



# In Search of Basenjis: Travels in South Sudan

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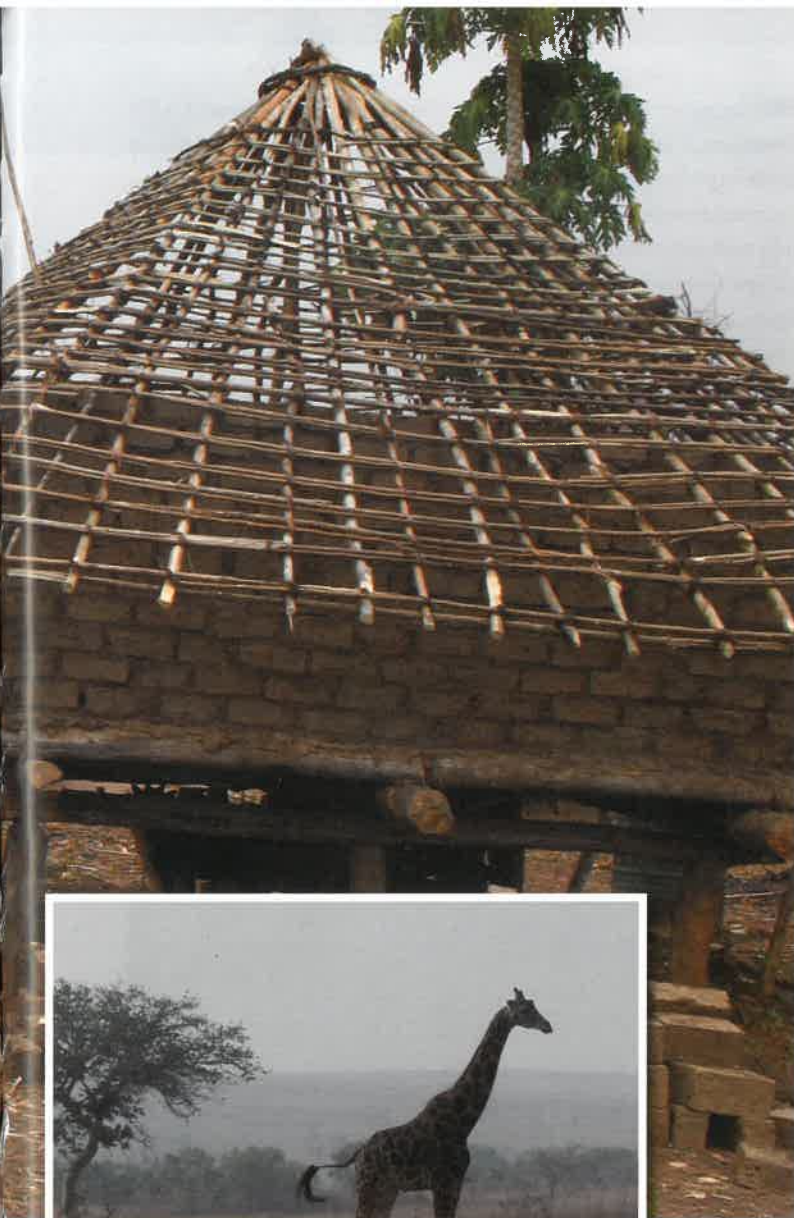
I have been on three trips to Africa in search of Basenjis: the first two areas I traveled to have had no known dogs exported outside of Africa before I went; my most recent trip to Africa, in February of 2015, was to South Sudan to the area where the Azande people live. Over the years, there have been more than a few dogs brought out from this area both successfully and unsuccessfully (see sidebar).

In 2011, South Sudan became independent from Sudan and travel there became a possibility. In 2013, I was planning another trip to Africa and after looking at possible places to go, I decided to follow in Veronica Tudor William and Michael Hughes-Halls' footsteps and go to Nzara and look there for Basenjis. During the planning stages, I found a website for the Anglican Church of Nzara; they provide room and board for visiting foreign volunteers. I contacted their Bishop, Samuel Peni, and he was only too happy to provide me with room, board, and support in my search for Basenjis to export. I traveled by myself after I was unable to get anyone else to commit to going on the trip. To reach Nzara, I flew

out on February 11th from Seattle to Washington D.C., on to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), and finally landing in Entebbe, Uganda. I had made arrangements with the Red Chilli Hideaway for a three-day safari trip to Murchison Falls National Park to see the wildlife; this company would also be providing the vehicle and driver for my trip in South Sudan. After staying overnight at Red Chilli in Kampala (Uganda), I met my safari traveling companions. School was on break for a holiday and a few English and Dutch teachers were taking advantage of this time to do the safari. On our first day, we drove to the park and visited Murchison Falls. The following morning before sunrise, we crossed the Victoria Nile by ferry and were driven around to view the wildlife. In the late afternoon, we returned to the river for a boat trip up to the falls. On the final day, we re-crossed the Victoria Nile and drove north to see more wildlife before exiting the park. After exiting, we drove east and stopped at Karuma Falls. It was here, after walking to and from the falls, that I was picked up by Hassan, my driver and escort for the remainder of my trip.

*Above:* An Azande family compound where Kiri was born.  
*Inset at Right:* Giraffe seen on safari in Murchison Falls National Park.  
*Right:* Looking upriver to Murchison Falls from the riverboat tour.





### Early History of Zande dogs of the South Sudan

Georg August Schweinfurth was the first to record the presence of the Basenji on his trip in 1868–1871 to the area in and around where the Niam-niam (Azande) people lived. When he was about to leave, he wanted to make sure to acquire a Zande dog to bring back to Germany. After returning with the dog to Alexandria, it leapt out of a second story hotel window and was killed by the fall.

The next attempt to bring out Basenjis occurred when Lady Helen Nutting traveled to Sudan where her second husband, Henry Brocklehurst, was offered a position as game warden in 1921. In her travels, she became fascinated by the Zande dogs and six were acquired for her by Major L. N. Brown from the area between the Ibba and Sueh rivers west of Maridi. After keeping them during her stay in Khartoum, she returned to England with her dogs in 1923. During quarantine, they were given a new distemper inoculation which made them ill and caused their deaths.

In 1938, there were three dogs brought out. Capt. M. G. Richards, M.C. had kept Basenjis—or as he called them, Zande dogs—in South Sudan since the 1920s. When he returned to England he decided to bring two along with him. One was bitten by a Jackal and died in Egypt of septicemia. The second, Nyanabiem, survived quarantine but died two years later of an enlarged spleen caused by malaria. The third to be imported that year was Amatangazig. She was acquired by Mr. and Mrs. Byron, of England, while they were motoring in the area of Zande people. She produced three litters and died of old age.

In 1959, Veronica Tudor William and Michael Hughes-Halls acquired Fula and Binza, the first brindle exported, from Yambio and Nzara in Southern Sudan. Fula would go on to produce two litters while Binza produced one.





After crossing the border at Nimule, South Sudan, we stayed overnight in Juba at the AFEX Camp along the White Nile. After breakfast, I had to register with the Interior Ministry as a foreign national; this delayed our start to travel to Nzara. The roads in this area were very interesting, to say the least. There were trucks and trailers abandoned alongside the road that had crashed or broken down, and in one location you could drive a semi-truck down into a hole and the truck's top would be level with the ground. After dodging numerous road hazards, we arrived in Nzara at 2 a.m. greeted by the church Bishop who lead us to our tukuls (sleeping accommodations). The next morning was a rush. I only had a very brief opportunity to speak with Bishop Peni because he was flying out of Yambio to Juba for a NGO peace conference related to the conflict in South Sudan; he would not be returning until after I left. It was then that I was introduced to Jeremiah who would be our translator and assist with anything I needed.

*Below:* Compound where Nzoro was acquired. He is in the background with the children.

*Below Left:* Kiri's sister.

*Bottom:* Nzoro and Kiri resting in the shade of the tukul in Nzara.



After breakfast, we traveled south to Sakure which is near the border with the DRC. A road block at the end of town, due to the presence of a SPLA (South Sudan Army) base further along the road, prevented us from getting to the border. Here we visited two different compounds. There were several adults at the first compound but no puppies. In the next compound there was one two-month old female puppy and one male puppy with a bad leg. According to the locals, there were very few dogs in the area because fewer people were keeping or raising dogs.

The next day we traveled to the west on the Ndormo Road. The road was not in as good of condition as the road to Sakure, slowing travel, but we saw more puppies than the previous day. At the first stop there were two puppies and one adult, all having white collars. One puppy had masking on its body and both had dark hairs on their tails. At this point, I discovered I had left my South Sudanese Pounds behind so we had to drive back. Luckily, it was not far to return to the church. Setting out again, we continued

past our initial stop so I could see what else was available. At the next location, we saw three adults and four puppies. I was especially interested in the two female puppies and in the end I purchased one. I named her Kiri, which means "palm bell" in Azande. Jeremiah informed me later that the family, from whom I purchased Kiri, really needed money to pay for their daughter's care in the hospital and my purchase of Kiri provided them the funds. We continued on to Basukangbi and stopped there. We walked to a compound a distance from the road, where we had been told there was an available puppy. It turned out he was a 3 month old male puppy. I was hoping to get a male, as well, and decided to purchase him. I gave him the name Nzoro which means "bell" in Azande. During both days of searching for puppies, I only saw red and white colorations. That evening, after purchasing Kiri and Nzoro, I emailed Dr. Alex Mugisa in Kampala so that he could generate transit papers for the dogs to pass through the border to Uganda.



*Above Left* : Map of my trip.

*Above*: Adult seen at Sakure, just south of Nzara near the DRC border.

*Far Right*: Female puppy seen in Sakure.

*Right*: Dr. Alex with Nzoro and Kiri.



*Right:* Tricolor dog seen before Maridi town, near where Lady Helen Nutting acquired her dogs.

*Below:* Hunter alongside the road on the way to Juba from Maridi.



The following day was Friday and we took the puppies to Yambio to get certificates allowing them to travel. We went to a vet clinic and they directed us to the State Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperatives, and Environment offices. They inspected Kiri and Nzoro but could not complete the document immediately; they had to print them so they told us to come back in the afternoon. After lunch at the Tourist Hotel, we returned to the Ministry; I paid the fee and received the completed, signed documents.

Sunday was my last day in Nzara. Jeremiah offered to help me find some dog bells before I left. He started calling various contacts on his mobile phone and learned of a man that had some bells. We drove out and I was able to purchase three palm bells. At this time, I was becoming concerned about the transit papers for the dogs because I had not received an email from Dr. Alex since contacting him on Thursday.

On Monday, we decided to leave very early (4 a.m.) because the drive to Juba took so long. The sun rose just before we got to the area where Lady Helen Nutting acquired her Basenjis and I saw a few red and white dogs and one very nice tri-color. Further along, we saw a hunter with a bow and arrow and his two dogs alongside the road. At around 10 a.m. the vehicle started hiccupping and then died. Hassan took a look under the hood to no avail. We could see a semi-truck parked further up the road; Hassan went up the road and came back with the truck drivers. They also took a look, however the engine would turn but it would not fire. We decided to push the vehicle to where the other truck was parked. Luckily, the vehicle had died just outside of Mambe. When it became apparent we would not be traveling further, we found there was a hotel with available accommodations. Hassan called the tour company and they dispatched a mechanic, who, after I asked, would pick up the transit documents for the dogs from Dr. Alex's vet office. The mechanic had to travel by bus from Kampala (Uganda) to the



*Left: Nzoro, Kiri, and I in front of the tukul, the hut where I slept in Nzara.*

*Below: Kiri today living in Seattle.*



border at Kaya, where he then hired a “boda boda” (motorcycle) to take him to us. The following evening, Tuesday, the mechanic arrived and determined the glow plug and computer were not working. He did not have the parts needed for the repair, so the tour company dispatched two guys in a car to come up.

The following evening they arrived, replaced the parts, and we decided to head South to the border. We traveled at night, which is not recommended. At Yei, we became lost looking for the road to the border and were stopped by soldiers. They asked us to get out of the vehicle; the soldiers inspected us, our documents, and the vehicles. They decided our story of trying to reach the border was valid and gave us directions to the road to the border. We arrived in Kaya at the South Sudan/Uganda border before sunrise where we then had to wait until it was opened. There was a lot of waiting, on both sides, to get the paperwork (and to grease one palm) to cross the border with the dogs. It took all day to arrive back in Kampala;

in the evening, I again stayed at Red Chilli. By this time I had missed my flight, so I rebooked for the flight for the next day.

After breakfast, I left Red Chilli in a hired car and stopped at Vetluc Clinic. I was hoping to meet with Dr. Alex before leaving Kiri and Nzoro at the vet for their 30 day quarantine. Dr. Alex was out on a call and did not return until I was just about to leave for the airport; it was hard to leave the puppies behind.

A week before the puppies were to travel to the U.S., Nzoro came down with acute hemorrhagic gastroenteritis. Even with treatment, he died. Kiri never showed any signs of illness. The following week she flew from Entebbe (Uganda) to Amsterdam. She missed her connecting flight and stayed overnight at the Pet Hotel at the airport. On April Fool’s Day 2015, Kiri arrived in the U.S. and she has never looked back.