

OUTDOORS

African explorer on hidden history of Congo

FEATURE

SALLY GILLESPIE
sally.gillespie@jpress.co.uk
@SReporterSally

American explorer and anthropologist Julian Monroe Fisher is coming to Scotland for the first time next week.

And Borderers will have the chance to hear the author speak on the forgotten history of the African Congo in Galashiels on Tuesday (March 26), in the last of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society's (RSGS) winter lectures programme.

Emailing us from his home in Austria, he said: "I will be talking about a historical detail that I stumbled across during my research of Victorian age explorers that changed the fate of today's Democratic Republic of Congo some 120 years ago. But this is not a dry history class, as I have travelled to the relevant locations and met the people for whom these historical events have relevance today."

Born in South Carolina, the 58-year-old explorer gained an anthropology degree before

working in the skiing industry in the winter and carrying luggage and golf bags in the summer. "The lifestyle provided me with the income to do what I liked, living free. But despite my desire for a carefree lifestyle, I built that into a career in hotel management. In financial terms I succeeded and excelled, but that all changed in 1996."

For it was then he spent time with his dying father. Julian had also, around that time, seen a National Geographical documentary about Colonel Norman Vaughan, who at the age of 88 and despite several set-backs, climbed the mountain named after him for his part in Admiral Byrd's expeditionary solo flight across Antarctica in 1929. When asked what it meant to him, Vaughan had replied: "Dream big and dare to fail".

Julian said: "That was the first time I heard that slogan. As I was looking out on to the sunrise over the Atlantic ocean thinking of my dying father, I made a promise to myself: 'When and if I ever end up like

my father, I want to have so many exciting memories, that will allow me to lay there and let it all run by like one long adventure movie."

His father died, Julian jacked in his job, sold everything, cashed in his frequent flyer points and started travelling. He said: "I never looked back."

He is best known for his exploration of the African continent, focusing on DR Congo's Katanga Province in 2009 and 2010, the subject of his talk. He is also researching the 1891-92 Stairs expedition to Katanga as well as potential local unexcavated archaeological sites. And he is working with Mwami Munongo, king of the Garanganze people of Katanga, and his family to build the first royal museum in the Congo and an anthropological research station in the village of Bunkeya.

Married to his soulmate, Gina, "whom I met on a boat years ago crossing the Bay of Honduras", the couple have two children. He said: "I absolutely love

what I am doing. I am old enough to understand the importance of living every day as though it could be my last. I miss my family when I am away on expedition, but I am quite honoured when I return and my eight-year-old daughter asks me out of nowhere, 'Papa, tell me about Africa'.

"I guess the buzz for me is to venture into the unknown. To read about a place in a historical encounter and then to stand on the exact same spot is awe-inspiring."

Julian's talk Journey to Katanga: An Expedition into the Past, will be at the Heriot Watt University campus, Galashiels starting at 7.30pm. Tickets £8 for adults, free to students, under 18s and RSGS members.

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Julian Fisher
"I guess the buzz for me is to venture into the unknown"

Country Diary

Sunday, March 24: Scottish Borders Hillwalking Club - Lauder area (73), meet at Lauder Post Office at 10am. For further information, call secretary Evelyn Horsburgh on 01750 76214.

Sunday, March 24: Coldstream Ramblers walk - Chillingham Estate permissive path (shortish but strenuous), 6.5 miles. Meet at Henderson Park car park at 9am or Chillingham Church at 10am. Call leader Elaine Roden on 01289 386436 or 01790 469290.



Open evening to quiz officials

Environmental advisors are holding a free evening reception near Peebles next week to discuss what they do.

Borders representatives will be among the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) officials holding the informal evening at the Macdonald Cardrona Hotel on Wednesday.

The Scottish Government body advises on the management and sustainable use of the country's wildlife, natural habitats and landscape.

Operations manager in SNH's Galashiels office, Andrew Panter said: "We are doing our best to bring people and nature and landscapes together for the benefit of everybody. We are advisors, we are not decision-makers."

Andrew will explain that, among many roles, SNH aims to conserve and enhance na-

ture, promotes sustainable land use and balances the government's policy of renewables with protecting the natural environment.

It manages national reserves such as Whitlaw Mosses near Selkirk and is directly involved with the government's Scotland Rural Development Programme and sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs).

There are 94 SSSIs in the Borders covering six percent of the region while across Scotland there are 1,431 occupying 12 percent of the land.

SNH national chairman Andrew Thin will host the event with board member, Sid Pattern, area manager, Chris Miles and Mr Panter.

For more information call 01896 756652 or email: Galashiels@snh.gov.uk.

New walking guide in bid to attract visitors to valleys

SALLY GILLESPIE
sally.gillespie@jpress.co.uk
@SReporterSally

Ettrick and Yarrow tourism operators are launching a new walking guide tomorrow.

Lord Steel of Aikwood will unveil Walking in the Ettrick and Yarrow Valleys, produced by the valley's tourism group at Bowhill House, Selkirk.

Valleys project officer Julie Nock said: "The booklet looks fantastic and I hope it will encourage lots of people to come and walk in these beautiful valleys."

Ettrick Valley resident Barbara Harrison, who lets out a holiday cottage in the valley, researched and wrote the leaflet over three months.

The guide features narrative, written by Barbara and others, maps courtesy of Scottish Borders Council and photographs which have been donated or which Barbara has taken herself.

The walks range in difficulty and length and include hikes at Bowhill to Ettrick Head, taking in the likes of St Mary's Loch and the Ettrick Marshes.

Julie said: "Barbara has done an amazing job. She's done a huge amount of work, taken pictures of the walks and walked them all to make sure they are okay. We've also had a lot of help from the Scottish Borders Council ranger serv-

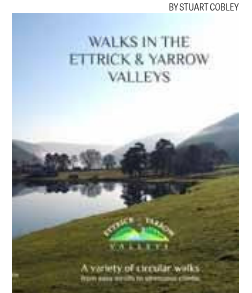
ice, who have been brilliant as well.

"Lots of people have given us photographs of wildlife that can be seen in the valleys and many have given us some really beautiful shots of the valley."

The leaflet was funded by Leader through the Revitalising the Ettrick and Yarrow Valleys project.

The forum is now working on a website for the valleys, thanks to funding from Europe and Buccleuch Estates, which it hopes to launch in May.

The Duke of Buccleuch has also lent locals Bowhill House and will provide refreshments for the leaflet launch.



The new walking guide launches tomorrow

The guide booklet will be available at valleys outlets and in Selkirk.

The tourism group evolved from the two-year revitalisation project which ends this month.

TALK TO US



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African explorer Julian Monroe Fisher will talk about Congo next week

Outdoors columnist

The early bird catches no lambs

WRITTEN BY
CORBIE



Just when I thought we were getting somewhere with this spring business, the snow came back at the weekend. When I drew the curtains on Sunday morning, the snowflakes were coming down like candyfloss. By the time I got into my waterproofs for my scheduled walk, the hills were white, but it had

turned to rain at lower levels. Undeterred, I set off up the river to see what was about.

There was plenty of bird song to be heard, dominated by the strident song of the local song thrush population.

Further away I could hear a woodpecker drumming and a mistle thrush's tuneless dirge.

It was tough going, with slick mud everywhere and every twig and bush hung with tiny transparent droplets of water just waiting to fall on whatever or whoever came in contact with it.

I found this out to my cost as I tried to photograph a fallen tree covered in an attractive bracket fungus.

Each false move brought down cascades of water which infuriatingly

made my spectacles useless and photography difficult, to say the least.

My hope for the day was to try and get an image of one of the season's first lambs or something like a snow-covered daffodil to illustrate the kind of March we're having, but I was finding it tough.

The daffodils by the river were far from opening, so I decided to head for the hills and a huge industrial-sized lambing shed, which was sure to have some early arrivals.

As I approached, I could see the shepherd's cottage nestling in the glen (which incidentally was the inspiration for the "Black Bob" cartoon in the Weekly News, about a Border collie).

The hills behind were still snow-capped and the nearer I

got to the shed I knew by the wall of silence that I was too early for the lambs as well.

Oh well, you win some and you lose some, so wet and bedraggled, I headed for home.

I had a tiny bit more luck on Friday night with my moth trap, managing to attract one solitary customer.

It was a wee brown thing called a dotted border, which flies during the first three months of the year.

It is interesting in that the female of the species is wingless and unable to fly.

I'd had them before but it was nice at long last to officially declare the mothing season underway.

Each false move brought down cascades of water which infuriatingly made my spectacles useless

SNH to tweet 'fun facts' about nature

The Scottish Government's advisor on nature is going to tweet interesting facts about the country's wildlife and land.

Scottish Natural Heritage has amassed "fun facts" to share through Twitter and Facebook.

And some of the "natural know-how" to go out and about in the Borders will include information about the father of geology, Berwickshire's James Hutton, whose findings at Siccar Point on the Berwickshire coast and at Inchbonny near Jedburgh, more than 200 years ago, helped him prove the earth was much older than was thought at the time.

Another will be: "Nuthatches only bred for the first time in Scotland in 1989, at Floors Castle and the Hirsell in the Borders. They have now spread across southern Scot-

land to Edinburgh, Perth and beyond, and there may be several thousand pairs. A result of global warming? Nobody knows."

The officials will reveal the Scottish-English border "coincides with the junction between two of the Earth's old tectonic plates. These were once separated by the Iapetus Ocean, which was the size of the Atlantic".

And, says SNH, the best-surveyed site in the world for its soil biodiversity is the upland grassland at Sourhope, once a research farm, near Yetholm, Kelso.

SNH's head of science, Ian Bainbridge, said: "Our experts on birds, mammals, insects, marine life, geology and more have contributed. These fun facts really show off how wonderful and unique Scotland's nature is."



PHOTOGRAPH: CORBIE

The shepherd's cottage in Corbie Linn, near Selkirk, the legendary home of "Black Bob"

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