

All, I think, benefited from the meets, a considerable proportion have continued climbing on their own and several, indeed, have in various ways been very active in teaching others to climb.

This kind of small course which takes the University club meet as its model has, I believe, certain advantages over the larger, more highly organised course. In the first place, the whole thing is entirely voluntary and informal, an enormous attraction to the layman which is of necessity unattainable in a semi-military organisation and which, I believe, greatly increases its value. Secondly, a small course is less costly, easier to organise and to accommodate. Thirdly, it offers a solution to the difficulty of providing sufficient leaders. Some of those trained on earlier meets become available as instructors later, and, provided the training is sound, a good tradition can be established as in a club. This snowball effect has already shown itself in several ways. Fourthly, with intensive training of this kind adequate basic training can be given in most cases in no more than a week. I am by no means certain that it is even desirable to give more. Beyond that, it is surely better to leave each to find his own way as much as possible.

G. A. DUMMETT.

RUWENZORI : MOUNT GESSI REVISITED

By P. H. HICKS

IN the May issue of the JOURNAL, R. M. Bere has given an account of a trip during which, among other things, we explored with Dr. Ladkin the Portal peaks from the W. After many distressing wades through cold bogs and much tunnelling through wet vegetation, and with many and interminable waits for fogs to lift, we completed a map of about 50 square miles, which included the whole group of the Portal peaks. In the footnote to his account, Bere mentions the apparent variance in the position, and even the number, of the main peaks as shown on maps then existing. In plotting the results of my survey, I now discovered that not only were there three main peaks (Kihuma, 14,640 ft. ; Middle Portal, 14,420 ft. ; and Rutara, 14,200 ft.), but that they appeared to have shifted their axis considerably to the E. of their hitherto accepted positions. This secretly gave me considerable misgivings and damped my first ingenuous joy over the map.

It was with no little excitement that I now discovered another ten days' leave to be possible, and immediately arranged plans to go up Ruwenzori again with C. P. S. Allen and R. N. Posnett, both of the Uganda Administration. Both Allen and Posnett disclaimed climbing experience and we decided therefore that Mt. Gessi (15,647 ft.) would be an admirable objective. The Duke of the Abruzzi dismissed in a few lines as one of no great difficulty his ascent in 1906 (*Ruwenzori*, by Filippi), and while not suffering the party's capabilities to be

strained too much, we could make the ascent of one of the major peaks of Ruwenzori and at the same time I could get the check on to the Portal peaks which I so sorely needed. The two main peaks of Mt. Gessi, Iolanda and Bottego (the lower), are roughly three quarters of a mile apart, and their positions on the map have been fixed fairly accurately. If observations could be made from each peak on to the main peaks of the Portal range, the intersections from each end of this natural base line would therefore be sufficient to check the positions of the Portal peaks as ascertained in June. An additional attraction, if one were necessary, was the fact that as far as was known Bottego peak had not been climbed since the first ascent by the Duke of the Abruzzi in 1906. Iolanda peak was climbed for the second time by Dr. Noel Humphreys in 1932, but in his account of the ascent in the *Geographical Journal* he does not mention ascending Bottego.

There appeared to exist only one photograph of Mt. Gessi, and that was a small print in Filippi's *Ruwenzori* showing the western aspect. I could not find any photograph published by Dr. Humphreys, and choice of a route was therefore left to be decided on arrival at the mountain. This turned out to be not an altogether wise, if unavoidable decision for Ruwenzori. We decided to go up the Mugusu valley for purposes of survey, and make the attempt on Gessi by much the same line of ascent as the Duke of the Abruzzi. As Allen and Posnett had more time available, they were to precede me by several days and make a camp at the head of the Mugusu valley, at which I would join them by travelling light and marching double stages. On the day that they left, irrevocably beyond any sort of communication, a gleeful tonsillitis germ lodged in my throat and put me to bed with a rising temperature. Visiting the nearest medical officer, twenty miles from where I was staying at the time, I begged for a miracle, and the germ was roundly assaulted with M. and B. tablets ; but a dismal prediction was made that I would be unable even so much as to get out of bed until the very day of rendezvous with Posnett and Allen on Mt. Gessi. Picturing their consternation, and possible anxiety, at my non-arrival I realised that a special effort was necessary and gratefully accepted a bag of M. and B. tablets, lay for two dreary days eating the horrible white pills and then on the third drove to Fort Portal. Very early on the next day, with two Bakonjo porters I started up the mountain from Bugoye. As time was getting short we trebled the daily stages marched, and to my immense satisfaction and relief reached the camp in the Mugusu valley at darkness on the day of rendezvous. The tonsillitis germ had by now given up the struggle, leaving me with the doubtful advantage of an M. and B. hangover.

Allen and Posnett had arrived two days previously, travelling slowly as the latter was recovering from a bout of malaria. They had reconnoitred as far as the Roccati pass, which lies between Mts. Emin and Gessi, but owing to a prevalent low lying mist had been unable to get a view of the W. slopes of Mt. Gessi. The camp was set up in the shelter of a rock overhang, evidently an old camp site, as a charred



Photo, P. H. Hicks]

IOLANDA PEAK (15,647 FT.).

bamboo peg indicated. There was no other evidence to show who might have used the shelter before, but we imagined that it might quite possibly be an old camp site of the Duke of the Abruzzi. It was in the approximate position of one of the Duke's bivouacs in the Mijusi valley. We spent the rest of the evening inside the tent discussing plans and comparing our states of health, while a thin rain drizzled down mournfully on the tent. The strength of the party was temporarily two invalids and one effective.

On the next day we left camp soon after dawn and cut a way up above the camp. It was a steep slope covered with dense wet *Helichrysum* and a rending wind slapped our wet clothes around us. We were numb with cold when we reached the crest of the main S. ridge of Iolanda at about 13,800 ft. The wind poured over the crest in a solid stream of cold, and here we left the three Bakonjo who had helped in cutting a path up to this point, instructing them to light an enormous beacon fire for our return. As we started up the ridge and looked back, we could see three huddled figures blowing feebly at a small bundle of sodden branches and then very despondently gathering their clothes around them and moving off silently down the mountain. The ridge was a long one, but did not rise very much up to the foot of the Iolanda ice cap. There was no mountaineering difficulty, but it took five hours from this point to an altitude of about 14,500 ft. at the foot of the main peak. Conditions had gradually worsened as we progressed until by the time we halted a dense white fog covered us, and the signs of an incipient snow blizzard appeared. We stopped at the foot of a steep snow-covered slope which rose above the point where the S. ridge abutted on the main peak. On the one side was a very steep ice slope falling downwards to the head of the West Bukurungu valley, and on the other a fairly steep glacier whose lower limits could not be made out in the thickening mist. By the time we had eaten a small meal and roped up, the visibility had grown impossibly bad and snow was now blowing over us very thickly. In view of the lateness, the bad weather and the unknown qualities of the route ahead, we decided to abandon further progress and rather disconsolately returned whence we came. As it grew towards darkness we arrived at the point on the ridge where we should turn westwards to the Mugusu valley, but for an aggravating time we floundered in thick *Helichrysum* trying to decide which was the correct valley. Coming by accident on scraps of chocolate paper, our doubts were resolved and we pushed our way down through the thick bush back to camp.

For reasons that now escape me this long and tiresome approach to Iolanda dissatisfied us so thoroughly that on the following day we moved camp further up the valley towards the Roccati pass. It was a drizzly day with low mist on the mountain. Drawing lots for the job, we left Allen plunged to the elbows in flour making a reserve supply of chapatties for bivouacs, and Posnett and I left for a reconnaissance of the Iolanda Glacier approach. Allen declared himself to be perfectly happy, as he both felt tired and had discovered that a painless

dry-clean is one of the virtues of chapattie making. Posnett and I meanwhile made our way up to the Roccati pass but could still get no view of the mountain, though we located in the mist the snout of the Iolanda Glacier up which the Duke's party made the first ascent. In our plans to follow this route we had reckoned without the intervening passage of time and the drying up processes now apparently taking place on East African peaks, for the glacier had retreated up a steep narrow gully leaving ugly wet walls of smooth steep rock, which looked so evil in the few glimpses we obtained through the mist that we unhesitatingly decided to make camp nearby and choose an alternative route.

The next day dawned fine and clear as we got out of the tents and looked at the cliffs above the camp. A fringe of green cliffs 500 ft. high runs in a band along the W. side of the mountain, and being just below the permanent snow line these cliffs have a glutinous green cover of moss and slime characteristic at this level of all the Ruwenzori mountains. We climbed up the frozen moss-covered face slowly and cautiously, and as it steepened considerably above our precautions redoubled. Each handhold had to be delved through several inches of frozen moss adhering lightly to the rock face, and we progressed like ungainly crabs, clutching at fronds on the rock. We reached the top at a little before midday and lunched at the foot of the Iolanda Glacier, but the ignominious climb had tired me out, with M. and B. effects lurking in my system, and I had to call off the day. We retreated down the cliff in brilliant sunshine which did indescribable damage to our few frozen moss holds, and the descent was only achieved by a series of sliding *rappels*. We reached the bottom of the cliffs completely covered with black muddy slime. That day was markedly an off day.

We returned to our first camp site, with the intention of going to the West Bukurungu valley on the other side of the mountain, and next morning we were fully packed and ready to move when we noticed quite by chance a subsidiary and unexplored hanging valley running up to the Iolanda Glacier, and decided to examine its possibilities before leaving. The valley ended disappointingly, however, in the same layer of moss covered cliff, and faint-hearted though it seemed we shirked another attempt. Anyone who has read Tilman's account of these mossy slabs in *Snow on the Equator* will reach a sympathetic understanding. We hastened back to our ready packed loads and at a little after midday set off along the Mijusi valley and southwards round the foot of the mountain. It was another gloriously sunny day, and there were even patches of dusty bracken to negotiate further down. The valley seemed very dried up in places, an almost incredible phenomenon on Ruwenzori.

We reached a good camp site beside the West Bukurungu stream near woods of giant heath, the whole forming a vast amphitheatre overlooking the Portal peaks which appeared to run from N. to S. in a long ridge, cutting off the view to the plains below. It was very pleasant to return to such idyllic surroundings, with warm sunshine and brilliant



Photo, P. H. Hicks.]

UMBERTO PEAK OF MOUNT EMIN (15,754 FT.). ROCCATI PASS TO THE RIGHT.

flowers and a dry crackling fire, and rearing up here and there the uncouth outlines of giant groundsel. It froze hard in the night, but we slept on a thick bed of bracken fronds and only stirred next day when the sun had warmed up the tent. We entered the West Bukurungu valley and approached the main S. ridge of Iolanda again, this time on its E. flank. One of the older porters wished to take us to Dr. Humphreys' old camp site at the head of the valley, but we found it possible to reach the top of the ridge by a simple route, and eventually pitched a tent on a sloping rock ledge under the crest. From the crest we could see our route to the summit, and returning to the bivouac, which we levelled off with armfuls of bracken, we made an early meal and settled in for the night.

Before dawn the next day we left the camp, and made our way along the S. ridge without difficulty, using a hurricane lamp until the sun came up. We arrived at the foot of the Iolanda ice cap at 8.30 A.M. The sky was overcast and a thick mist surrounded us as we breakfasted. Roping up, we started up the steep snow-covered slope and found it just possible to kick steps in the hard crust. On reaching the top we found ourselves on the summit ridge, as it seemed, although we could not see very much, and following the line of this we ascended and descended one or two rock towers. The slopes on the western side descended steeply to the Iolanda Glacier below.

Finally we climbed through the mist to the summit of a shattered rock peak and found ourselves looking on a stone cairn covered with ancient lichen. It was the Duke of the Abruzzi's 'stone man', built on the occasion of the first ascent, and is shown in the panorama taken by him on the summit of Mt. Gessi. The top of the cairn has now been blown down. We searched for records but found none, and while we were on the summit the mist suddenly began to disperse, and within a quarter of an hour we were standing in bright sunshine with clouds scattering away from one great peak after another. It was a magnificent spectacle, eventually the whole range of peaks from Mt. Baker to Mt. Emin being visible. Is Ruwenzori a range or a mountain? To me the question was answered by the view we saw from the top of Gessi, but this is a heretic opinion as the matter has been debated in more than one learned society, decreeing Ruwenzori to be a mountain.

While the atmosphere was clear I took sights on the Portal peaks, and after taking a round of photographs, we started packing up to go to Bottego peak. As we were moving off, the drone of an aeroplane grew loud, and we gazed with expectancy to the E. A huge bank of advancing cloud was between us and the sound of the aeroplane, and after a few moments the noise receded and went. An airline operates between Uganda and the Congo, and the pilots frequently fly in near Ruwenzori. The sound of the engine was an extraordinary introduction of outside contacts in our isolated position. To picture civilised beings in business suits and reclining armchairs being wafted through the air at roughly the same altitude and so near us seemed to cancel the inaccessibility of the place at a stroke. Yet in a few moments more

the sound had gone and Ruwenzori seemed as remote as ever. The thread of civilisation and modern communications runs very thinly through parts of Africa.

We went along the ridge between Iolanda and Bottego, reaching the latter peak at midday. It was a precarious summit of huge shattered boulders, and on the highest point four or five stones were piled together. After hurriedly taking sights on the Portal peaks before the cloud banks submerged them, I looked again at the spectacle of all the peaks visible together. Mt. Emin was a sharp clear cut picture across the valley, and to the N. we could see the long sinuous ridge of Ruwenzori dropping slowly to the Semliki flats and Lake Albert, losing its outlines in the softening contours of its own dense forests. We left Bottego regretfully. On both peaks we were able to bask in warm sunshine, and two lazy unforgettable hours were spent on these remote summits. From a spectator's standpoint we could not have been better placed to view the whole of Ruwenzori, and that it should have cleared so completely on our arrival was a gift from fortune which we did not waste.

We returned along the ridge and back to Iolanda, then down the S. slopes to the ridge, where we stopped to boil some tea. Here the mist closed in again densely and quietly and remained around us as we regained our bivouac. We made more tea and then took the tent and loads down to our previous camp on the West Bukurungu stream. In the next two days we returned uneventfully to the foot of the mountain and back to Fort Portal.

The ascent of Gessi described is not an outstanding mountaineering achievement. The route has no difficulties whatsoever, though the selection of the right line of approach up the lower slopes is of first importance to avoid entanglement with dense wet vegetation and the unmentionable mossy cliffs. From the summit, Gessi appears to be much broken up on the E., particularly overlooking the Lamia upper valley. The view here is one from the Welsh hills, with barren loose rock gullies dropping to the valley. The approach up this side should be quite simple once the Lamia valley is reached, and it appears that the eastern flank of the mountain is relatively snowfree as compared with the glaciated western slopes.