

EAST AFRICAN NOTES

BY DAVID PASTEUR

SINCE the last notes in this series were written (November, 1960) little of outstanding importance has occurred in the East African climbing world, and few new climbs have been done which merit description. It has, all the same, been a period of steady activity and progress, and perhaps the most notable aspect has been the increasing interest of Africans in mountaineering.

Few really strong climbing parties have visited the Ruwenzori, and ascents have mainly been as usual of Speke, Margherita and Baker by the standard routes. Not many parties are in the range long enough to attempt more than these, and even if they do have the time, luck with the weather is also needed before such climbs as the North-east ridge of Albert or the North-west ridge of Baker can be attempted. Similarly, little if any climbing seems to have been done recently on the Elena/Savoia group at the southern end of Stanley. More frequent ascents are now made of the East-north-east ridge of Margherita from the hut at Irene Lakes, and this is gradually becoming a more commonly used route to the summit; though technically harder with the risk of the rock ridge being iced up, it is an easier route to follow in mist than the original route that meanders across the Stanley plateau.

The fascination of Ruwenzori vegetation and the almost unique unpleasantness of the boggy going on many parts of the mountain below the snow line are carefully preserved by the persistent cloud cover: if it is not raining (and it is certainly not true that it rains 365 days of the year as is sometimes alleged), it is very often misty, with short or even only momentary clearings during the day. Fine clear weather does occur, such as one expects to get in the Alps, but only for short and quite unpredictable periods. In recent years there usually seems to have been a stretch of about two or three weeks of this sort of weather in each of the two dry seasons of the year, most often in late January and July.

If the weather were better the snow would no doubt be receding more rapidly than it already is. Since October, 1961, however, there have been exceptionally heavy snowfalls on the range, over the period that has also seen serious flooding in East Africa, and climbers have reported very different snow conditions from those usually encountered.

The glaciological work that has been undertaken in the range since 1957 has now been described in the Final Report of the Makerere College International Geophysical Year Expeditions to Ruwenzori

1957-60, produced by the Department of Geography at the College (this is understood to be appearing in the *Journal of Glaciology* in due course). The report includes a survey of the present ice coverage and of the pattern of ice change over the last fifty years or so. Six glaciers are shown to have disappeared completely and several have split into smaller units. All the evidence points to a reduction in the ice coverage, which seems to be taking place at an accelerating rate. The report also includes detailed surveys based on observation of several of the important glaciers and other interesting data. Further work subsequent to the I.G.Y. programme was done in 1961 and may be continued, including observations on the well-defined Savoia glacier on Mt. Stanley.

The only other scientific expedition to the range recently has been one from the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland at Salisbury, which re-opened a long-disused route up to the picturesque Nyamagasani valley with its chain of lakes, starting from the copper mine at Kilembe, and ascending the Muhambuli and Kamusongi rivers (see *A.J.* 64, map facing page 60). The party undertook botanical and zoological work. The route gives access to the upper Nyamagasani in three or four days, which is quicker than by any other route, and it is hoped it will enable more parties to visit this interesting area.

Fewer parties from Europe and America have visited the Ruwenzori in the last two years than previously. To what extent this is due to the existence of more remote and less thoroughly explored ranges in the world and to the fact that there are no new peaks to climb on Ruwenzori or to the fact that proximity to the Congo border and political developments cause potential visitors to turn elsewhere, it is difficult to say. On the second score there should be no fears as the government of independent Uganda is doing its utmost to encourage tourists, and the Ruwenzori provides its own barrier to anything that may happen in the Congo. There are no really important climbing 'firsts' to do, with the possible exception of the traverse of all the peaks on Speke, Stanley and Baker, nor can the climbing compete in quality with some other ranges, but there is no denying the fascination and interest of visiting these mountains.

By contrast, there has been an increase in the number of climbers from South and Central Africa visiting the Ruwenzori (and East African mountains as a whole), and also in the number of parties from within Uganda. Particularly encouraging has been the increase in school and university mountaineering groups, of which there are now nine affiliated to the Mountain Club of Uganda. Several schools are fortunate in having people on their staff interested in climbing or hill walking and many successful expeditions to Ruwenzori and other Uganda mountains have been made, including ascents of Speke and attempts on other peaks. Girls college parties have also started, and have climbed Elgon and the

Bufumbira volcanoes. The Mountain Club of Uganda has gained a good number of new members both from the schools and from among people who have attended courses at the Outward Bound School in Kenya.

This school, which is situated at Loitokitok on the northern slopes of Kilimanjaro, has gone from strength to strength since it started in 1956. It provides courses similar in character and length to those at the Outward Bound Mountain Schools in England, for the older schoolboys and young men up to the age of twenty-five, drawn from all three territories in East Africa and from all races. The inter-territorial and inter-racial nature of the course is only one of its many beneficial features. The school has now developed to a capacity of sixty-four on each course. The final expedition of the course, which in its earlier stages includes some experience of rock-climbing, is the ascent of Kibo (19,340 ft.). This is enough to put the majority of newcomers off climbing for life, but nevertheless quite a good number are attracted to joining the Mountain Club of Uganda on their return. Expense will for a long time be a difficulty for African mountaineers, especially in East Africa where distances are long, and expeditions often entail the expense of assistance from porters: also there are few mountains or cliffs suitable for regular weekend climbing. However, if the difficulties of organisation and expense can be overcome, there is every sign that climbing will increase in popularity in East Africa, and African climbers appear to enjoy the sport for the same variety of reasons as those who are introducing them to it.

Uganda is proud to have had an African as President of its Club for the first time in 1961, T. B. Bazarrabusa, who comes of the same tribe, the Bakonjo, which provides the porters so indispensable to climbing in the Ruwenzori. He is the first African to have climbed the three major peaks in the range, some of them more than once, and many others in Uganda besides.

The efforts of the Club, mentioned in the last Notes, to build up a corps of recognised porters, have been fairly successful, and there is rarely any difficulty in obtaining experienced porters even when several large parties are in the area at once. Efforts to abolish the free issue of clothing traditional since the earliest days, and replace it with a generous money equivalent sufficient to purchase really warm clothing at intervals, have proved fruitless. One's admiration for these excellent carriers is increased when one sees them set out into the forest with the single flimsy blanket and brightly coloured cotton jersey that they prefer to receive on each trip.

The climbers' map of the Central Ruwenzori has recently been completed and published by the Directorate of Overseas Surveys. This map, which is on a scale of 1 : 25,000, covers the six glaciated

groups of peaks, and the approaches from about 10,000 ft. upwards. The background to the preparation of this map and the earlier work in the 1 : 50,000 series covering the range were described by Sir Douglas Busk in *A.J.* 64, pp. 60-65. The new map is a remarkable achievement and will be of immense value and interest to mountaineers. A hill shading technique similar to that employed on the most up-to-date maps in England, such as that of the Lake District, has been used to great effect. The main rock features above the snow line have been drawn in, and this gives a far better impression than earlier maps of the real structure of the peaks, and is an aid to route finding. The naming of glaciers has been reviewed and some revisions made to take account of the subdivision of some of the glaciers into two or even three separate units. Several more native place names have also been added to the map. If one may venture a criticism of what is in almost all respects an outstanding and most attractive map, it is of the colouring, which is a rather gloomy grey-green shade. Though admittedly it reflects what is frequently the mood of the mountain, it would be better in more cheerful tones, and easier to read the printing in poor light. The glaciers also do not appear white enough, and it is sometimes difficult to see where they begin and end.

A further aid to climbers is provided by a preliminary or draft edition of the Mountain Club of Uganda's *Guide to the Ruwenzori* (by H. A. Osmaston and D. Pasteur, available from the Club at P.O. Box 2927, Kampala, Uganda). This includes all the general information required by climbers, the main walking routes below the snow line, and climbing routes covering the whole of Mt. Speke and parts of Mts. Stanley and Baker. Further sections deal with plant and animal life and native place names. In due course it is hoped to add descriptions of further climbing routes and publish the guide in completed form.

I am indebted to P. A. Campbell for the following notes from Kenya. Rescue training is an important part of the functions of the Mountain Club of Kenya and some of the problems which arise are probably peculiar to this country. Following an accident on Mt. Kenya someone has to climb down, run down the mountain over the moorlands through the forest, and to the Police Station at Naro Moru. A message is then sent by police wireless to Nairobi where the rescue team is called out and drives or flies the 120 miles to Naro Moru. There it is lifted up to about 9,000 ft. by police Land Rover if the road is dry. Then follows a seven to ten hour walk up to Firmin hut at 15,700 ft., where the team has to recuperate for a few hours. Those that are fit can then start climbing, perhaps thirty hours after the accident.

Fortunately the accident rate is low and there have only been three call-outs in the last seven years for accidents on Mt. Kenya. The most recent occurred early this year when some rock gave way and a climber

fell a few feet just below the summit of Batian (17,040 ft.), at about mid-day. He broke ten ribs and an ankle. Of his three companions two climbed down to Firmin hut and one of these then ran down the mountain to get help from Nairobi. The other, R. Chambers, went back alone to the injured man with food, etc. Another member of the party at the hut went round to another hut to ask for assistance from a party of German climbers from Bavaria. This party started packing up immediately, and that evening some of them were climbing as the moon came up.

News reached Nairobi about 11.00 p.m. and members started moving towards the mountain shortly after. Two innovations were tried, neither with complete success. Dr. B. Mayes, who runs the rescue team, was flown up to about 13,500 ft. at the head of the Teleki valley in an Army Alouette helicopter and reached Firmin hut about three hours after leaving Nairobi. However, the change in altitude forced him to spend some hours recovering. Arrangements were also made for 720 ft. of full weight rope to be dropped from a Police Cessna aircraft. This was draped across Nelion and about half was recovered. The Germans then used this as an 'aerial ropeway' with great success.

The morning after the accident the first party of Germans arrived on Batian and the whole of this day was spent in getting the injured climber across the Gate of the Mists on the eastern side of Nelion. The following day he was brought down the standard route on to the Lewis glacier, down which he was carried to the head of the Teleki valley, with just enough daylight for the helicopter to collect him. Some sixty hours after the accident he reached hospital. Without the Germans, who did most of the work, this might easily have been ninety hours.

During 1961 a strong party from the University of Cape Town spent some time on Mt. Kenya completing a number of new routes. R. W. Baillie and R. N. Kamke opened up a Grade V-VI climb between the South-west ridge and the Diamond glacier which took ten hours to the summit of Batian. Baillie and C. Rhys-Jones found an easy (Grade III) route up the South face of Nelion. The North face route was climbed by two parties who suggested that the grading should be IV. With this and the possibility of a hut being built on this side of the mountain, there may in the future be many more climbers attempting the northern routes.

On Kilimanjaro, Tanganyika celebrated its Independence by raising the new flag and setting off rockets and flares from Gillman's Point at midnight. For the mountaineering philatelists there was another stamp and for those there, a pleasant glissade down the slopes of Kibo the next morning.