

Thursday, September 1, 1988

Group tries to continue Fossey work in Africa New movie hoped to draw funds, interest

EDITOR'S NOTE — Dian Fossey fought hard to protect the remnants of Africa's mountain gorillas and apparently paid for it with her life.

Now those who carry on her work carry the hope that a forthcoming movie on Fossey's singular adventure will spur the public's interest and donations.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP)—The head of a fund that carries on primate researcher Dian Fossey's work after her murder in Africa expects a movie about Fossey's life to pique the public's interest in the sometimes tragic plight of the endangered mountain gorilla.

Claude Ramsey, head of the Digit Fund — which continues Fossey's work today through the Englewood-based Morris Animal Foundation — is hoping that the film this fall will keep pressure on gorilla poachers and heighten awareness of one of the closest primate relatives of man.

Fewer than 400 of the huge, gentle apes remain in the world today, none of them in captivity. Most live in Rwanda's Parc National des Volcans in central Africa's Virunga Mountains, where Fossey conducted her studies.

"The gorillas come across as very friendly in the movie," Ramsey said. "It's going to make the world a lot more conscious of the gorillas and the problem of poaching."

"Since Dian Fossey's death, poaching has diminished. There's a lull."

"Gorillas in the Mist," also the title of the book Fossey wrote about her research, will feature actress Sigourney Weaver as the American researcher.

Fossey went to Rwanda in early 1967 at the urging of anthropologist Dr. Louis Leakey and stayed on until her murder, when she was 53, at Karisoke Research Center on Mount Visoke.

The Morris Animal Foundation hopes that the movie that documents Fossey's work will spur public donations to the Digit Fund.

Ramsey said that Karisoke Re-

search Center needs \$65,000 in funds to keep up maintenance and \$100,000 worth of capital improvements.

Fossey founded the Digit Fund in 1978, naming it after a male gorilla she had befriended and studied closely for 10 years before it was killed by poachers on 12,000-foot Mount Visoke.

His head and hands were cut off to be sold as souvenirs.

"I am anxious to establish a 'Digit Fund' to attempt to raise money to

"I suspect he (the killer) was hired, or suborned, by influential people who increasingly viewed Dian as a dangerous impediment to the exploitation of the Parc National des Volcans, and especially to the exploitation of the gorillas."

— Farley Mowat, in his biography of Dian Fossey

maintain students, to train Rwandans in the patrol of the park and for additional census work on the Rwandan side of the Virungas so that stronger efforts may be made to protect them and to actively secure their survival," Fossey wrote during 1978.

"Here, at camp, we wake up each morning wondering who will be next," she wrote.

Fossey began regular patrols of Mount Visoke's slopes to protect the endangered gorillas and she also was known to fire shots in order to frighten intruders.

In at least one case, Fossey, who had emphysema, helped other workers to chase and to capture a poacher

thought to be involved in Digit's death.

Poachers initially were suspected of killing Fossey, but Rwanda government officials and others have ruled out that theory because of the way she was killed.

Fossey was found dead on Dec. 28, 1985, on the floor of her Karisoke cabin, her skull split by a large knife that she owned.

Beside her on the floor of the cabin were a pistol and also a clip of ammunition.

The Rwandan government charged Wayne McGuire, a student researcher at Karisoke, with Fossey's murder, but no credible motive ever was established.

McGuire fled to the United States, which has no extradition agreement with Rwanda.

A native tracker who had been fired months earlier by Fossey also was charged with the murder.

He died in a Rwandan jail.

Some observers think that Fossey's vigorous conservation efforts may have eventually led opposing parties who wanted to expand the economic development of Rwanda's volcanic region to plot her death.

Fossey was a staunch advocate of minimal human contact with the gorillas.

This stand put her at odds with those people in the country who wanted to use the endangered gorillas in order to lure tourists to the Virunga Mountains.

Fossey was concerned that the gorillas would contract human diseases, against which they have no immunity.

Fossey eventually linked some of the gorilla deaths on Mount Visoke to their contact with humans.

"I suspect he (the killer) was hired, or suborned, by influential people who increasingly viewed Dian as a dangerous impediment to the exploitation of the Parc National des Volcans, and especially to the exploitation of the gorillas," Farley Mowat wrote in his biography of Fossey, "Woman in the Mists."



Hair today, gone tomorrow

Photo by Mike C. Mulvey

Doug Harris, a freshman member of Squadron 4, gets his 'fish cut' in the MSC Barber Shop during the beginning of Freshman Orientation Week.

Freshmen in the Corps learn to be unified, and part of that lesson is having the same haircut — a 'fish cut,' which leaves hair one-quarter inch long.

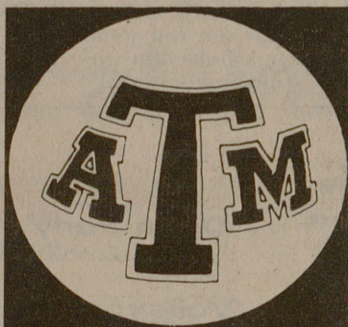


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