KILIMANJARO

By D. L. BUSK

It is some time since anything appeared in the Journal on Kilimanjaro, and the A.C. may be glad to have some information about present conditions, facilities and costs. There is, of course, little real mountaineering on Kibo, but Mawenzi presents serious problems. The Mountain Club of East Africa publish some hints to climbers, and copies should be available in the hotels at the foot, the managers of which are aware that they can be obtained from the Club.

Kilimanjaro is a vast mountain mass rising from the plateau of East Africa on the border between Kenya and Tanganyika. At the 5,000 ft. level, where the main upsurge of the mountain can be said to begin, it is some forty miles from east to west and thirty from north to south. For comparison it is less than twenty-five miles from the Col du Bonhomme to the Col de Balme and the Mont Blanc range is far narrower. It is some forty-five miles from Mont Blanc to the Matterhorn. One tends to look at Kilimanjaro on small-scale maps of Africa and I must confess to being, quite unreasonably, surprised by the scale of the mountain after I had been walking up it for three days.

At about 10,000 ft. during the 'walk in' Kilimanjaro partially discloses its two characteristic and utterly different summits. Only at the Saddle (about 14,000 ft.) is the whole revealed on the third day. The higher summit, Kibo, is then still an immense mass, the scale of which is very difficult to grasp. At the 15,000 ft. level it is five miles across and it culminates in a crater with an almost level rim and a diameter of a mile and a half at over 19,000 ft.

The secondary summit, Mawenzi, is six miles to the east of the top of Kibo. It is a two-mile long ridge running roughly N.N.W.–S.S.E. and rising to nearly 17,000 ft. The ridge is composed of a series of teeth divided by deep notches out of which spring some smaller *aiguilles* so sheer and stark that in more 'civilised' regions they would be major objectives.

Unlike Kibo, which presents few difficulties unless they are deliberately sought, no climb on Mawenzi is easy and some must be exceptionally severe, though short (at most 2,000 ft. of actual climbing). I do not know of any complete record of climbs on Mawenzi and it would be a formidable task to compile one. Many ascents were made in bad weather when poor visibility prevented parties from ascertaining with certainty which peak they had climbed. (One of the few really competent parties to visit Kilimanjaro recently—from Geneva—merely noted in the record 'one of the peaks of Mawenzi'.)

As I was alone there was no question of attempting Mawenzi, which in any case does not much attract me, as the rock is notoriously

deciduous and the whole ridge rises from a purgatory of untracked scree some 2,000 ft. high. However, the approach march to both summits is by the same series of huts,[1] so the remarks below can be of assistance to parties aiming at either Kibo or Mawenzi. All the six or seven major summits have, I think, now been attained, but the east face of the mountain remains virgin, despite several vigorous assaults by Arthur Firmin. The *aiguilles* also await their first visitors.

The only good large-scale map of the massif known to me is the unfortunately unpublished one of the *Schweizerische Stiftung für Alpine Forschungen* on a scale of 1 : 250,000. This covers Kilimanjaro and also Meru, another extinct volcano forty miles to the west of Kibo and entirely distinct from it. Meru is well over 15,000 ft., but has no glaciers or permanent snow. Inset in this map is one on a scale of 1 : 100,000 covering Kibo and Mawenzi down to about the 10,000 ft. level. The map is contoured and in its present form in monochrome. Anyone contemplating a visit to Kilimanjaro would be wise to ask the Foundation to supply a copy. All heights must be accepted with the utmost reserve for the simple reason that no complete, modern and accurate survey of the whole massif has yet been made. The *Bulletin* of the Mountain Club of Kenya for March, 1953, quotes the Department of Lands and Surveys of Tanganyika as having assigned 19,340 ft. to Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze, the highest point on the rim of Kibo. This computation is based on new observations. The crater rim (? at its lowest point) is said to be 19,200 ft.[2] In the early days Kibo had been given over 20,000 ft. (perhaps in the faint hope of attracting British mountaineers to such a memorable altitude); later it was given 6,010 m. = 19,718 ft. (in the more confident hope that continental mountaineers could claim a 'six thousander'); now that the poor thing has been reduced to 5,896 m. hardly any seekers after glory will bother with it. The same degradation has befallen Aconcagua, now reduced below 7,000 m.

The new observations reduce Mawenzi to 16,890 ft.; previously the accepted height seems to have been 5,355 m. = 17,569 ft. Margherita in the Ruwenzori at 16,794 ft. is now creeping up to Mawenzi and is far more worth-while, height disregarded. I am glad to say that Mt. Kenya has risen in the world from its previous 17,040 ft. as the result of a new survey.[3] What is surely the grandest mountain in Africa, has been raised to 17,058 ft. Mt. Kenya is unfortunately out of bounds to mountaineers at the moment owing to the activities of Mau Mau.

All mountaineers must hope that in the not too distant future the Department of Lands and Surveys will be able to take time off from

[1] There is a hut (additional to those described below) sleeping four, or six at a pinch, specially placed for Mawenzi. It lies 2½ hours above Peters hut.

There is also another hut above Moshi, Johannes hut, from which Peters hut can be reached next day. I am told, however, that it is in very bad condition and it is next to imposible to find porters to carry from Moshi.

[2] By eye I should have said the difference was considerably greater; perhaps 400 feet.

[3] See *G.J.*, vol. cxx, p. 252.

more urgent jobs to devote to a new and thorough triangulation of Kilimanjaro and all its peaks.

For the ordinary climber the approach to Kilimanjaro is from the south (Tanganyika). It is, of course, possible for properly equipped expeditions with plenty of time to reach the snows from any direction. This might, however, involve cutting a track for days through the belt of rain forest which is nearly as impassable as that in the Ruwenzori, though not generally set at so steep an angle. From the north (Kenya), where the rainfall seems to be less, a major difficulty, according to most of the accounts I have read, is lack of water above 5,000 ft. From the south (Tanganyika) this presents no difficulty as far as the first two huts are concerned.

From the south the usual approach is via Moshi (about 2,750 ft.) or better still, Marangu (about 5,000 ft.). At the latter there are two good hotels catering not only for static visitors, but well-organised for ascents of Kibo, which is a considerable tourist attraction. That is in many ways the trouble—tourists, not mountaineers. We have all seen the same in lower Alpine huts, but in these there is at least usually a rough-tongued hut keeper. Permanent (native) caretakers are not possible on Kilimanjaro. None would accept such an isolated job.

The hotels will engage a native guide, competent at least to reach the crater rim, and porters to carry to the top hut. These are Chagga who carry their loads on their heads. This is feasible on the easy gradients and comparatively clear paths of Kilimanjaro. In the much more difficult Ruwenzori country the Bakonjo porters use a head band, if only because they cannot spare a hand to balance a loose load on the head. The hotels provide food for climbers and porters, cooking utensils and boxes. At a pinch they will lend bedding and even clothing. A minor but important activity is nailing the boots of those who arrive smooth-soled.

The huts are owned and administered in some sort by the Mountain Club.[4] They are locked, but the hotels can obtain the keys.

The first hut above Marangu, Bismarck hut, appears to be situated at about 9,100 ft., though various statements are made ranging from 8,900–10,000 ft. It is a commodious three-roomed building, accommodating at least 16, with (like all the huts) a subsidiary one next door for native guides and porters. In none of the huts are there mattresses, and those who dislike sleeping on bare boards are well advised to bring Lilos or Dunlopillo mattresses. (I favour the latter as weight is no objection.) There is no equipment at all apart from stoves which all smoke and which, when I made the ascent, were seriously broken in various ways. The one at the top hut had a leg off and was precariously

[4] Originally there was a ' Mountain Club of East Africa ' covering Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika. In 1949, however, the ' Mountain Club of Kenya ' and ' Mountain Club of Uganda ' were set up, reasonably enough in view of the vast distances separating Mt. Kenya from the Ruwenzori. The split was facilitated by the remarkable discovery of the lawyers, who reported that this thriving organisation ' had never existed.' The ' Tanganyika Section ' still continues to call itself this. Address : P.O. Box 66, Moshi.

supported by a log of wood. When someone burns this, the stove will presumably have to be upheld in part by an already cracked chimney. A primus is a useful addition to the baggage. There were other maddening deficiencies in the huts. By far the worst in the long run is the lack of provision for garbage disposal ; the surroundings of the top hut in particular are disgusting. There are no mirrors and while not particularly vain myself, I would have welcomed one when greasing my face. Women visitors, who are as numerous as men, feel even more vociferous despite their skill with minute ' vanity ' mirrors. I am told, however, and I can well believe it, that no mirror would survive for a week the depredations of the Chagga, and the same applies to such priceless items as mattresses, which would rapidly be acquired by local hunters. The risk of penalty for ' breaking and entering ' could be ignored with safety. There are no hooks or even nails to hang up clothes and no drying racks over stoves. I advise all comers to do as I did and take a pocket tool kit. With this I pried out a couple of nails at the first hut and with my own string was able to manage comfortably. I carried the two nails from Bismarck to Kibo hut and down, replacing them in their holes ; but really, one does not want to have to be an amateur carpenter when climbing a mountain.

What I have written implies criticism of the Mountain Club. It is therefore only fair to explain the difficulties. The main one is, of course, that the vast majority of the numerous parties attempting the climb are tourists and not mountaineers. I feel confident that, whether from exhaustion or sheer thoughtlessness, they never see to it that their guide and porters clear up before leaving a hut. Nor would they check the casual distribution of rubbish on the surrounding landscape. Nor, again, would they even notice if fitments or equipment vanished. A second difficulty is that, while the Club has adequate funds (for instance, new stoves are waiting at the foot of the mountain to be carried up), it lacks manpower. There are, at most, half-a-dozen members available in the Moshi-Marangu area, some, perhaps, not very active. The work of inspection and control thus falls on one or two devoted persons who must sacrifice much, if not all, of their local leave if they are to be effective. In the Ruwenzori many will be found to do this because they know they are working for mountaineers who appreciate their labours. The ingratitude of tourists and the comments of casual climbers, like myself, are no encouragement. As it happens, both the hotels at Marangu are run by women. It is the hotels, really, that should take over a large part of the burden, if only because the mountain is a rich source of gain to them. A man around the house would be invaluable.

Wood and water are plentiful at Bismarck hut, which is about four hours' walking from Marangu. It is at the upper level of the rain forest and half-an-hour higher one emerges on open moorlands, where for the first time the peaks are visible.

The second hut, Peters hut, appears to be at about 12,500 ft. and sleeps about 12 in comfort in two buildings. It is about four hours'

walking above Bismarck hut, mostly on a long traverse with slight gradients. Water is close by and scrub is available for the stove. As the stoves in all huts are mounted on tin instead of iron sheets, on which blazing fragments fall, the fire hazard is great. The tin soon burns through and at Peters hut a gaping hole in the floor lies under the grate. Native porters cheerfully allow burning faggot ends to fall into this and it was only the more than usual intensity of smoke, which alerted me, when I was going to bed, to the fact that the foundations were smouldering. Two hours of Civil Defence were required to damp the insidious blaze.

The ground above Peters hut steepens slightly to the Saddle (about 14,000 ft.) between Mawenzi and Kibo, where for the first time the two very different peaks can be fully appreciated. From the Saddle, fairly close under Mawenzi, one looks across an almost level lava plain to Kibo, with the Kibo hut discernible at the foot of the final mass. The plain is so much wider than it looks that the unaccustomed eye is continually deceived. It takes about two hours to cross in this direction or about four hours going in all from Peters hut to Kibo hut.

This is a more modest affair with only four board bunks[5] and the usual reeking stove. It is at about 15,000 ft. I found the cold more severe than at a similar height in the Ruwenzori. As the hut is right under the east face of Kibo, the sun leaves it early, shortly after 5 P.M. There is no water (or snow) at Kibo hut, which is a nuisance. Owing to foreshortening and the impressive scale of the mountain it is very difficult to realise that another 4,000 ft. lie above.

Here most parties seem to suffer from mountain sickness, leading to refusal to eat, to headaches and sleeplessness. Few seem to realise how essential it is to force oneself to eat, lest one become enfeebled, nor that aspirin will cope with headaches and that a sleeping tablet will ensure a sound night. Cramp is usually due to salt starvation and is equally easy to prevent.

With gloomy experience of parties that often take many hours to reach the crater rim, the guides like to start at 2 A.M. This seems to me crazy, because it means three or four hours behind a lantern and ensures that the first halt is in shivering darkness. I intended to get off at 4 A.M., but overslept until then. A shout aroused my 'cook-porter' and tea was served to me in my sleeping bag from the petrol primus, a luxury I have never enjoyed in a hut before. I then deigned to rise for porridge and bacon and eggs, served on a table cloth with a napkin placed neatly beside my plate. It was just before five before we left, so I had only an hour of lantern work and our first halt at 7 A.M. was in welcome sunshine, though with a chill wind. This was at the Hans Meyer cave (apparently about 17,500 ft.). The cave provides welcome shelter from the wind and, as it faces due east, accepts the morning sunlight gratefully. Before the top hut was built the cave was used as a bivouac.

[5] There is room for more, but in the six months prior to my visit several had been chopped up by tourists for firewood.

Most parties content themselves with Gillman's Point on the rim, which is invariably referred to in the hut books as ' the top ' or ' the summit,' though it is some way to Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze. Times taken vary enormously. Normally they range from five to eight hours for the 4,000 ft. from Kibo hut. Ten hours is recorded. I took 3 hours 25 minutes going, or 3 hours 50 minutes in all, and learnt later that a Swiss, climbing with my 64-year-old native guide,[6] had taken 2 hours 45 minutes. I expect that he, too, had passed a good night and started well ballasted by a substantial breakfast.

To begin with there is something of a path, but above the cave the going is bad and experience in maintaining a steady tempo and placing the feet carefully counts for much on very fine scree. High up frozen snow can be used with profit. I was reminded of the only other volcano I have climbed—Demavend in far-off Persia. There, too, the scree is abominable, but on Kibo it is like grapenuts compared with Demavend's lump sugar. Kibo is also a few hundred feet higher and the angle is, I think, steeper, though after more than 20 years I would not care to swear to this.

At Gillman's Point the crater is disclosed and Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze is visible. It is impossible to give times for this, because the condition of the snow is paramount. I cannot find that any party has taken less than an hour and much more is usual. I did not seriously attempt it, though the weather was perfect, partly because there was a nasty trap crust which let one through to the knee every third stride and partly because I had very foolishly not brought up enough food from Peters hut to spend two nights at Kibo hut. That meant that we must return to Peters hut that night and I was depressed by the prospect of the long slog across the lava plain and down to Peters. We contented ourselves therefore with movie-photography along the rim for some distance. After returning to Gillman's Point to pick up discarded baggage we ran in giant strides down snow and scree to the Kibo hut in 55 minutes. From here to Peters hut some $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 hours going should be allowed.

Next day we descended via Bismarck hut ($3\frac{1}{4}$ hours going) to the hotel another $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours going). These times compared with those uphill show that it is as much distance as height that presents the difficulty. It is said to be thirty-three miles from the hotel to the top hut, 10,000 ft. higher. I am consumed with admiration for Lt. Hackett, U.S. Army, who in 1950 climbed from the Kibo hut to Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze and descended the same day to the hotel some thirty-five miles away and 15,000 ft. below the summit.

As regards costs the hotels will do all the organising, and, while this is ideal for tourists or those like myself who come from distant parts and have only the minimum personal equipment, it comes expensive.

[6] The guides each have a proper ' book ' supplied by the Mountain Club. They also propose to provide decent badges. This is an admirable idea which the Uganda Club would do well to follow for their ' Headmen ' in the Ruwenzori. I had not expected a ' book ' and did not ask to see it in advance. A party would, I think, be wise to do this—not that much choice of guide is likely in the best seasons.

The charge for a party of three is £17 10*s.* 0*d.* per head for five days and four nights on the mountain. This covers food, guide, porters, porters' food, hut charges, loan of utensils, etc. Everything is, I admit, very well done, but if one could organise one's own properly equipped party it would come much cheaper. The Club, of course, much prefers parties of mountaineers, but obviously, cannot undertake to organise for them.

The basic costs for three mountaineers would be :

	£	*s.*	*d.*
3 × 5 nights in huts	1	10	0
1 guide at 10*s.* 0*d.* × 5	2	10	0
Say 6 porters at 7*s.* 0*d.* × 5	10	10	0
Food for guide and 6 porters (about) . .	3	10	0
Food for 3 climbers (about)	3	15	0
Incidentals including tips to guide and porters	3	5	0
	£25	0	0

or, say, £8 10*s.* 0*d.* per head. Clearly there is a considerable profit margin somewhere.

It should be added that the diligence of the Chagga, combined with the high world price of coffee has produced a well-deserved wave of prosperity in the district. For some time recently it proved almost impossible to attract porters and rates of pay had to be raised 40 per cent. to the present level. An obvious solution to the problem of rising costs would be mule transport, which is perfectly feasible to the top hut, as it is on Mt. Kenya, though not in the Ruwenzori. Indeed, on Kilimanjaro, it would need remarkably little work to run a Landrover track to the top hut. Across the final lava plateau one could even now, in places, touch 50 m.p.h. The Club, hoping desperately for mountaineers as opposed to tourists, is not keen on the idea of vehicles.

Lest anyone be tempted to do without native assistance, I must warn them that the hotels maintain that there is what would appear to be a fantastic rule that the huts may not be used by parties unless they employ a guide (porters are not mentioned). This harks back to the 'seventies, but even at the worst period of anti-Girdlestonism the Alpine Club did not suggest that guideless climbers be banned from huts. So much for the superiority of the white races. Perhaps other establishments in East Africa will take note of this precedent and pass a rule forbidding their use unless the visitor is accompanied by an African.

In fact, as the hotels are dealing with tourists, they are wise to insist on a guide. There have been several cases of parties losing themselves, and Police and Forest Officers, with dozens of *Askaris*, have to scour the neighbourhood at a cost of several hundred pounds. The Club had to meet heavy criticism for ' encouraging ' this sort of ' expedition.'

In general it may be said that Kibo is a tourist mountain and the mountaineer who visits it must be prepared for this. Owing to divided authority there is confusion about reserving the huts, and cases of the

grossest overcrowding and overflowing (which is not amusing at 15,000 ft.) are recorded in the hut books. The latter and also the *graffiti* on the walls are rather pathetic. Folk little accustomed to climbing or even walking, and badly equipped, obviously have a hard time. ' Kibo, I've had it,' ' Kibo, you can have it ' and ' Made it, but never again ' compose the theme song. All this is very sad, despite the real gallantry of those who climb in plimsolls up those tiresome slopes. It is hardly to be wondered that they complain in their weariness of the condition of the huts—sometimes, I agree, with justification—but they should remember that the huts were originally built for properly equipped mountaineers who know what to expect. It would be only fair if visitors joined the Mountain Club before blowing off steam in the hut books. Such gratitude is, I am informed, unheard of. I should have thought myself that the Club would be wise to raise the hut dues to 5*s*. 0*d*. a night for non-members. With the extra profit a few sorely needed improvements and repairs could be effected. To be reasonable, the increase should come out of the already swollen profits of the hotels, but that, I suppose, is too much to ask.

Quite a few of the visitors if introduced to a reasonable sort of mountain might take to climbing, but I can imagine nothing more effective than Kibo, except perhaps, Mont Blanc or the Zermatt Breithorn by the ordinary routes, to put off a beginner. The whole thing is out of proportion ; you walk sixty-six miles up and down for the sake of a few hours' climbing. Mountaineers can, of course, include Mawenzi to make the walk worth while, but that is beyond the skill of most visitors. Walkers as opposed to mountaineers would do far better to follow the advice given to me by the Governor of Tanganyika and climb Meru, which is much more attractive and less of a grind—but, of course, it is not the highest mountain in Africa and therefore less advertised.

Kibo is notorious for mountain sickness and many visitors have to give up on this account. I should have been inclined to attribute this exclusively to lack of training and experience if no less a pair than Shipton and Tilman had not fallen victims. With his usual directness the latter wrote, ' the reason for our retreat was the prosaic and not uncommon one—inability to go any further.' This is very puzzling, particularly as they had been living at 5,000 ft. and were to that extent acclimatised. Those who come from sea level are obviously more likely to be afflicted. On the basis of my own brief experience, I should have said that experienced climbers have little to fear. Personally, I felt the altitude less than at lower heights in the Ruwenzori, but I was in better training. I even managed to hold a movie camera still without a tripod.

Tilman's matter-of-fact explanation of failure delights me in contrast with the remarks of one recent party who attributed their ' high morale ' to the portable wireless receiver they had brought (but who still failed to reach the summit). Even better was the pair who after several hours of effort failed on the last day ' because we got mixed up with the

dates.' This opens up fascinating vistas of a religious belief preventing the attainment of summits on certain days of the week. Perhaps, however, I misunderstood them ; it may have been the dates they had eaten !

Finally, I would most strongly advise any party to spend two nights at the top hut, after making every effort in advance with both the Mountain Club and the hotels to reserve it and warn others accordingly. This permits an unhurried day on Kibo and even if snow conditions are as bad as they frequently are, and the party not very fit, Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze or even the complete circuit of the crater should be feasible. Even if only Gillman's Point is attained lazy hours can be spent on the top without the nagging prospect of the boring plod on the same day back across the lava plain from the top hut to the Saddle and thence down to Peters hut. It is as much this walk as the efforts on the climb that reduce many parties to the exhaustion to which they give vent in their dispirited notes in the hut books. If two nights are spent in Kibo hut a party can descend next day via Peters hut to Bismarck hut and during the morning after reach the hotel.

There are two rainy seasons in East Africa and the best months for the climb are July to September and December to February.