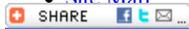


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Tanzania Mesh/Terrain/Objects

For FSX Published by OpenVFR

Reviewed by **Tim Arnot**

August 2011

Introduction

OpenVFR produces general scenery enhancement products that cover large parts of Europe, and smaller parts of Africa, South and North America. However, unlike the massive area products, such as Ultimate Terrain, which cover (say) the whole of Europe for quite a large price, OpenVFR splits their scenery into smaller country-sized blocks, and further splits those blocks onto scenery types -- terrain, mesh, and objects. This results in a larger number of products to buy and download, but has the advantage that each separate product is cheap, and you only need get the areas you are particularly interested in.

This review covers one particular country in Africa: Tanzania, and consists of three products: Mesh, Terrain and Objects.

Features

Terrain: Landclass and vector data. 'Landclass' is short for 'land classification'. It defines how land is used, e.g. forest, jungle, savannah, arable crops, urban, city, industrial etc. It is important to note that landclass just covers the classification data, it doesn't include the textures that are drawn to represent it (those are provided by FS). 'Vector data' essentially means all the drawn features that you see on the ground overlaying the textures. These include roads, railways, rivers, streams, lakes and coastlines. These data have been drawn from OpenStreetMap.org, which is a public repository for geographic mapping data.

Note: Roll mouse over to see the default scenery



Mesh: Mesh is essentially the chicken wire that all the textures and terrain are draped over. It defines the form of the land - mountains and valleys, how high they are, how steep, how jagged or pointy and so on. The defining feature for a mesh is its resolution. This is a number that basically indicates how far apart the sample points are. This mesh is 75m. You will sometimes see mesh referred to as "DEM". This is simply an acronym that stands for Digital Elevation Mesh.

It is important to know that FSX will always use the highest resolution mesh that is installed, regardless of quality. So if you already

have a mesh installed for Tanzania that is better than 75m, FS will always use that instead of this one, and so you might need to reconsider the purchase of this mesh. (I don't believe there actually is a higher resolution mesh at this time, but one day...)



Objects: These are things like lighthouses, windfarms, communication masts, power stations etc, that will be placed around the countryside. They are placed as individual objects, rather than autogen, which means that they are controlled by your Scenery Complexity slider, and not by the Autogen Density slider. This also means there is a nice easy way to spot them -- turn your autogen right down, and they will remain visible.

Download and Install

For complete coverage of Tanzania, you need all three products. In order to download them, you are given a link, which requires you to log in to your store account. Once you have downloaded the files, it is recommended that you unzip them to a temporary location before proceeding further.

Once you've unzipped the files, you can simply copy the folder tree into your main Flight Simulator folder. You will then need to add entries for the scenery into your scenery library, but the process is simple, and clearly described in the pdf manual. Although this may seem a little cumbersome the first time you do it, it will pay dividends if you buy and install moreOpenVFR scenery, since it all installs into the same folders, and the process then becomes simply unzip-copy-done.



Geography

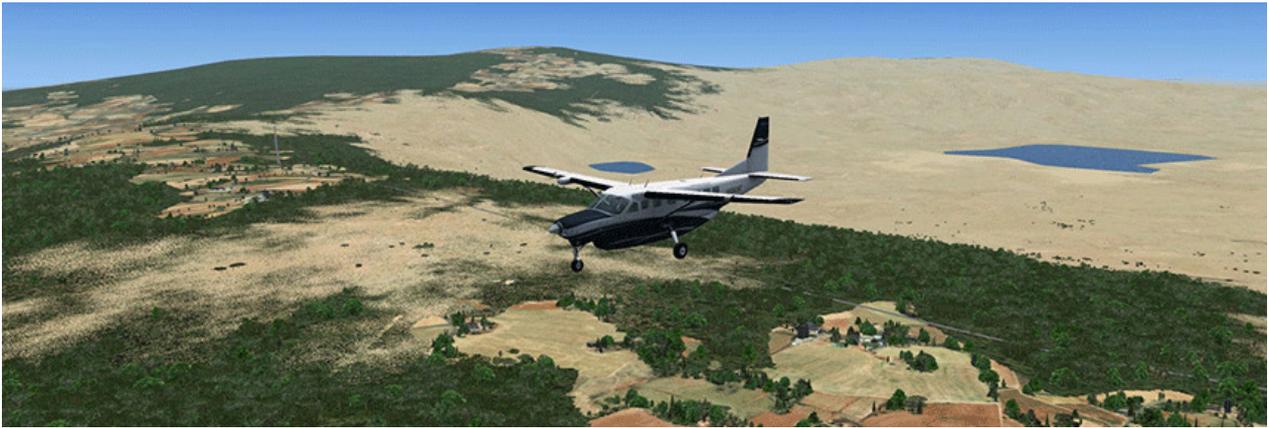
Tanzania, or to give it its full title, the United Republic of Tanzania, was formed in 1964 with the uniting of the states of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. It is situated on the East coast of Africa, with Kenya to the North and Mozambique to the South. It also shares borders with Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, Zambia and Malawi.



Striking features include the African Great Lakes - Nyasa, Tanganyika and Victoria (which is generally considered the source of the Nile), all of which are part of the Great Rift valley system. Mt Kilimanjaro in the North East is the highest mountain in Africa at

19,314ft. The Ngorongoro Crater is the world's largest intact volcanic caldera, and famous as a microcosm of African wildlife. National Parks abound, and the most famous are the Serengeti in the North and Selous in the South.

(Rolling image showing wet season)



Climate ranges from tropical along the coast to temperate on the high flat plateau of the interior. It is South of the equator, and the seasons are Wet and Dry. the wet season is December to April.



Safari

Seeing as it's Africa, and Africa is famous for its safaris, it struck me that the best way of seeing the scenery would be to mount a safari and fly around the country. And so I started in the commercial centre of tanzania, Dar es Salaam, initially following the coast and then heading into the interior.

You can follow the trip in the forums here: <http://forum.mutleyshangar.com/index.php/topic/6360-tanzania-safari/> and the flight plans are available in the Download Centre if you wish to fly the trip yourself.



Overall Impressions

The most striking improvement comes from the mesh. Entire systems of hills and valleys appear that simply do not exist in the default scenery, and the whole landscape feels much crisper and better defined. The Ngorongoro Crater, which is little more than a suggestion in the default, is quite spectacular. It makes you want to don your pith helmet, get down there and start hunting the TV Wildlife documentary crews... [ahem!] The only downside is that the default airports have not been adjusted for correct elevation in the new mesh, and consequently you'll find some that are perched precariously on high mesas and others buried in trenches. Developer tools

to correct these issues have been available for some time now, and it's not a hard job to fix them.



Terrain also showed a good improvement, particularly with lakes, rivers and coastlines, all of which showed significantly better detail. There are some quite large lakes that simply do not exist in the default scenery, and here they are all present and correct. The terrain and mesh are well blended together, with the lakes and rivers sitting flush to the ground. (some other mesh addons leave the lakes and rivers on high cliffs, which looks really bad.) The landclass showed improvements, particularly around the major population centres, although further away from these the improvement was noticeably less, presumably because accurate survey data simply isn't available for these areas. A striking inaccuracy in the landclass is that it completely removes the snow cap from the top of Mt Kilimanjaro.

There were a few places where the mesh and terrain didn't quite gel, the coast of Lake Nyasa being the most striking example.

Objects unfortunately were few and far between. So few in fact that I find it hard to recommend spending the money, even at the reduced price of €3.99. When you do come across them, they are perfectly good masts, power stations, towers etc. but, frankly, with the autogen cranked up to anything above sparse, unless you know exactly where they are, I very much doubt you'll even notice them.

The OpenVFR products do not include replacement ground textures, and as a result you still see the default FSX desert textures, which seem to plague much of the world. However there is another product which may help, in the form of GTX Africa, which is a texture replacement addon. I have to stress that I haven't tried it, but it could well be an ideal companion to OpenVFR, in the same way that it acts as a companion to Ultimate Terrain in Europe and the U.S.





Review Extra

Download the flight plans for the Tanzania Adventure [here](#) (Zip File)



Verdict

The terrain and mesh work very well together on the whole, the only real niggles being the default airport elevations and the missing snow from Mt Kilimanjaro.

And so the scores:

OpenVFR Mesh: 9.0

OpenVFR Terrain: 8.5

OpenVFR Objects 6.0

Overall Mutley's Hangar score: 8.0/10



Tim Arnot

Review machine Spec: Core i7-965 O/C to 3.8GHz | 6Gb Tri-Channel DDR3 Ram | GTX280 1GB into a TripleHead2Go @ 5040 x 1050 |
Windows 7 64bit

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