

# VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK – A CHRONOLOGY

1925	Albert National Park is established by Belgium's King Albert I.
1960	Congo becomes independent.
1969	The park is renamed Virunga National Park.
1979	Virunga is designated a world heritage site, at the request of the Congolese government.
1991	Soco International is formed as a subsidiary of Snyder Oil Corporation, USA.
1994	Rwandan genocide. Over 1.5 million Rwandan refugees flee to eastern Congo, including hundreds of thousands into Virunga National Park.
1994	Virunga is classified as a world heritage site in danger by Unesco.
1996	First Congo War begins. Laurent Kabila's forces occupy northeast Congo, including much of Virunga. They go on to take Kinshasa in May 1997 and Kabila becomes president, renaming Zaire the Democratic Republic of Congo.
May 1997	Soco lists on the London Stock Exchange.
August 1998	Second Congo War begins, claiming millions of victims. It formally ends with the establishment of a unity government in 2003.
1999	Patrick Maugein and Rui de Sousa buy a stake in Soco and join the board as chairman and non-executive director respectively.
January 2001	Joseph Kabila becomes President of Congo after his father's assassination.
2003	Shell commits <a href="#">not to explore or pump oil in world heritage sites</a> as does <a href="#">the International Council on Mining and Metals</a>
August 2005	Soco signs an agreement for an offshore oil block in Congo-Brazzaville, its first acquisition in central Africa. A private company set up by a <a href="#">presidential advisor</a> , who as the head of the state oil company <a href="#">oversaw the bidding process for the block, gets a 10% stake in the block</a> .
October 2005	Soco Chairman Maugein and director de Sousa are named in the official inquiry into the Iraqi oil-for-food scandal. Both deny any wrongdoing. The following year Maugein dies and is replaced by de Sousa as chairman.
June–July 2007	Seven mountain gorillas are killed in Virunga in a few weeks. Pictures of villagers carrying the slain silverback Senkwekwe are published around the world.
December 2007	Soco signs a production sharing contract for Block 5 Albertine Graben, over half of which overlaps the Virunga National Park.
August 2008	Emmanuel de Merode, a Belgian conservationist, is nominated Director of Virunga National Park.
June 2010	Soco's production sharing contract for Block 5 is ratified by presidential decree.
July 2010	Regional MP Célestin Vunabandi starts working as a consultant for Soco according to his LinkedIn profile. This lasts until August 2011.
December 2010	The provincial High Court of North Kivu mandates a member of park staff to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by Soco.
2010 – 2011	About 5,000 tourists visit the park, bringing in over \$1 million in 2010 and 2011 combined.

February 2011	The head of the Congolese national parks authority says that a team of Soco officials, accompanied by a local MP "forced" their way into the park. Soco denies forced entry.
March 2011	Congo's environment minister suspends Soco's oil exploration in Block 5 and <a href="#">rejects the company's environmental assessment as "superficial"</a> .
May 2011	Soco signs an agreement with the ICCN under which the national parks authority allows Soco to enter the park. Money is paid directly to Guy Mbayma at the ICCN who coordinates on-the-ground activities, according to the ICCN head.
1 July 2011	The UK Bribery Act enters into force.
September 2011	The Congolese environment ministry gives Soco permission to conduct an aerial survey in Block 5.
2011 – 2012	Activists in the town of Goma opposing oil exploration receive death threats by text message. Three activists flee Goma in fear for several months in 2012.
March 2012	Guy Mbayma, Soco's "focal point" at the national parks authority is filmed undercover telling Virunga rangers that they will be paid "money, money, money" if they support oil exploration and will be fired if they don't.
March 2012	Activists and traditional chiefs gather in Vitshumbi and "condemn any exploration and... any production of <a href="#">oil in the middle of Virunga</a> ".
1 April 2012	A pro-oil counter-demonstration is held in Vitshumbi. Afterwards Soco agents hand local organisations envelopes saying, "Don't say oh, Soco sent money".
4 April 2012	Former rebels mutiny from the Congolese army and begin the M23 rebellion.
15 April 2012	Tourism and gorilla trekking in Virunga is halted due to the conflict.
13 June 2012	Soco's operations supervisor and a subcontractor are filmed undercover in Goma by Mélanie Gouby for a documentary, <i>Virunga</i> . The subcontractor says Soco's oil operation has paid money to rebels. Lechenault responds by saying payments aren't made directly. "That's why we subcontract that shit," he says. Soco has denied paying rebels.
15 June 2012	Members of the naval force guarding a Soco team stab a Virunga ranger in the ankle, according to a ranger present. Soco says "we are in no way responsible for the reported incident".
July 2012	A study by the International Crisis Group warns that major oil discoveries in eastern Congo " <a href="#">would exacerbate deep-rooted conflict dynamics</a> ".
6 July 2012	Unesco's World Heritage Committee calls on the Congolese government to "revise its authorisations and <a href="#">not to grant new authorisations for petroleum and mining exploration and exploitation</a> " in Virunga.
20 July 2012	Soco increases its stake in Block 5 to 85%.
September 2012	<a href="#">"The UK opposes oil exploration within Virunga"</a> , says the British Foreign Office. It urges Congo to "fully respect" international conventions it has signed.
20 November 2012	M23 capture the regional capital, Goma, and hold it until 2 December.
29 November 2012	The Belgian parliament passes a resolution calling for <a href="#">the cancelling of oil rights in Virunga</a> .
13 December 2012	<a href="#">The European Parliament passes a resolution</a> urging the Congolese government to prevent damage to Virunga from oil exploration.

May 2013	<a href="#">Total announces that it will not seek to explore for oil in Virunga</a> in its Block 3. In February 2014 Total announces a "no-go" policy on world heritage sites.
May 2013	Major Feruzi, Soco's military liaison officer, tries to bribe a senior Virunga ranger – Rodrigue Katembo – to spy on de Merode, the head of the park. He suggests that the ranger meets Soco's security contractors, SSC.
4 June 2013	<a href="#">German parliament passes a motion</a> expressing concern about possible oil exploration in Virunga National Park.
July 2013	Major Feruzi introduces the senior Virunga ranger to Pieter Wright of SSC, describing him as "my boss". The three men discuss finding reliable rangers to collaborate with Soco. The ranger is handed an envelope with \$50, with Wright saying it is "just to say thank you".
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July 2013	A member of Nyakakoma fishermen's committee – site of Soco's base camp – is arrested, reportedly on the orders of Major Feruzi, <a href="#">shortly before he was due to speak</a> about oil.
September 2013	<a href="#">WWF files a complaint against Soco</a> alleging that the company has "violated multiple provisions of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises". <sup>148</sup> Soco disputes the allegations.
September 2013	An activist with a local human rights group is arrested by navy officials for allegedly taking photographs of Soco's camp in Nyakakoma
September 2013	After opposing the construction of a communications antenna, park ranger Rodrigue Katembo is arrested, threatened and beaten by government security forces supportive of Soco before being held without charge for 17 days. <a href="#">Soco denied any involvement</a> , although its statement quoted its ally Guy Mbayma justifying the arrest.
November 2013	The M23 is defeated in a Congolese army offensive backed by the UN. Heavy fighting in and around the park.
February 2014	Virunga reopens to tourists.
15 April 2014	<a href="#">Emmanuel de Merode is shot</a> in an attempted assassination. He had submitted a report on Soco's activities to the public prosecutor in Goma earlier in the day.
17 April 2014	Feature-length documentary Virunga premieres at Tribeca Film Festival in New York, featuring undercover footage of Soco employees and supporters in Congo.
April 2014	Threatening text messages are sent to local activists in Goma. One says, "Don't think that if we missed your Director [de Merode] that we will also miss you".
April 2014	Soco starts six weeks of seismic testing in Lake Edward, inside Virunga.
May 2014	WWF say two of its staff in Goma <a href="#">have received death threats</a> .
11 June 2014	<a href="#">Soco issues a joint statement with WWF</a> . The company says it would cease oil operations in Virunga unless Unesco and the Congolese government agree that they "are not incompatible with World Heritage status". WWF withdraws its OECD complaint. <a href="#">A Global Witness statement</a> says Soco's announcement <a href="#">could be a ruse</a> .