan and the CAR.

The Afrika Odyssey also traversed the length of Cameroon to reach Chad and the Ennedi massif in the Sahara Desert close to the border with Libya before navigating through volatile areas of Nigeria to reach the north of Benin in West Africa.



Chad Sahara Ennedi Massif Kingsley and Rangers

“Never before have we experienced such harsh and difficult conditions,” adds Kingsley’s son Ross, who has taken on the mantle of expedition leader.

“From record flooding in Uganda and the DRC that turned dirt tracks into rivers, to pothole-infested, treacherous roads to reach Juba in South Sudan, which is prone to banditry and land mines.

“Some routes were just a whirlwind of chaos as were remote border crossings, many of which had seldom seen overland travellers. Throw into the mix the world’s largest desert, the Sahara: now that’s a test for man and machine, as temperatures soared well over 50°C day after day. It was a constant job of inflating and deflating tyres as sand dunes gave way to sharp rocks; we were amazed at how the heavily-loaded Defenders just kept on going, despite the extreme heat and terrain.”

Humanitarian Support Abounds

It wouldn’t have been a Holgate adventure without humanitarian support in tow. As such, the expedition provided humanitarian support to 100,000 people in communities adjacent to each wildlife area, in particular malaria prevention for pregnant women and mothers with young children!

The unusually high rainfall in East and Central Africa has escalated malaria cases, especially amongst pregnant women and young children. Tragically, statistics show that on average, 1,320 children die daily from this killer disease,” Ross explains.

“But sometimes, it felt like we were risking our lives to save lives, as every member of the expedition team also contracted malaria. We know from personal experience just how deadly malaria can be, so along with education on malaria prevention, we distributed more than 15,880 long lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets. With one mosquito net protecting on average a mum and two children, that’s 47,650 people kept safe from malaria on this expedition alone.”



Chief Mola Gets an Eye Test

Not forgetting other areas of life-changing need, 2,250 eye tests and reading glasses were also provided to poor-sighted people in deeply remote areas.

“It’s incredibly heartwarming to witness the transformation a simple pair of spectacles makes especially for elderly people, as they are able to become productive members of their communities again,” observed Kingsley.

Ross furthers that the expedition also reached thousands of children through a vibrant, educational Wildlife Art programme, saying, “Children are the future guardians of these critically important natural areas, so it’s important they know from an early age about the values of caring for their environment.”

The Scroll of Hope for Conservation

The Holgate’s well-travelled Zulu calabash collected symbolic water from all 22 locations while the expedition carried a 250-page ‘Scroll of Hope for Conservation’.

It now contains thousands of inspiring messages handwritten by community members, park rangers, health workers, teachers and government envoys across Africa alike. The impressive and enormous book has been handed over to African Parks as a unique legacy of the Afrika Odyssey expedition and a reminder that stories of hope begin when we all agree they should.

“When we started out on this mission to find stories of hope for Africa’s wildlife, wild spaces and the communities that depend on them, to be honest we weren’t sure what to expect – or if we’d find anything to celebrate,” Ross says.

“We found plenty. Despite the incredibly tough conditions, we feel very privileged to have journeyed to parts of the continent that we’ve never experienced before, and to have met thousands of extraordinary individuals all committed to preserving what makes Africa so unique and special, for future generations.”