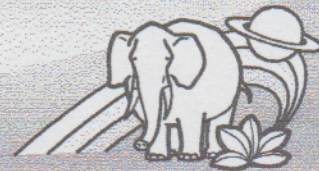


# Gorilla Lady



There was a split second of warning screams and roars. Then, the gorillas, an enormous adult male and female, began their attack. Dian Fossey could feel the ground shake as the two charging beasts came close. When they were less than two feet (61 cm) away and she could clearly see their long, yellow canine teeth, Fossey dove. She dove into foliage. The foliage was a thick, dense tangle of plant and tree leaves.

The gorillas were running too fast to stop. They thundered past. Fossey said later that she was fortunate they did not return, as it took her just a second to dive into the dense foliage but at least 15 minutes to get out of it! Fossey was a primatologist. A primatologist studies primates. Primates are a group of mammals. All apes and monkeys are primates.



*Dian Fossey*

Through her early encounters, or meetings, with gorillas, Fossey learned how to observe gorillas safely. She would crouch low to the ground. She would not look a gorilla directly in the eye. She would let a gorilla know she was close by humming a certain way. This way the risk of startling a gorilla with a surprise encounter was greatly lessened. She would move slowly. She would let gorillas touch her, but she would never touch one first.

Fossey was the first person to do detailed studies of gorillas. By living in the wilds with them, she was able to make detailed observations. She counted them. She recorded them. She learned to recognize different family members. She observed how they behaved and what they did. She learned that they are not vicious or wicked beasts. They are shy, timid, gentle giants that eat mostly plants.

Fossey studied mountain gorillas in the Virunga Mountains. The Virunga Mountains are in Rwanda. Rwanda is a country in Africa. Unfortunately, Rwanda could not control poaching. A poacher is someone who hunts on someone else's land. Poachers were responsible for many gorilla deaths. Fossey did her best to defend the gorillas against poachers. Fossey saved many gorillas, but sadly, she was killed by poachers in 1985.