prouder of being elected to that office than on being appointed a Privy Councillor. I would put the ante up a bit and say I'd be prouder of the Presidency than if I were to become Archbishop of Canterbury. And that, as his friends will tell him, is the fate we confidently expect to overtake Ken Wilson.



1 Elena huts, Mount Stanley (This and next four photos: John Cleare)

Ruwenzori

John Cleare

Like all the best 'expeditions' our Ruwenzori trip was planned on the back of an envelope – the letters shuttling to and fro between Nairobi and London. The affair of Mr Dennis Hills caused a postponement in August '75 but by December Uganda seemed quiet enough, so Bill O'Connor and I flew out to join our Kenya friends on 7 December.

As most of our Ruwenzori team were in Education we had time to kill before the Christmas holidays, so for a training climb Ian Howell, Bill and I went down to Kilimanjaro to have a look at one or other of the 2 big problems outstanding on the mountain. Bill and I were very aware that the Ruwenzori might be tough so we decided against what would obviously be an epic on the Breach Wall Direct and chose instead to attempt the Kersten Glacier. The Glacier is the steepest of the SW glaciers of Kibo and its only previous ascent, by 2 Austrians via a very indirect line in 1962, took 3 days and was said to have been desperate. We hoped to make a direct line up the middle.

At about 4700m, the Kersten Glacier – previously nearly ½ mile wide – breaks up and pours 1,000ft over vertical rock cliffs in a series of steep and

sometimes overhanging ice couloirs. We bivouacked in a cave at exactly 4420m at the base of the centre couloir. Several ice and mixed pitches led to the first major obstacle, a 40ft free hanging icicle which we were unable to turn on the rock to left or right. At this altitude and carrying 40lb packs there was no room for heroics and Bill led the pitch on direct aid. Thereafter the climb, mostly in mist, was a succession of difficult route finding problems round and over huge serac walls until we hit the final 300m of easier angled slopes to the summit. In all there had been some 8 serious and steep ice pitches and a bivouac in a huge ice-cave. We found the climb, never desperately difficult, a very serious one and graded it 1500m ED.

On our descent from the summit, very tired – we had had 5 consecutive bivouacs since leaving Nairobi – in the late afternoon Bill slipped somewhere on the cliffs high in the Great Western Breach and tore again the ligaments in his knee. Once again we were forced to endure an unpleasant bivouac and it was all we could do the next day to retreat in good order down through the jungle of the Umbwe Route to our car at the Mission Station at its foot.

Bill was obviously in no state to make the Ruwenzori and it seemed that he would be spending a less energetic Christmas on the shores of the Indian Ocean! We arrived in Nairobi at 3am and I was appalled to realize that we were due to leave for the Ruwenzori that afternoon, a 750-mile drive across equatorial Africa.

Now short of one man it was a 5-man team that crowded into John Temple's rickety Toyota Jeep. Temple is a schoolmaster in Nairobi as are Tony Charlton and John Youngs. Jim Slade is an American and by profession a white-water river boatman but already an old Africa hand and no stranger to high standard mountaineering. Contrary to British press reports Ugandans don't grow horns and breathe fire and we found the frontier authorities both friendly and polite, if a little strict. Our sleeping bags attracted much interest and were examined in minute detail and copies of *Newsweek* and the *Manchester Guardian* were confiscated before we were waved through. We spent a night at a friendly Mission near Kampala and on Christmas Eve we drove through torrential rain – in which we narrowly avoided being run down by elephants a few yards from the Equator – into the foothills of the Ruwenzori to the road head at Ibanda.

We spent the night in the round tin shed which is the MCU 'Base Camp Hut' in the banana grove at the end of the motorable trail. Outside a myriad stars filled the sky between the jagged black shapes that walled the narrow valley. Inside we were too tired to eat seriously and made do with the disgusting dried fish which we had bought on Lake Edward to feed our porters during the march in. It was not the pleasantest Christmas Eve I have spent: I was still suffering from our Kilimanjaro affair and was really in quite a bad way.

John Matte, the local African Trader and agent for the MCU, is an important man in Ibanda and he was expecting us and was extremely helpful and cooperative. Despite his assistance it took most of the morning to select our porters, a very ragged dozen local tribesmen – Bakonjo folk who are traditionally hyrax hunters when they are not growing bananas – and most were armed with short broad-bladed spears. But eventually we set off and 4 hours and 900m of slippery going took us to the Nyabitaba hut. The hut, another tin shed in attractive open forest of bamboo, podocarpus and giant bracken,

has unfortunately been vandalized but it was welcome shelter for Christmas night as the hail drummed down. Next day we descended to the confluence of the Mubuku and Bujuku rivers where the Busk Bridge has long since been washed away and we crossed on a spidery lattice of fallen tree trunks. And so to Bigo Bog. The far side of the Bog at 3350m is another round tin hut also vandalized and by the time we arrived there late in the afternoon we were covered in mud to our waists and we stood in the river – waist-deep – in order to scrub it out of our shorts, our socks, our boots and our skin. Little did I know that it would be fully 2 weeks before my feet were warm or my socks dry again. Before dark some of our Bakonjo left their nearby smoky cave armed with their spears and trailed by their yellow dog and for supper we had fried hyrax with our bacon. One porter sported a new fur hat.

Then came the strike. Now that we were deep into the 'bundu' the porters felt that it was time to demand a wage increase. Temple was expecting the ploy and he fired them all leaving us sitting in Bigo Bog with 500lb of assorted stores. But, as he had predicted, 5 of the younger lads crept back and volunteered to stay with us at the originally negotiated wages. They were as loyal and devoted as we could have wished but it meant reorganizing the whole load carrying system.

From Bigo it was an easy half day to Bujuko Hut, the strategic centre of the Ruwenzori. The hut is in a rocky glade at exactly 3962m and, true to form, it too had been vandalized, but there are at least the remains of 'tratzenlager'-type bunks. Nearby Cooking Pot Cave is well fortified with sheet aluminium and one hesitates to think how many huts in the lowlands now sport foam rubber mattresses and aluminium roofing? At last the sun broke out and we caught tantalizing glimpses of snow-plastered crags and hanging seracs close around us. It was our first sight of the mountains although we were now in the midst of them. Morale soared.

A good first day seemed to be the traverse of Mount Speke, the second highest massif, and in a clear and sparkling morning we scrambled up moss-covered glacis behind the hut towards the Speke Glacier. The SW ridge of Johnson, the second summit of Speke, looked interesting and so we joined it at a narrow gap close above the glacier and followed easy snow-slopes and rocky scrambles into the already descending mist. The ridge turned out to be entertaining, narrow, rocky and nowhere difficult.

The climbing was perhaps comparable with the Cuillin of Skye. Nowhere did we need the rope and we soon arrived at our first summit, able to see nothing. We had heard about the difficult and dangerous descent towards Vittorio Emanuele, Speke's summit, and it took us some time to locate the rime-plastered step which necessitated a rappell. But there were no problems and in ½ hour we had traversed the easy snow-ridge and arrived amid the huge accumulations of ice-rime that are Vittorio Emanuele – 4890m. We ran down the Speke Glacier unfortunately unable to avoid all the difficult sections in the zero visibility, and arrived back at Bujuko hut in time for an early tea.

The following day Jim Slade and John Youngs set off for the long E ridge of Margherita, the Ruwenzori's highest point, via the tiny bivouac hut at Irene Lakes. About mid-day John Temple, Tony Charlton and I set off in our turn for the green and boggy saddle of the Stuhlmann Pass.

Now the Uganda/Zaire frontier is a hypothetical one, a succession of straight

lines on the map which meet on the summit of Margherita and the frontier bears no relationship whatsoever to the watershed of Mount Stanley. But we knew that the Stuhlmann was the approximate frontier and once over it we struck up through tangled undergrowth of helichrysum shrub, often 8ft deep and almost impossible going and through jungles of giant groundsel towards the grey ceiling of mist that cloaked – we hoped – our goal: Albert, 5087m the 3rd highest Ruwenzori summit and the far N end of the long chain of the Stanley Massif. We bivouacked among boulders on the snow-line beneath a looming shape that we assumed was Albert's N face. It was an excellent bivouac site, warm and comfortable and a brilliant morning confirmed our hopes. The face was black and triangular, covered in snow patches but with, as our research had indeed hinted, the great gash of an ice-gully running down its centre. Excitedly we moved up to look at it.

The gully gave 600m of excellent climbing on ice in the Scottish style. At times it opened into snowy amphitheatres and sometimes it narrowed into steep ice-draped clefts giving serious pitches. Pitch followed pitch relentlessly and long before we reached the top we were in cloud once again with the odd flakes of drifting snow. The gully led almost straight to the tiny rocky summit, there were 4 major ice-pitches and we considered the climb a Vallot D.+ and the hardest pitch a Scottish IV –. We were very pleased with this find, probably the best ice climb in the Ruwenzori to date. We crossed the easy snow-ridge to Margherita and blundered our way down in driving sleet towards the Irene Lakes Hut. The NE ridge, on which we caught up with our descending friends was frightening under the conditions. The snow was rotten and the rock the greasiest I had ever come across. Although nowhere difficult it would be a very easy place in which to kill oneself when wet on the descent. We arrived back at Bujuko just before dusk, all of us with some sense of achievement.

We then moved up to the Elena Huts at the S end of the Stanley Massif. These tiny bivouac shelters are really only tin tents: they lie at 4540m beside the Elena Glacier. When we reached them we were in for a shock, the 2 tiny huts were amost invisible under deep snow-drifts and when we had dug them out we found that only one, the larger, was really habitable. But it only takes 3 at a pinch and John Temple and I were forced to dig the ice out of the smaller hut to make room for ourselves. The last visitor had left the door open and the roof leaked in any case!

However squalid the huts are, they are in a superb situation. Clustered above are the beautiful S Stanley peaks and cradled by 2 symmetrical rock spires is the hanging ice of the little Coronation Glacier. On New Year's Day we reached the glacier by the E gully, the route pioneered by Firmin and Busk in '53 and we found it in good snow conditions a Scottish II. Nowhere was the rope necessary. We climbed along the narrow snow-ridge to the summit of Kitasamba, one of the 2 beautiful rock spires whose walls will give excellent routes to somebody and then climbed through curtains of icicles and over weird ice-bulges and up a short ice-chimney on to the summit of Elizabeth. Down in Zaire below us we caught glimpses through the writhing cloud sea of a narrow and tortured glacier dropping steeply. We knew it must be the Moebius Glacier, the longest in the Ruwenzori. Our information led us to believe it was virgin and it looked most interesting.



2 Kitasamba above Coronation glacier, Mount Stanley

We climbed easily on to Savoia and then once again in zero visibility descended the N ridge into the gash which is the col between Savoia and Great Tooth. The route finding down the horribly corniced ridge was awkward – a mad nightmare of ice – but with care every problem was solvable and the rappels were often quite exciting.

Particularly so was the final one from the col into the steep couloir which leads back to the Elena Glacier. We could see nothing but the great cornice jutting out over space and it was my turn to pioneer the rappel. Very apprehensively I eased out towards the cornice lip and suddenly it gave beneath me. I crashed through to find myself hanging from the roof of a huge ice cave. I slid carefully down through a forest of icicles into its silent sanctuary. It was an incredible place and each of my friends as they joined me was quite overawed by its eerie beauty. It certainly made an interesting New Year's Day.

On 2 January John Temple, Jim Slade and I set off to look for the Moebius Glacier. From our sightings the previous day we anticipated serious difficulties and we were loaded with ice-screws, ropes, and all the latest technical ice gear. The descent from the Stanley Plateau into Zaire was quite exciting. Steep rock and ice and a series of rappels took us into an incredibly beautiful valley wherein lay Lac Vert. We forced our way through mossy glades of feathery groundsel and found ourselves in very difficult terrain, rock, moss ravines and the ubiquitous helichrysum jungle in which it took us several strenuous hours to locate the gorge that held the snout of the Moebius Glacier. From below it looked more desperate still.

But the actual ascent was a disappointment. Never once did we even uncoil the rope. It was steep, indeed, but always we were able to locate an easy corridor winding through the chaos of seracs, crevasses and avalanche debris. On our right-hand, by contrast, we noted that the W Savoia Glacier was obviously a prize – albeit a dangerous one – for some enterprising ice climber of the future. Our only consolation was the probable first ascent of a little pointed



Giant groundsel and Mount Baker



Descent from Scott Elliott Pass to Kitandara

Margherita and Alexandra from Albert





3 West Savoia glacier from Point John, Mount Stanley

rock peak which rose from the upper glacier nevé and which we dubbed Point John. We finished on the summit of Moebius itself in thick mist having swum our way through steep waist-deep snow.

We now planned several days climbing on the W side of the N Stanley Peaks – the 3 highest Ruwenzori summits – intending to work from the ruins of the old Belgian Moraine Hut. All the climbing, and the hut, would be in Zaire and we had been warned that the Zairian authorities do not encourage either visitors or climbing on their W flanks of Mount Stanley. However, we did not intend at any stage to drop below 4250m and mountaineers must consider that the ground above the snow-line belongs to all men. We certainly expected to find no one in the empty high country on the upper slopes.

We packed gear for 3 days and left the Elena Huts for the Stanley Plateau. Before descending the awkward little W Stanley Glacier into Moraine Cwm we traversed Alexandra (5091m), the Ruwenzori's 2nd summit – by a lovely narrow crest of bulging ice and rime and looked down on to the famous Alexandra Glacier supposedly THE ice route of the whole range. But after our experience of the Moebius we knew that it looked easy and we modified our plans accordingly.

Moraine Hut was a wooden ruin but at least it kept off the night frost and we had a comfortable bivouac. Next day, while John Youngs explored the Cwm, John Temple and Tony Charlton attempted a new direct line on Alexandra's W ridge using all our minimal rock gear, whilst Slade and I armed with just axe and crampons and one abseil cord, would attempt the already classic NW ridge of Albert. We would then all descend the Alexandra Glacier instead of ascending it. It seemed a good way to fit in 2 routes in a single day.

The ridge on Albert was superb, as fine as any great classic in the Alps. A narrow ice arête linked the 2 steep steps which we turned alternately on solid sun-warmed rock or by icy traverses in the shade. From the final narrow rock-



4 Alexandra from Albert

ridge we could see the Virunga volcanoes through the haze of distance. We never quite needed to tie on the rope.

From above we had plotted our route down the steep glacier and our only problem was finding a gap in the maze of walls, couloirs and cornices which guarded it from above. We had to traverse almost to the top of Margherita before we found our way down and on to the steep upper slopes of perfect snow. With modern ice gear all sorts of wonderful things are possible and we found the glacier an excellent and easy way off the mountain. Close behind us came our 2 friends who also had successfully completed their route – a new direct start to Carlo Mauri's W Ridge. We had all made very good time.

Unfortunately all was not well back at Moraine Hut. When we reached it we found it surrounded by red tents and a party of Swiss in occupation. Hanging around them belligerently were 3 large Africans dressed in camouflaged combat fatigues who we gathered were rangers from the Zairian Park National Albert. John Youngs told us that we, like him, were under arrest.

One of the Swiss, an attractive fair-haired girl who spoke perfect English, told us that we were indeed in serious trouble. Conditions were very difficult in Zaire she explained, and they were never allowed out of the sight of their guardians. She feared they would not be allowed to climb. She said that reinforcements – who would be armed and were already in occupation at one of the lower huts – had already been sent for to escort us down to the Zairian road-head and we realized that we were indeed in hot water. First we had a cup of tea and then we packed our bags and in a gathering snow-storm we lashed our helmets firmly on our heads and marched off towards the W Stanley Glacier. To cut a long story short there was a slight *contretemps* but we were armed with Chouinard hammers and our captors were armed only with staves and although nobody got hurt tempers ran fairly high. We discovered that we could move quicker on greasy boulders in a snow-storm than could the Africans in tennis shoes and we realized that once we were on the ice we

5 Alexandra summit



were safe and so we made it back to the Elena Huts, very tired and with a big surge of adrenalin to finish the day. At least we were safe in Uganda and we would not be filling a cooking pot in the Congo that night!

After our lucky escape everything was anti-climax. We crossed the Scott Elliott Pass the next day and descended to the Kitandara Lakes. We passed below the stupendous blank rock walls of Mount Baker's W Face; they are 600m high, modelled in Yosemite style but streaked with water and capped with hanging ice-fields. They are virgin but an ascent, while obviously possible, would be an exercise in masochism rather than the pleasurable experience that mountaineering should be.

At Kitandara we actually took a day off. My first rest day since I left England a month before. Once again what had been a luxurious hut had been vandalized but after the squalor of Elena, Kitandara was luxury. Time was getting short and so we sent our porters over the Freshfield Pass to the Bujongolo rock-shelter at the head of the Mubuku Valley and all 5 of us set out to traverse Mount Baker.

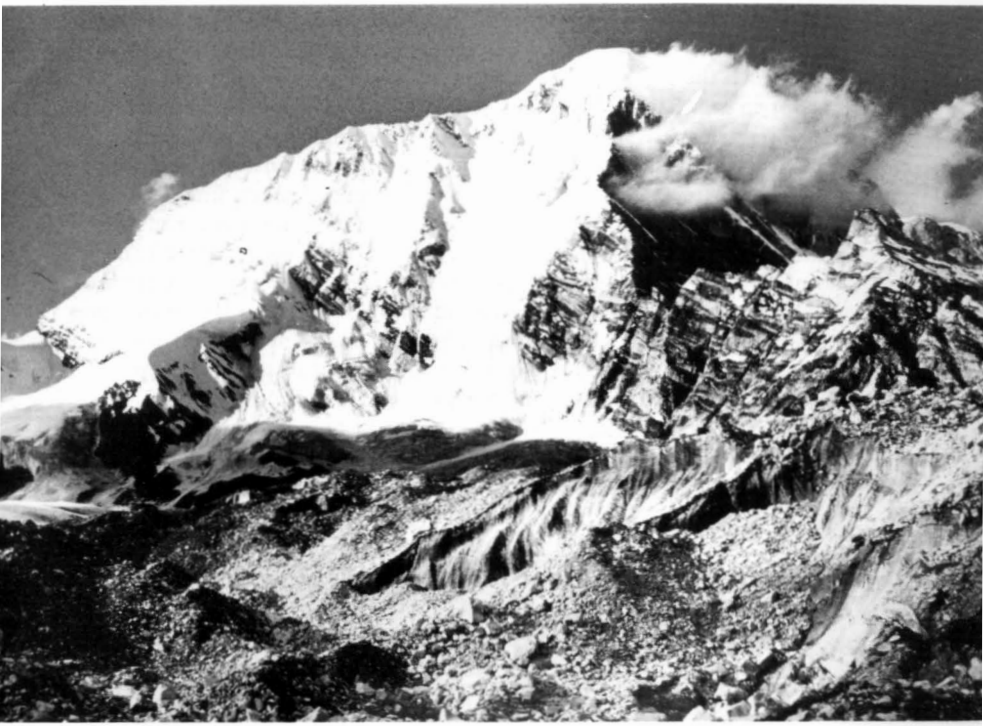
Despite a promising dawn we saw nothing all day but the 2-mile crest of Baker crossing over Edward, its highest point (4843m) and along Semper and over the Monk's Head to the Grauer Rock (4484m) gave fine mountaineering. The ridge is knife-edged and pinnacled with mixed climbing on ice and rock and big drops to either side. Again we found no need for the rope and we were able to move fast with a steady concentration of interest. Below the Grauer Rock we paused for lunch and attempted to climb Moore, a 120m rocky pyramid rising at the end of the Baker chain. It was the most unpleasant climbing I have ever come across, incredibly slimy rock plastered in loose moss leading on to rotting ice running with very cold water. Only Temple who delights in such unpleasant situations made the summit of Moore while the rest of us considered that masochism is no part of valour. I for one was content to remember the fine parts of the Ruwenzori, the superb solid rock in some places, the excellent steep ice in others.

The descent of the Moore Glacier, however, was horrible. Visibility was zero and perhaps we took the wrong way for we soon found ourselves on ice-polished rock in pouring rain climbing by friction above the waiting jaws of giant crevasses. In monsoon conditions we followed the torrent of the infant Mubuku to the top of a tall waterfall round which we could find no way. We were forced to rappel from a rickety groundsel plant down through the freezing glacier water into the moss-hung forest below. A long stretch of bog led us at dusk to the Bujongolo Shelter and the big welcoming fire of our porters. We were soaked to the skin, cold and plastered in mud, but no matter – it was all over.

We accomplished the final descent from Bujongolo down the Mubuku Valley to Ibanda in 6½ hours. It is a far steeper and more spectacular valley than the Bujuku route by which we had entered the Ruwenzori and it is lined with numerous waterfalls, huge crags and beset with many river crossings. Most of the way it is continuous bog and for mile after mile one seems to fall downwards from boggy ledge to boggy ledge. I was forced to wonder if it would even be possible to ascend by this route? I know it is done but what suffering must that entail! It rained so hard that two Leica cameras secure in the depths of my rucksack were full of water when eventually we reached Ibanda.

The film was ruined.

The sky was clearing. The icy summits of the Ruwenzori were clear against the last light. It was a fitting conclusion perhaps to a trip among mountains which must be unique in the world. Superb mountains. Exciting mountains. Beautiful mountains. The Mountains of the Moon – indeed, but I shall always consider them the Mountains of Suffering. The price you pay for enjoying the Ruwenzori is certainly a high one.



6 Dunagiri, climbed by the facing ridge (This and next three photos: Joe Tasker)

Small expeditions

Joe Tasker

Much attention is now being focused on small expeditions, not because they are a new concept but because of the growing concern for the long-term harm which can come from repeated, large-scale invasions of wealthy foreigners into a primitive environment. Shipton blamed Everest for the breeding of the 'big expedition' mentality, which subsequently influenced the development of the whole of Himalayan climbing. In recent years small expeditions have achieved some very hard climbs on high Himalayan peaks, ascents previously only expected from or considered by large teams. This has given impetus to the questioning of the validity of large expeditions at all. It is the point of this article to ask why big expeditions are in disfavour and whether small expeditionsare