

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DER - 25
The Mountains
of the Moon

September 14, 1954
c/o Barclays Bank
Queensway
Nairobi, Kenya

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The night was almost over. It was still very dark though. There had been no moon. An icy wind whipped around us. We were less than one degree north of the equator, but our altitude was nearly 15,000 feet.



Mount Stanley, with
Lake Bujuku in fore-
ground. Margherita is
the snow-topped peak to
the right.

The first streaks of dawn appeared and Mount Baker's wind-swept glacier loomed out of the night. The gale was whipping snow across it. Then, off to the left, Mount Speke's glacier appeared. Both peaks rose out of a blanket of clouds that covered the valley. The peaks were cut off from the world below.

A few yards from us lay our own glacier, that of Mount Stanley. It too was visible now---a gigantic profusion of ice-falls, crevasses, icicles and towers and buttresses of rock and sheer ice. We had camped in a tiny shelter at the glacier edge the day before, ready for a first-light try at Margherita Peak, 16,794 feet and the highest point in the Ruwenzori mountain range. Now we were ready to climb.

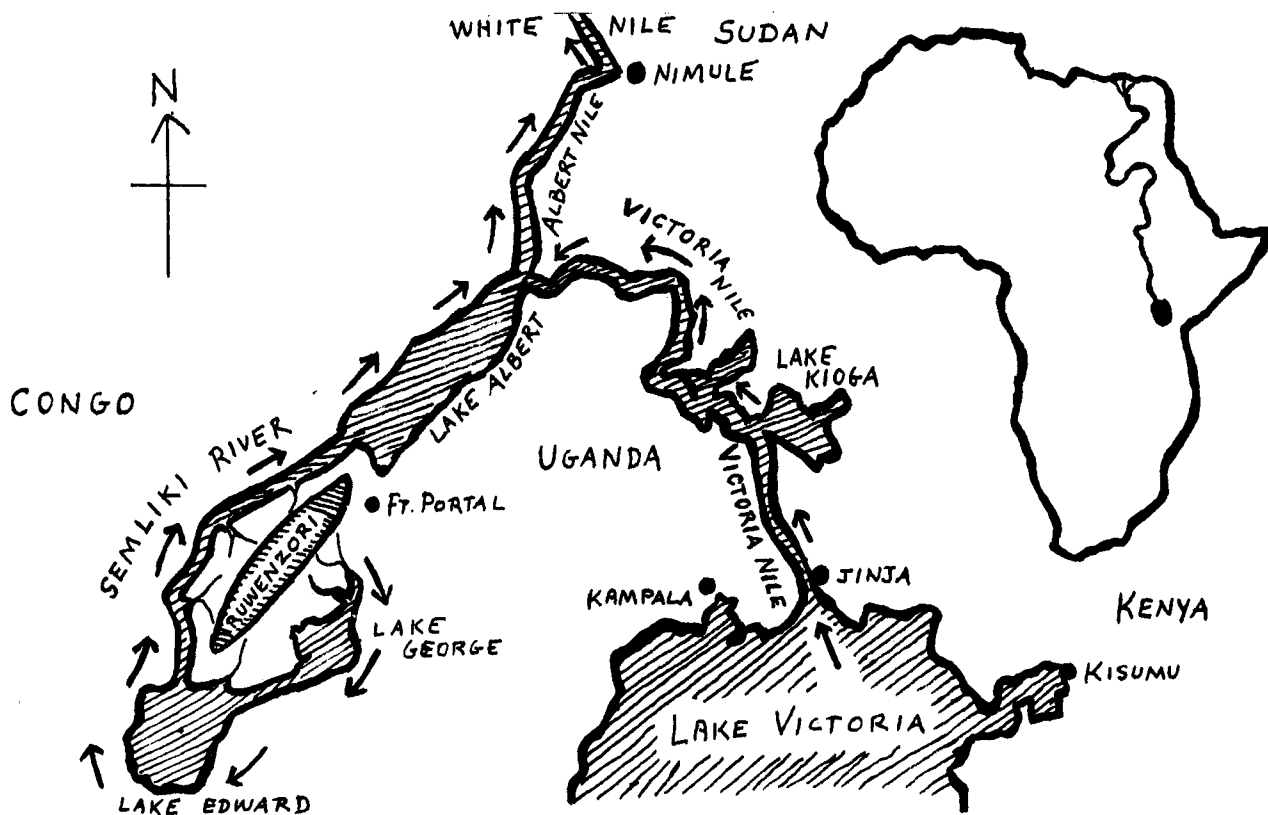
The Ruwenzoris are the fabled Mountains of the Moon. They lie between Uganda and the Belgian Congo and their melting snows help to form the great Nile of Egypt and the Sudan. The Mountains of the Moon had long been one of the greatest puzzles of the western world. For centuries, men had speculated on the source of the Nile. But

early attempts to follow it to the source were always blocked by a seemingly impassible barrier: the Sudd, or swamps, of the lower Sudan.

However even the ancients somehow knew, or suspected, that the Nile rose in a snow-covered mountain or mountain range. In Ptolemy's writings there is mention of "the Mountain of the Moon, whose snows feed the lakes, sources of the Nile." A latitude and longitude---incorrect yet still surprisingly near---are given for "the mountain." It has been suggested that an Arab translator interpolated at least part of this into Ptolemy's text. There is mention of this Nile source, too, in the writings of even earlier scholars. Aristotle tells of the Nile rising in a "mountain of silver" and Aeschylus of "Egypt nutured by the snow."

It is likely that Arab slavers either knew of or saw these mountains. But, until the last half of the 19th century, the western world had no confirmation of them. No one had ever penetrated that far into the interior of "Darkest Africa." This Nile source remained a persistent legend only---but one persistent enough so that the crude maps of Africa that existed until comparatively recently all bore a shadowy spot to indicate the Mountains of the Moon.

Now, as a result of explorations in the last 100 years, it is known that the waters of the Ruwenzori range drain into the Semliki river and hence into Lake Albert. Water from Lake Victoria proceeds via what is called the Victoria Nile to the same lake. From there the Albert Nile, later to become the White Nile, flows northward to the scorching land of the pyramids.



The Nile waters were frozen solid where we were, though. One of the three members of our party, Peter Douglas, a British Army captain, had cooked porridge while waiting for first light. We ate. Then we took aspirin to get rid of headaches brought on by altitude and by colds that developed during the rain-soaked ascent of the last four days. The third man in the party, Alastair Matheson, the Kenya government press officer who climbed Kilimanjaro with me, skipped breakfast. He was bothered with altitude sickness. But up he would go.

Margherita is a difficult peak. One mountaineer, describing his ascent, wrote:

"We looked at the east glacier, with its formidable seracs, and have high praise for Golcz for the icemanship required on his route, but turned our own attention to the ridge immediately above us on our right. We did not attack this directly, but followed the glacier until we were up against the main cliffs; we passed a small very steep glacier, obviously subject to avalanche, leading down from a col on the ridge and climbed the well-defined buttress beyond it."



Alastair, with crampons

Alastair and I had never done any real mountaineering before. We had never used ice-axes, a rope or crampons--- metal frames fitted with eight 2-inch spikes, that you strap on your boots to enable you to scale the steep, icy slopes. Peter had crossed a Himalayan pass with crampons and ice axe before, but he too was not familiar with rope climbing.

The mountaineer's warning of a place "obviously subject to avalanche" was wasted on us. What would be obvious to him would be just a cute chunk of ice to us. The only advice we remembered was that offered by a Kenya climber: "If you hear a funny sound like a snowball being crunched together, get out and get out fast. That means an avalanche is starting. If you don't get out you're liable to wind up in a snowball that drops in among the pigmies in the Congo forest."

We sat down at the glacier edge and put on our crampons. We had borrowed them from the Mountain Club of Kenya and they did not fit very well. We tied them into place, using bits of string and rope and even the lanyard of Peter's whistle. "You've got to make sure you don't lose a crampon," said Peter. "Without even one, you'd slide down the slopes. You couldn't stop yourself. It could mean your life."



Alastair,
with ice axe

I stood up and started up the 45-degree slope. It was topped with snow and the crust was frozen hard. I had half-expected to slide back down. But instead I found myself whizzing up like a fly negotiating a wall. The Matheson-Reed-Douglas Ruwenzori Expedition of 1954, which hadn't an inkling of what constitutes a glacier "obviously subject to avalanche," and which wasn't too sure, when you got right down to it, just what a serac is, was about to attempt a peak that has turned back many an experienced climber.* One experienced climber had suffered an accident on another Ruwenzori peak only the day before. As we began our ascent, Margherita was hidden by the outer crags of the equatorial mountain. I wondered if we would ever make it.

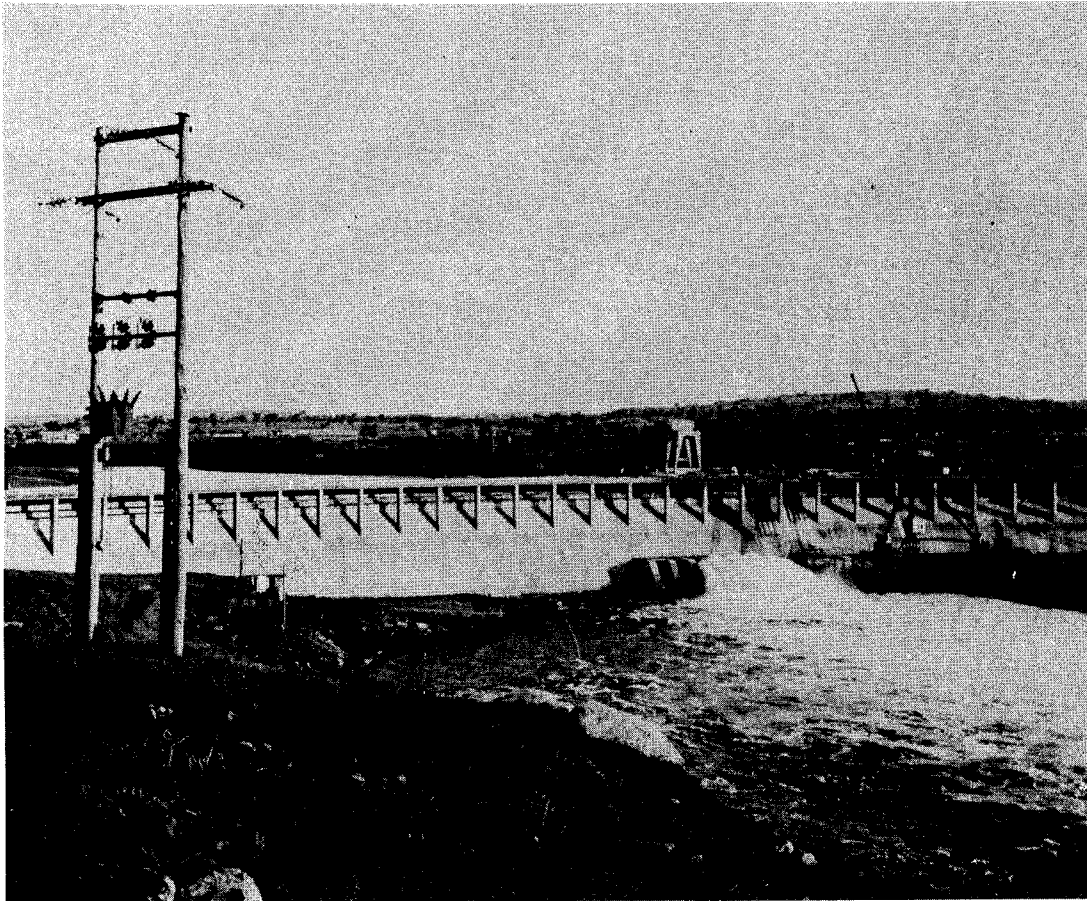
It had taken us a week to reach the edge of the glacier. The distance from Nairobi to the foot of the Ruwenzoris is about 700 miles and we started out in my car. It was jammed with perhaps 800 pounds of food and equipment. There are no planned trips up the Ruwenzoris and climbers must bring all their own supplies. We had eight boxes of food alone, mostly canned items. They included meat, butter, soup, vegetables and fruit. Oddly enough, we had not forgotten a can-opener. We also brought 10 dozen indifferently packed eggs, many of which were quietly oozing through the bottom of the box before the journey had even begun.

Some of the items in our equipment: Three sleeping bags, three rucksacks, a couple of suitcases, 120 feet of rope, three ice axes, three sets of crampons, a box of dishes, pots and pans, a portable stove, a pressure lamp, kerosene, photographic equipment, two pairs of binoculars, hatchets, boots, compasses, maps, flashlights, whistles (in case someone got lost), three water bottles, first aid items and a case of beverages.

The last box pushed into the car, we somehow found room for the

* A look at the dictionary on returning produced the following definition of "serac": "A pinnacle of ice among the crevasses of a glacier."

three of us, plus Oriko, my servant, who would come along on the climb to carry the cameras and cook the meals. Late the first afternoon, we reached Jinja, Uganda, where we stopped for a look at another source of the Nile. There the Victoria Nile pours out of Lake Victoria, tumbles through a turbine at the Owen Falls dam and then heads out for Lake Albert and, ultimately, the Mediterranean. The dam and hydro-electric plant were opened by the Queen only a few months ago and electricity is being supplied to parts of Kenya as well as to Uganda.



Owen Falls Dam---
Water for Egypt

The front suspension of my car folded up at Kampala. We hired an African to drive us in his car the next day to Fort Portal, 200 miles further on and the starting point for mountain safaris. On reaching Fort Portal that evening, we made arrangements with a local Indian merchant for buying food for our porters---cassava flour, dried beans, dried fish, sugar, salt and tea. Each porter would also receive a sweater costing four shillings (\$0.56), a blanket costing seven shillings (\$0.98) and Shs. 2/50 (\$0.35) a day in wages. The next morning we hired the Indian's truck and were driven 40 miles to the Chief's camp at Bugoye, on the lower slopes. We had written ahead to the District Commissioner and we found the porters waiting for us.



Porter, with
monkey skin vest

The porters were of the Bakonjo tribe, who live in the foothills. They appear to be immune from nationalism for at least a half-century. The East African march toward civilization has marched right past them. The men wear old shorts that European climbers have discarded or that they have purchased with the wages of a safari. The women get by with bits of animal skins, fig leaf fashion. The children are unencumbered. A large number are pagans and not very many know any language but their own.

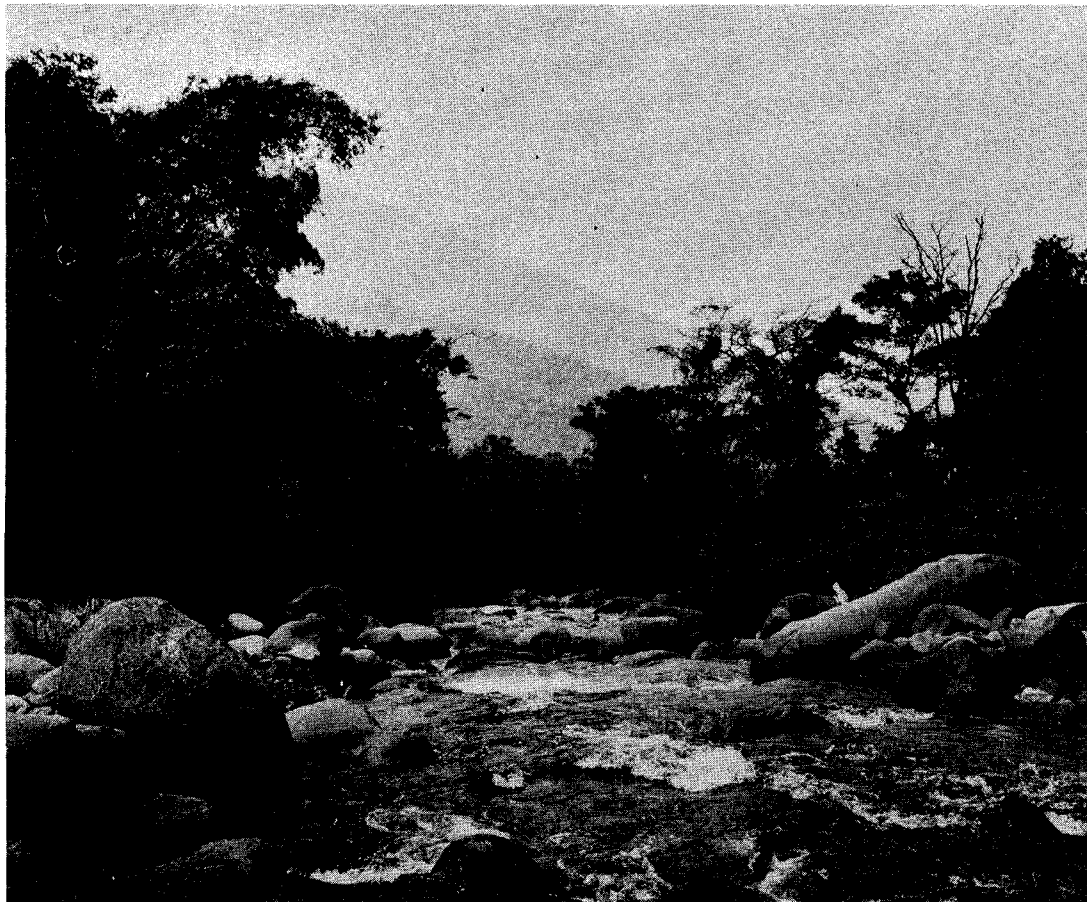
Our headman, a Christian named Simon (or Simoni as the Africans say), did know a little Kiswahili and he informed me that he had received 29 years of education. "Uwongo sana (A big lie)!" exclaimed Oriko, who had already taken a strong dislike to the porters. He let it be known that he was a highly civilized man from Nairobi.

I told Simoni to get the men ready to march. It was 1 p.m. and we wanted to get to Nyinabitaba hut (8,400 feet) that evening. It is a climb of 3,400 feet. The porters muttered something in emphatic unison. Simoni translated it as "Hapana"---the mis-used Kiswahili negative.

I argued. No, they said, they couldn't go till morning. They didn't have a sufuria---a cooking vessel. "You can use ours," I said. That had them stumped for a minute, but then they brightened up and said they were afraid of bumping into elephants in the late afternoon. "Hapana," I said. No, they said, they only begin marches in the mornings.

I gave up and we settled down for the night in a nearby bamboo rest house. The porters trooped off jubilantly, saying they would return in the morning. "I think they're ripe for a trade union organizer," said Alastair.

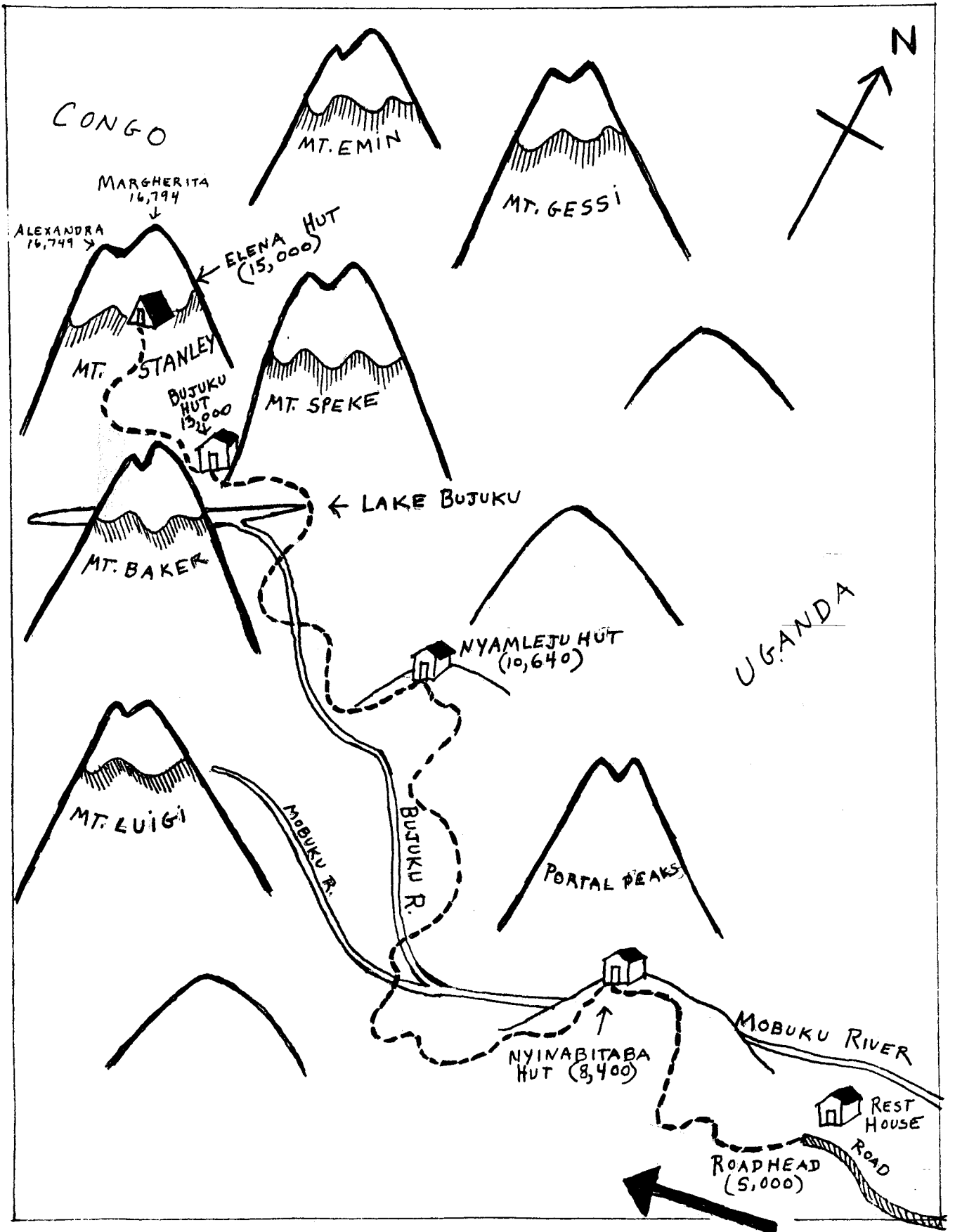
The Mobuku River runs near the rest house. It is as fast and as cold as any Rocky Mountain stream. It falls continuously, one long ribbon of churning water. We would follow its valley and that of a tributary



The Mobuku
More Water for Egypt

for three days and 8,000 feet to reach the headwaters of the tributary, 13,000-foot Lake Bujuku. The lake is ringed by the bases of the three highest Ruwenzori peaks, Stanley, Speke and Baker. From the lake, we would ascend another 2,000 feet to the glacier edge. Then we would start another climb to the summit of Margherita.

It was still mid-afternoon and it was a bright day. We knew that the Mountains of the Moon lay right before us. But we could see nothing. The mountains were blotted out by a bright, purple-tinted haze. Once in a while we would catch the fleeting suggestion of a sharply-rising line. But then, as we stared, it would disappear.



It was this eerie haze, said to be caused by lowland vapors drawn up by the equatorial sun, that kept the Ruwenzoris hidden for so long from western eyes.

The first European to see them was probably Sir Samuel Baker. In 1864 the explorer viewed some vague shapes in the distance and he called them the "Blue Mountains to the South." But he failed to appreciate their true nature. In 1875, Stanley camped beneath the mighty range, but because of the mist he was not aware of what towered over him. In the following year Romolo Gessi, an Italian explorer, saw what he described as a strange vision in the sky--- of mountains covered with snow. The Ruwenzori mist yielded its secret slowly, though, and Gessi too had no idea what lay behind the veil.

Finally in 1888, 24 years after Baker's glimpse, the Ruwenzoris were recognized as a snow-covered range. Stanley, on an expedition to relieve the besieged Emin Pasha, made the discovery. Writing in his journal, he said:

"When about five miles from Nsabe camp, while looking to the southeast and meditating upon the events of the last month, my eyes were attracted by a boy to a mountain, said to be covered with salt, and I saw a peculiar-shaped cloud of a most beautiful silver color which assumed the proportions and appearance of a vast mountain covered with snow.

"Following its form downward, I became struck with the deep blue-black color of its base and wondered if it portended another tornado; then, as the sight descended to the gap between the eastern and western plateaux, I became for the first time conscious that what I gazed upon was not the image or semblance of a vast mountain, but the solid substance of a real one, with its summit covered with snow."

Stanley fixed the name of the range as the Ruwenzori. Although several names were used by local tribes, he thought that something that could be written as "Ruwenzori" was the most common. It is supposed to mean "King of the Clouds" or "Rain Maker."

The Ruwenzoris had been seen and named. But nearly 20 years would pass before anything would be known about them. Several climbing attempts were made, but they were always forced back by lack of porters, lack of equipment, illness and the abominable weather for which the mountains are famous. Two parties did manage to scale one peak, on Mount Baker, but the rest of the range remained as unknown as their namesake, the moon.

A thorough exploration was finally made in 1906. A party headed by an Italian, Prince Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duke of Abruzzi, scaled all the major peaks and carried out mapping operations. The names of the six glacial mountains were given by Abruzzi. Stanley (Margherita Peak: 16,794) was named after the explorer. Speke (16,080) was named after the discoverer of the Lake Victoria source of the Nile. Baker (15,988) was named after Sir Samuel, who discovered Lake Albert and who had the first fleeting glimpse of the range. Emin (15,285) was named after Emin Pasha, who, among other things, traversed the Semliki valley with Stanley. Gessi (15,647) was after the Italian explorer who first circumnavigated Lake Albert and

who had the distant "vision" of the Ruwenzoris. The sixth big peak, Mount Luigi di Savoia (15,299) was named after the Duke himself. The two highest peaks on Mount Stanley, Margherita and Alexandra (the latter is 16,749, or 45 feet lower than Margherita) were named after Italy's Queen Margherita of Savoy and Britain's Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII.

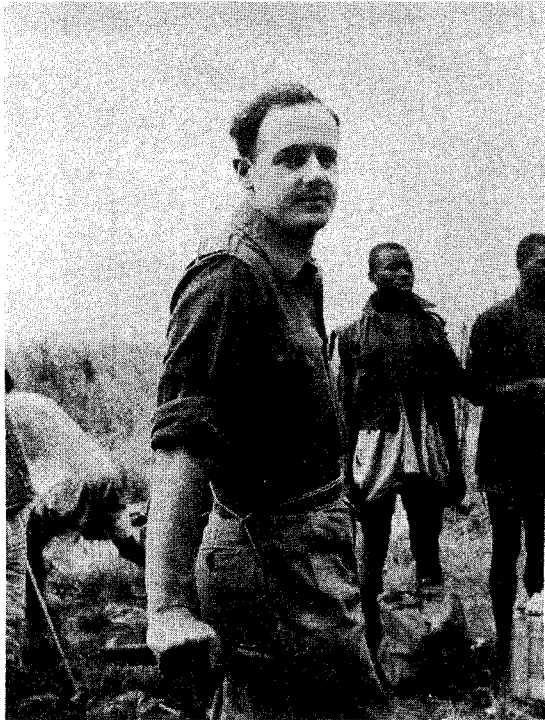
Since the Duke's expedition, the Ruwenzoris have been well explored, but they still remain but little touched by civilization. A small amount of bamboo is cut commercially and there is a copper mine at Kilembe, but that is about all. Unlike Kilimanjaro, there is



Porters Load Up
(Alastair is wearing the large
hat and Peter is to the far right)

no well-beaten path for climbers to follow. Huts have been built, but those on the Tanganyikan mountain are palatial by comparison. Without porters, expeditions would quickly become lost in the thick forests guarding the approaches to the peaks. There are no guides. After the porters have brought parties to the edge of the glaciers, the climbers have to find their own routes over unmarked ice fields to the final peaks.

The next morning, Wednesday, July 21, was cloudless and hot. Yet the Ruwenzoris still lay hidden in mist. The porters showed up and began arguing over loads. As I was the only one who knew any Kiswahili, I had to argue for all of us. We had brought enough blankets and sleeveless sweaters for 17 porters and the headman, who carries no load. We found that no matter how hard we tried, we had too much



Peter,
holding ice axe

equipment for that many men. So we had to hire another six porters. We had no blankets or sweaters for them, so they demanded extra pay. They would get seven shillings (\$0.98) a day each. Most three-man expeditions get by with, say, 10 porters. When we started up the road toward the forest, we had a total of 23, plus Simoni the headman, plus Oriko. We looked like one of Stanley's great ventures into the interior. It was 8:50 a.m.

At 9:40 we came to roadhead and plunged into 15-foot-high elephant grass, following a narrow, tunnel-like path. "Now this is more like Africa should look," Alastair said. Here and there the Bakonjo had cleared tiny shambas and paths.

We came to a stream. The barefoot porters, each carrying 50 pounds, splashed through it. Sometimes they leaped from rock to rock. I removed my shoes and started across. I slipped, grabbed for a rock and dropped the shoes. They roared off downstream, but a

porter managed to retrieve them. I put them back on in mid-stream and waded ashore. On the other side we began encountering elephant droppings and tracks. The porters became uneasy.

This was Number Two on Alastair's East African mountaineering schedule. "I know it sounds silly to say it, but one reason I took this job in Kenya was so that I could climb Kilimanjaro, the Ruwenzoris and Mount Kenya," he said. Wearing corduroy shorts, a five-gallon bush hat and heavy climbing boots, he bounced up the trail, chatting continuously. He had visited Uganda a couple of years before, on a roving assignment from the Central Office of Information in London. Now, always the newspaperman eager to inform the readers, he kept bubbling over with little bits of information gleaned on that trip.

Despite the difficulties, this was a pleasant holiday for Alastair. Back at the Press Office in Nairobi, he would be trying to talk on two telephones at once, while, at the same time, he would be trying to answer questions from a couple of visiting journalists. Alastair has spent most of his adult life in South Africa and Kenya and feels much at home in the bush or ploughing up a forest trail.

We left the grass at 10:30 and plunged into the forest. I had climbed in several of East Africa's high-altitude forests before---on Kilimanjaro, in the Aberdares and on the lower slopes of Mount Kenya. But they all seemed like Chicago's Jackson Park compared with this.



Twenty-five men preceded us up through the forest---23 porters, Simoni and Oriko. But the forest closed in so swiftly behind the column that they left hardly a trace. We still had to push, sometimes shoulder, our way through the tangle of thorns, vines, brambles, bush and weeds. The "trail" was not really a trail at all. It was only that place that offered a little less resistance. At times the porters would get 25 feet ahead and we would be lost. We would have to shout for them to call out their position.

We crossed another stream. A tree, six inches in diameter, had fallen across it. Despite their 50-pound loads, the porters skipped across the tree like tightrope walkers. We waded through it. A troop of monkeys high above us in the trees hooted in derision.

When you think of mountain climbing, you picture yourself starting out at the bottom and proceeding upwards until you reach the top. But when you get underway, you realize you have to spend a large part of your time going down as well. You climb a small ridge. Then you have to descend to reach a larger ridge. You scale it, then you go down the other side to get to a hill. Then up and down the hill to get to the larger hill.

We would puff and stumble up through the thorns, using our hands to haul ourselves up at the steeper places. Then, when we had reached the ridge, we would realize that we would have to abandon all that altitude so laboriously acquired.

At 2:50 p.m., we were climbing along the crest of a razorback ridge. The ridge was less than 15 feet wide at the top. On either side it fell away nearly perpendicularly, to river gorges. One was the Mobuku, the other a tributary. We were so high above the Mobuku, which is one long cataract, that its roar sounded like the murmur of a meadow brook. An eagle on a tree branch watched us pass.

We reached Nyinabitaba hut at 3:20, 6 1/2 hours after starting out. A pamphlet published by the Mountain Club of Uganda puts the time at four hours. "We're running true to form," said Alastair.

There was nothing in the hut. We spread our sleeping bags out on the wooden floor. I asked the porters where we could find drinking water. "Oh, there's some very good water here," they said, removing the lid from a rusty rain barrel. I peered with detached interest at the minuscular wild life sporting around in it. But we were thirsty and waterless. It would have been a big battle to get the porters to descend the 1,000 feet to draw water from the Mobuku. We boiled some rain water, removed some of the dead bugs and added purifying tablets as an added precaution. But the water remained so hot that we couldn't drink it. So we used it as tea.

A feeling of depression settled over us. We were dead tired. It had been our first day on the trail and none of us was in shape for it. Our clothing was wet from the damp forest undergrowth and our shoes were soggy from splashing through streams. We would never really dry out for a week to come. Our hands, legs and faces were cut by brambles. We could see nothing of the reputed majestic scenery of the Ruwenzoris. There was nothing but damp, cold mist.

Peter said: "I'm going to send myself a telegram: 'Come home at once. Can't get along without you---George.'" General Sir George Erskine is Commander-in-Chief, East Africa.

At 6 p.m. the haze began to lift. The great Portal Peaks (14,640) emerged. First the bases took definite shape. As the mist rose, the lines went higher and higher. Finally the jagged peaks themselves were visible. The twin summits reached to more than a mile above us. They are among the smaller of the Ruwenzori peaks, yet them surpass anything in the United States.* We watched in silence. Then, in a few minutes, the mist covered them up again.

Oriko slept in the hut with us, refusing to associate with the shenzi (uncivilized) porters. The shenzis had gone to a nearby cave and they whooped it up half the night, singing, shouting and grunting. "They're animals," said Oriko. "When they eat they grunt like dogs." At 7:20 p.m. we were asleep.

Thursday, July 22

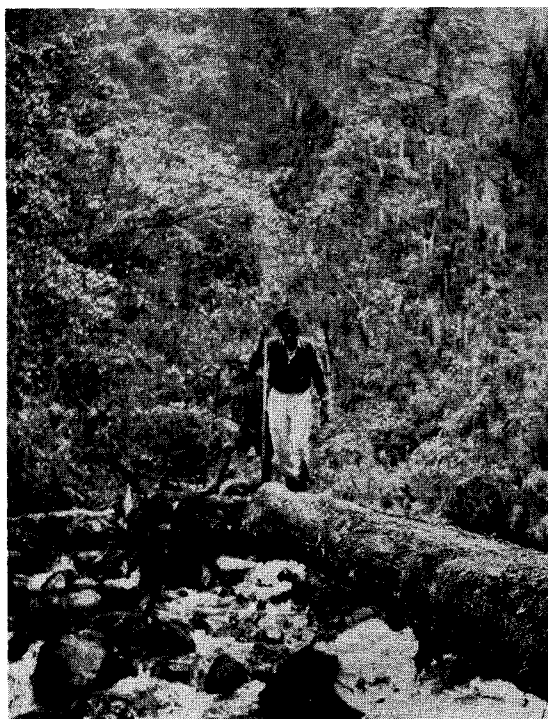
We got up at 6:20 after 11 hours of sleep. Oriko went outside with the thermometer and returned to say: "The blood stands at 54." It was

* Highest mountain in the U. S.: California's Mt. Whitney (14,495).

still dark. Rain was beating on the aluminum roof of the hut. I lighted the pressure lamp and we had breakfast. The night before I had told the porters to be ready to leave at 7:30. They were ready at 8:30. We were ready at 9. With one day's rations consumed, we were able to pay off two porters and send them back down. That left us with a mere 21.

The junction of the Mobuku and its great tributary, the Bujuku, was near the hut. We left the Mobuku there to follow the Bujuku for the

next two days. A log, two feet thick, served as a bridge over the river. The porters bounded across it. Oriko walked across too, though hesitatingly. Alastair, Peter and I wormed our way across on all fours. A cataract roared beneath the improvised bridge.



Oriko,
Crossing Log Bridge

"This is a very bad place," Oriko said in Kiswahili as he followed me up through the barbed undergrowth. Climbing was not for him, nor, for that matter, any great physical effort. He is about 18---few Africans know their exact age---and he has an Abaluhya father and a Swahili mother. The Swahilis are coastal Africans and they are part Arab.

Oriko is a Muslim and his full name is Ramazan Oriko son of Murunga. Not to be outdone by the Europeans, he signs his name "R. J. Oriko." He has had a few years of education in a Muslim school and in addition to North Nyanza dialects, he speaks Kiswahili, some English and a little Arabic. He has a shamba in North Nyanza and his wife and two children live there.

Oriko spends a large part of his wages on maradadi (fancy) items. They include two wrist watches, a cigaret lighter, a cigaret case, a fountain pen and at least a dozen studio photographs of himself. Some of my acquaintances refer to the fastidious Oriko as "His Lordship" or "Lord Swillbeer."

He had been a "room boy" at the Norfolk hotel in Nairobi. Then he worked as my house servant at Ngong. Now he takes care of my car, runs errands in Nairobi and accompanies me on safaris. On trout fishing trips up Mount Kenya, he carries the creel and net and, armed with a spear, acts as lookout and bodyguard. I am teaching him how to drive so he can get a better job and he is a quick pupil.

Oriko usually is stoical about everything. One exception was his first and only plane ride. We returned to Nairobi from Nakuru in a small plane once with Oriko sitting in the back, persistently

asking the pilot what kept the plane up and perspiring at the thought of being karibu Mungu ("near God"). The other exception to his stoicism was the Ruwenzoris. He most emphatically did not like them.



Left--the groundsel forest. Simoni is in the lower center.

Amid sighs of exhaustion, Oriko did find time to comment that the wachawi, the evil witch doctors, "eat trees, just like goats." Simoni, who was right behind us, clucked in horror.

At 10,000 feet we entered the alpine zone, encountering the prehistoric-looking vegetation one finds at high altitudes in East Africa. Groundsels, looking somewhat like grotesque palm trees, were covered with big clumps of brown moss. Giant lobelias, resembling a cactus, rose as high as 15 feet. Heather, which grows to only a few inches or a foot in Scotland, was tree size. "Looks like a drawing of pre-historic times," said Alastair. "I half expect to see a brontosaurus poke his head out from between those groundsels---or a terradactyl come flying down."

The eerie forest is still. There is little wild life. The plant world, in one of its most bizarre forms, holds sway.

We arrived at Nyamleju hut at 2:30 p.m., 5 1/2 hours after leaving Nyinabitaba. The altitude was 10,640. The hut was perched on a steep slope. The Bujuku roared 500 feet below, unseen because of the tangled groundsel. "If we ever get to the top, we'll have to rename it 'Matheson's, Reed's and Douglas' Folly,'" someone suggests.

What made us continue our chase after those elusive peaks? I didn't know the answer. At times I thought I was crazy to go even that far. "The thing is that you forget quickly," Peter was saying. "Already I've forgotten just how horrible it was climbing through that forest today and yesterday."

At 7:30 the mist parted. We climbed to an overhanging ledge. A series of giant peaks beckoned from the distance. They dwarfed even the majestic Portals. We could not identify them. Then, in a minute, they were engulfed in mist again. Darkness fell.

Peter mixed some drinks and Alastair, the teetotaler, settled for an orange ade. Then Peter talked about his experiences in India. He is a British officer of the Old School, first a gentleman and then a professional soldier. One gets the impression that he would have been much at home in the days of Kipling and Gunga Din, the days when the sun never set on the British Empire, and no one ever dreamed it ever could, the days when you could get by all over the world by speaking in "a loud, firm and clear English voice."

When Peter got to India, though, Kipling's day was almost over and Nehru's was just beginning. Today, too, one finds that the exclusive nature of "the best club in the world"---the British Army officer class---is beginning to crack a bit. Draftee officers and others who don't quite measure up to the old standard have been infiltrating into the Mess, or Officers' Club.

Still, though, Peter belongs to one of the more exclusive regiments, the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, or the 5th Afoot. A vigorous social life is pursued there and one needs an independent income to meet the mess bills. None of the officers wear uniforms when off duty. Instead, wearing top quality tweeds and old school ties, they gather each evening for rounds of drinks and witty, intelligent conversations. At these gatherings, it is hard to believe you are among professional soldiers. Rather it seems you have just dropped in on a discussion group at Oxford or Cambridge.

Neither does Peter seem like a professional soldier. He says he loathes firearms and adds, "What's more, they frighten me." He works as a staff officer at the 49th Independent Infantry Brigade headquarters, just outside Nairobi and never carries a firearm although he has to pass through a corner of the Kikuyu Reserve each day.

Peter is 28 years old, of medium stature and has thinning brown hair. His home is near London and his father is a well-to-do businessman. A grandfather was a canon in the Church of England. Peter got a public school---i.e., American private school---education, at Christ's Hospital. There the serious business of being a gentleman was drilled into him and, he sometimes recalls, pounded into him via "six of the best" with a cane.

Peter did not go on to a university, but joined the Army as an officer cadet at the age of 17. An English public school education is such, though, that he can hold his own in any conversation, particularly one relating to an old favorite, English poetry.

Sent to India, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the 6th Gurkha Rifles, in the turbulent North West Frontier Province, now part of Pakistan. "Did I know a Gurkha from a Chinaman?" Peter says, imitating Jimmy Durante, "No! But I kept on trying!"

He was in Delhi during one Muslim-Hindu riot and recalls that Nehru once entered the command post. "Nehru said, 'It's terrible, all these people killing each other.' Nehru was a nice chap." Peter was 21 and a captain when Independence came. He remembers well the day, in Delhi's Red Fort, when the pipes and drums beat retreat and the Union Jack came down forever. That was in August of 1947. Looking back, he regards the British withdrawal as a mistake. "Educated people used to come up and say, 'You're not leaving India, are you? There'll be terrible riots. You understand us better than we understand ourselves.' If your bearer (servant) told you that, you'd figure he was trying to win favor. But when educated people said it, that was a different thing."

When the riots came, Peter led convoys of Muslims to Pakistan and returned with Hindus for India. "When you are in the East," he says, "you find that life is very cheap. You see beggars dying in the streets every day. But these riots were so colossal that you would feel very sad. Thousands of people would be on the move and they would be petrified with fear. Going by train you could see bodies lined up by the families in the fields."

Peter left India on Christmas Day, 1948, and went to Malaya, where he participated in jungle patrols against the Communists. Then, after a short stay in Hong Kong, he finally got home after 5 1/2 years. With the breakup of the Indian Army, Peter fared better than many British officers. Large numbers of them had to retire, regardless of age. Peter managed to get into the 5th Afoot, his father's regiment, though.

In Kenya, like most British officers and men, the war against Mau Mau is just another job for him. He is critical of the settlers and rarely mixes with them socially. He likes to attend chapel, and parties. At the latter, he often plays the piano, mixing church hymns with American dance numbers. His other activities include imitating what he regards as a Texas accent ("The name's P. Reginald Wackenheimer Douglas, son!"), Jimmy Durante ("Gentlemen, I have made my bed and now I will let sleeping dogs lie in it---it's hoomiliatin'") or Indian merchants ("Just is first class merchandise, Sir.").

Friday, July 23

We woke up feeling the first effects of altitude---light headaches, but these soon departed. It was a cloudy and damp day. We got underway at 9:45, having told the porters to be ready at 7:30. They knew us better than that and weren't ready till 9 o'clock. Three more were paid off and sent back down. That left us with 18.

The groundsel forest was swampy. We kept sinking almost to our knees in mud, filling the rarefied air with expressions more vigorous than eloquent.



The Valley
Tall lobelia rises at
the right.

We left the forest, emerging into a broad valley. It was ringed with phantom peaks and dotted with giant lobelias. We had lunch at 12:30. We were at 11,500 feet. The porters watched us with great mirth. "They're probably saying we eat like dogs," Alastair said.

The mist thickened. A sleet storm broke. The temperature dropped to just above freezing. The trail got muddier. Oriko was exhausted. He gave the cameras to Simoni. Then, at 2:50 p.m., after three days of following the rivers, we reached Lake Bujuku, source of the Bujuku River.

Stark groundsels protruded from the swamp at the point where the river spills out of the lake. The mist was very thick. "Looks like the Valley of Death itself, doesn't it?" said Alastair. The lake is ringed by the three great massifs of the range---Baker, Speke and Stanley. For one fleeting moment we caught a glimpse of Stanley and its glacier, nearly 4,000 feet above us. It was the first time we had seen snow and ice. "Barafu! (Ice)," Oriko exclaimed. He had never seen any before, except in the refrigerators that the clever white men had brought to Kenya. At 4 p.m. we stumbled into Bujuku hut, altitude 13,000. It had taken us 6 1/4 hours. The book said 5 1/2.



Beginning of the Bujuku River
---"The Valley of Death Itself."

The hut, we found, was full. Five people were there already--- a woman and two men from South Africa, a European forest officer and an educated Uganda African who is a keen mountaineer. The woman, a medical doctor, was there alone. The four men were making a one-day excursion to the top of Mount Speke. She said the "white Africans" in her party had not been too happy about finding a "black African" sharing their hut. But, with their mutual interest in climbing, they soon were getting along well and had gone off to climb together.

We decided to sleep in a tent that the forest officer had brought along. We were wet, cold and tired and it was not an inviting prospect. Just before dark, we went outside to see what the evening lifting of the mist would reveal. This time it was Mount Baker, which came into full view for a minute.

Back in the hut, while thumbing through the climbers' journal, I came across a notice asking climbers to write down the peak they would attempt "and any information that may be of use to other climbers and/or rescue party in the event of a sudden change of weather conditions or accidents."

The four men had not returned by dark. The doctor was worried. We hung pressure lamps outside to mark the position of the hut. Then Alastair, Peter and I crowded into the tiny tent and made fitful efforts at sleeping.



Mount Baker

(The glacier is not visible from this position, but bits of it can be seen on the right hand side of the mountain.)

The woman awakened us at 9 p.m. "One of the men has returned. There's been an accident," she said. We got up and went into the hut. One of the South Africans, a big strapping young man named Rolfe, said: "We got to the top and an electric storm broke. Sparks were flashing along our nylon rope. We got worried. We were hurrying to get down when Bloomfield (the other South African) slipped on some wet moss and fell 20 feet. He hit his head and I think he broke his arm. When we got to him he said, 'Where are we? What are we doing here? We didn't get to the Ruwenzoris after all.'

"We couldn't bring him down in the dark, so the African and the forest officer are staying with him. I came down to get sleeping bags, a tent and sedatives. We'll try to bring him down in the morning. I think he'll be able to walk."

If he couldn't walk, he would have to be taken back down to roadhead on a stretcher. It would take an able-bodied man two days to descend through the thickets. It might take a week to get a stretcher through. Bloomfield was lucky in one respect, though. There was a doctor in the hut.

I sent for the headman of their safari and told him I wanted two porters to carry Rolfe's equipment. The headman refused. "We're

afraid and it's too cold," he said. I cajoled and berated and finally he agreed to get the men and accompany them. The porters shouldered their loads reluctantly. Rolfe waved to us and then was gone in the night.

2 a.m.: The doctor awakened us again. The porters had returned with a note from Rolfe asking for six more porters. The note said the headman and the two porters had left him after two hours, without finding the other party. I called the porters to the hut. All refused to go. Threats had no effect. Maybe they would go at dawn, they said.

The woman was frantic. Finally I told her we would just have to wait for first light. We could never find Rolfe and/or the others in the dark. Even if we did, we still would have to wait for first light before we could do anything. Reluctantly, she agreed.

7 a.m.: Alastair, Peter and I, along with the headman and six porters, started up the nearly vertical slope of Speke. The mushy ground of the day before was frozen solid. It was a tough climb in that rarefied air and we kept silent to save breath. That is, everyone saved his breath but me. The porters kept balking and I had to keep urging them on. They hate to get that close to the glacier. They were barefooted, true, but it was no colder there than in the valley. They have a superstitious dread of the top.

8:55: We found one of the rucksacks that the porters were carrying the night before. That was where the porters had balked. Rolfe had tried to carry both 50-pound loads. But he got only a few feet and then dropped one. The porters turned around and started back. I drove them up again. We picked up Rolfe's tracks in the moss and began following them. They wound around erratically.

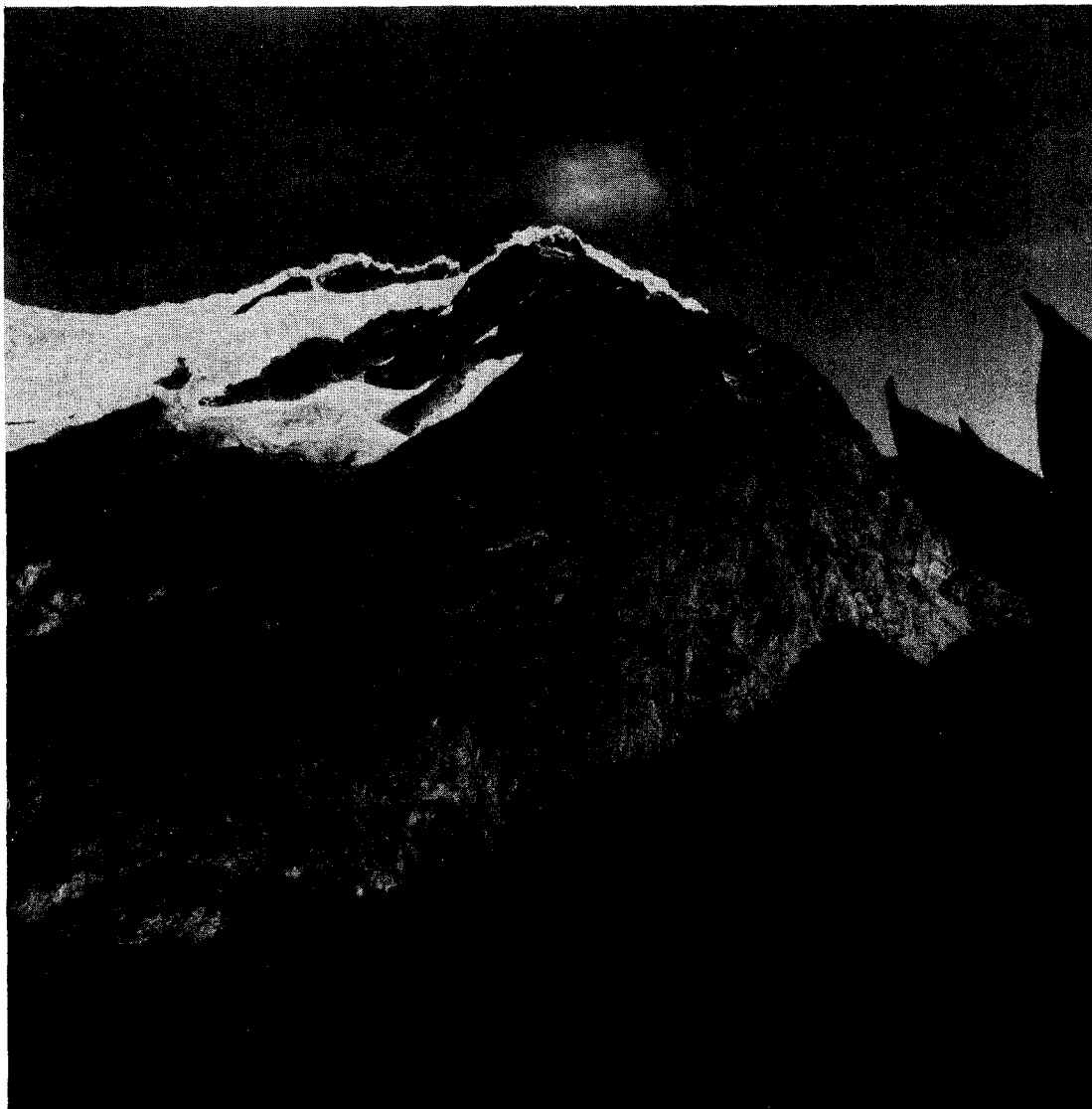
Where was Rolfe? Was he wandering around on the mountain, lost? Did he have an accident, too? Or did he find the others and descend with them by a different route, leaving us perched high and dry on Speke? "The plot thickens," Alastair said glumly.

We reached 14,000 feet. It was very clear and we had a magnificent view of Stanley glacier and its Margherita and Alexandra peaks. They were not far above eye level. The ice cliffs guarding the final approaches to Margherita looked gigantic. We wondered how we would ever get over them---if we ever got that far.

Rounding a shoulder of the mountain, we came on all four men. Bloomfield was roped to the forest officer to prevent another fall and was coming down with tiny steps. He greeted me in Afrikaans, then switched to English. He said he thought he had broken his arm. He seemed to be still feeling the effects of concussion.

Rolfe, we learned, had wandered around in the dark for an hour and then had keeled over from exhaustion. He slept the rest of the night in a bed of moss and rocks. At first light he woke up and found the others. With 10 men to attend to Bloomfield, we descended rapidly, leaving them to follow at his slow pace. We had a date, with Margherita.

12:15 p.m.: We got ready to leave Bukuku hut for Elena hut, at the edge of Stanley glacier. "I don't want to go up there. Perhaps I might die," Oriko said. That was all right with us if he stayed behind.

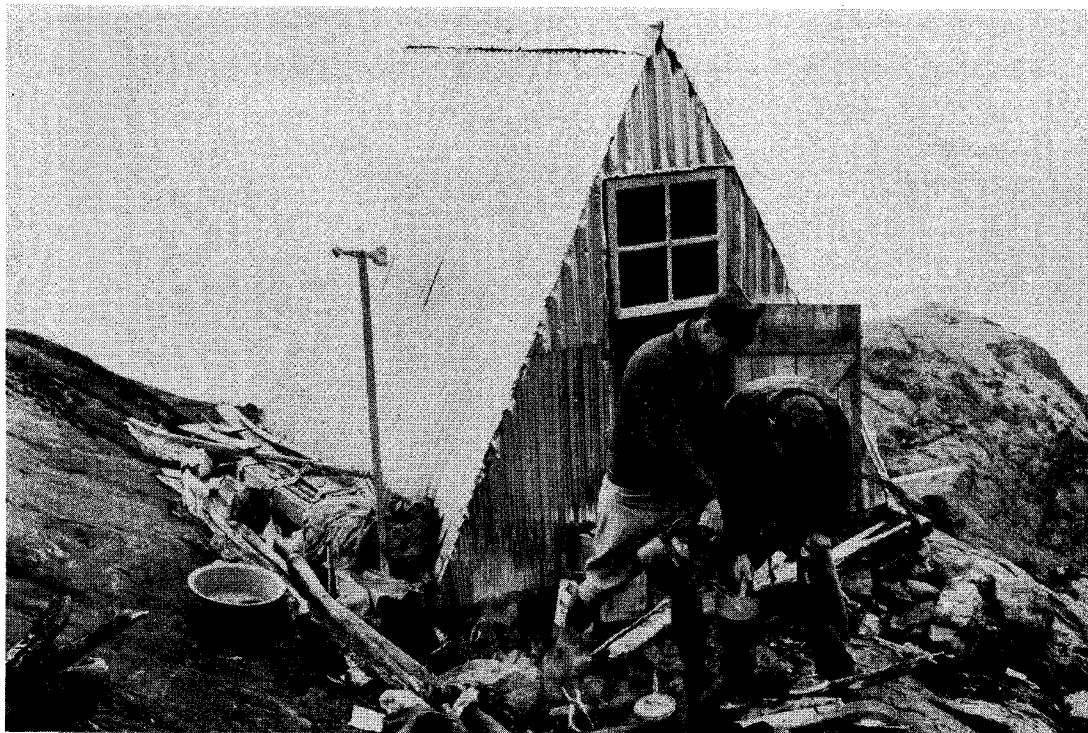


Stanley Glacier
From the 14,000-foot level of
Mount Speke that morning. Margherita
peak is to the right; Alexandra to
the left. Shadow on lower right is
that of Speke.

But he would have to wait in the cave with the detested shenzis.

We climbed rapidly on Stanley. At 2:30 we reached the end of vegetation. Now we were on bare rock. Sometimes we squeezed along narrow ledges, hanging on by the fingertips. We crawled over the tops of huge boulders. The rocks were wet and we were very careful not to slip. Next to us was a thousand-foot drop. Yet we could not see down. Everything was blotted out in mist. We knew the precipice was there, but that was all. The rest of the world had disappeared beneath us.

We arrived at Elena hut at 3:15, right on book schedule. The



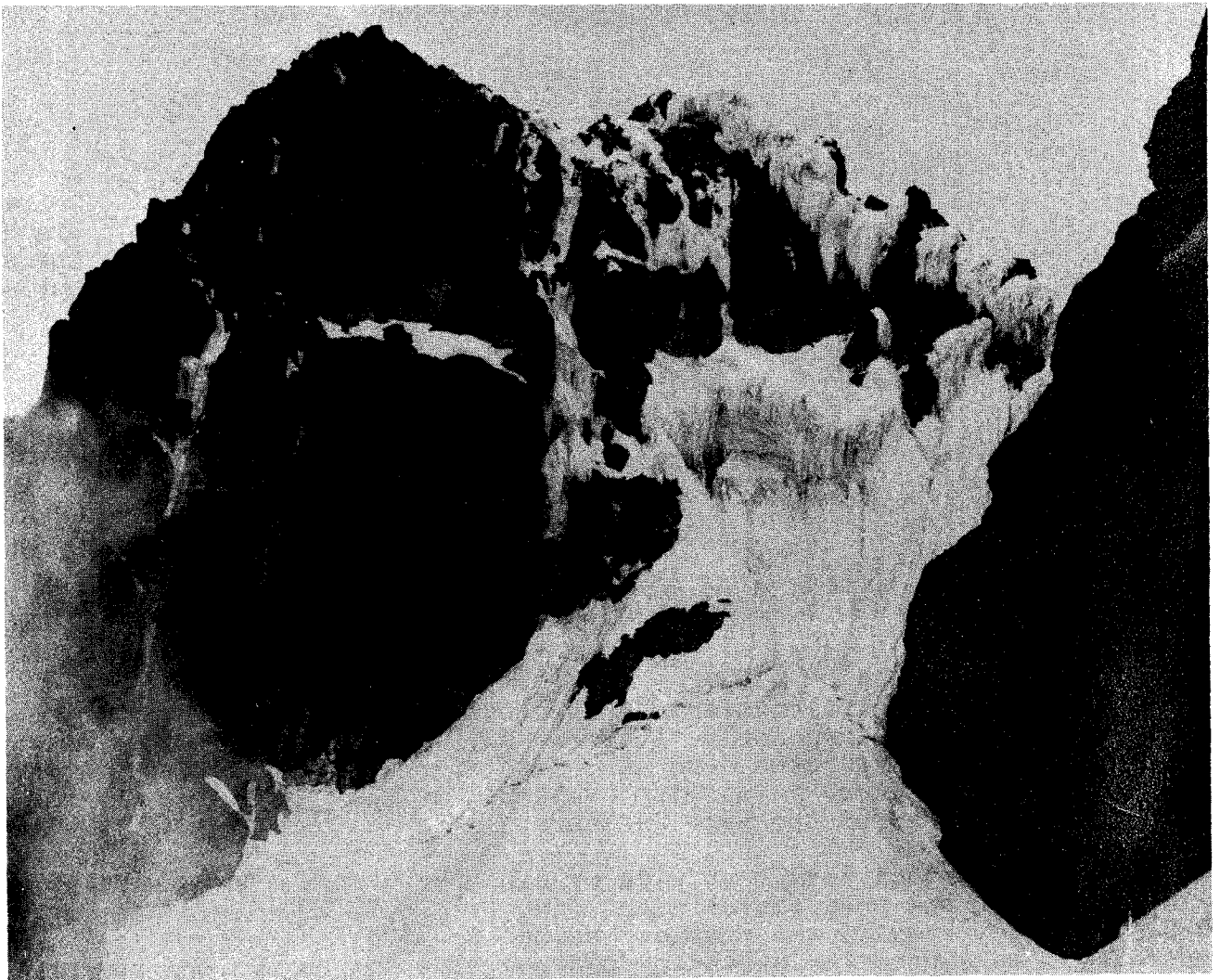
Preparing
Dinner,
Elena
Hut

porters put down their loads and started back. They would spend the night at Bujuku hut and return for us the next day. "If the mist comes up while you're on the glacier, come down at once," Simoni says. "Otherwise you would be lost for good." The mist swallowed up his retreating figure. We were left there for the next 24 hours.

The hut was only six feet wide by nine feet long. There were no walls; rather the roof sloped right down to the floor. We could hardly stand upright, even in the middle. We had to move some of the equipment outside to make room for spreading out our sleeping bags. The pressure stove wouldn't work. We built a fire outside in the sleet storm. We ate dinner with no relish. Altitude kills one's appetite and we were at nearly 15,000 feet.

Just before dark, the mist lifted with customary suddenness. To our surprise, we found that the hut was only 50 feet from the very edge of the glacier. The glacier rose sharply upwards and disappeared over a ridge. In the morning, we would be going up it. Someone shouted to produce an echo. A tiny avalanche let loose. We decided to keep quiet. The temperature was just above freezing and the snow atop the glacier itself was loosening up.

That was the story of what had happened before we began our final ascent. Once Peter said, "And to think I could have spent this leave on the beach at Malindi." He echoed Alastair's and my sentiments. We had soured on the Ruwenzoris. But no one ever suggested giving up. So, just after first light the next morning, Sunday, July 25, we were picking our way up the glacier, bound for Margherita peak. We got only a short way and Peter had crampon trouble. He and Alastair exchanged pairs. I went on, feeling exhilarated. I took very small steps, as an experienced



mountaineer had told me. All that exhaustion on Kilimanjaro had been in vain, he said. If I had taken it easy and hadn't tried to fight the mountain, it would have been quite easy. It was true that Kilimanjaro is higher than the Ruwenzoris, but I was feeling much better this time than I had felt at equivalent heights on the Tanganyikan peak.

Peter and Alastair disappeared from view as I crossed a shoulder of the glacier. I came to a fork. One branch went straight up; the other veered to the right. I took the right fork and continued climbing. Once I sat down to tighten a crampon. I began sliding rapidly down the slick surface. I stopped myself by digging the crampons into the frozen snow.

It was a clear morning. The glacier was dazzling. I understood why snow blindness is such a danger and was glad I had brought very dark sunglasses. Up I went.

You get a very strange and pleasant feeling on the glacier. The towers of rock and ice, the overhanging ice cliffs, the crevasses

and the giant icicles all dwarf you into insignificance. You have burst into a world you never dreamed existed and you are filled with awe and wonder. The skyscrapers of New York would look very small and unimpressive next to the ice falls of Ruwenzori.

As I climbed, I kept poking my ice axe into the snow to make sure I didn't plunge into a crevasse covered with a light topping of snow. Once the ice axe went in all the way to the hilt, throwing me off balance. Looking down, I found I was standing on a thin layer of ice atop a crevasse. I got off very fast.

I looked back and saw the tiny figures of Peter and Alastair at the fork. "We think that's the wrong way," they shouted amid many echoes. I was in no mood to abandon 500 feet of rarefied altitude without an argument. "How do you know?" I shouted back. "Just a guess," they said. "All right, you try that way and I'll try this one. We'll meet at the top," I said. It turned out to be one of my more colossal follies.

I continued up my route while they went straight ahead, roped together for safety. My glacier wound around. Finally I came out atop a precipice and saw Peter and Alastair plodding up a distant ice field far below me.

I decided to descend the precipice---it was not too steep in places. But, I found, a yawning crevasse separated the bottom of the precipice from the ice field. Then I spotted what looked like a bridge of ice connecting the two. Peter and Alastair had disappeared from view as I started down the precipice, edging my way down over the rocks.

Then I slipped on a smooth rock outcropping. I started to slide, clawing to stop myself. Only a few seconds had passed, but it seemed like an hour before I finally got a good grip on a crack in the rock and had stopped sliding. From my new vantage point, the "ice-bridge" just below me turned out to be just a bump in the glacier edge. The crevasse was still there.

I couldn't go down and it seemed I couldn't get back up. I got my whistle out and blew it, hoping that the others would come and lower a rope so I could get back up. But all I got were echoes and re-echoes. The ice and rock kept turning the sound back.

I had to do something, so I decided to try to edge my way back up the rock face. I took off the crampons and flung them and the ice axe to a wide ledge about 25 feet above me---the one from which I had started sliding. Then I edged my way slowly up the rock face, using every pebble-sized bump for support and balance. I was surprised to find that I could get back that way. Well, anyway, I didn't have much of a choice.

It took me 20 minutes to cover those 25 feet to the ledge and another five to get back to the top of the precipice. I sat down and smoked a cigaret. My "ice bridge" looked, from that angle, every bit like a real one once more.

There was no point in trying to find another place to cross over to the lower ice field, so I went back down to the fork. I was back



Alastair



Peter

where I had started; an hour had been wasted. I thought of returning to the hut, to wait for the others and then descend to Fort Portal and write the whole venture off as a big mistake. It was an attractive idea. But four days had been spent laboring up that mountain. I started up after the others.

I climbed rapidly and after an hour caught up with the others. We were on the lower slopes of Alexandra peak. The peak itself, guarded by a cornice, loomed up above us. We realized we had probably crossed into the Congo---the boundary runs across the glacier. Looking down to the east, though, we could see nothing but clouds. "And to think I forgot to get a visa," exclaimed Douglas-Durante. We kept climbing up toward the great cornices, wondering how we would scale them.

We never had a chance to find out, though. The mist started to return. The majestic ice scenery began to fade from view. Soon the top of Alexandra was gone; soon the menacing cornices were only a memory. Then the man in front became just an indistinct blur.



Author

We were only 500 feet from the top of Alexandra. If the weather had held up, and if we had gotten over or around the cornices, it would have been only an hour to the final cornices of Margherita peak. But with the mist, we could see nothing. The sudden crevasse, the about-to-fall icicle, the abrupt drop-off---all were hidden from sight.

Even if those dangers had not existed, we wouldn't have known which way to go. Nor would we have known which way to return. "I think we've had it," said Alastair. "It's hoomiliatin'," said Peter.

We trudged back down in silence, past the great ice formations, all hidden in mist, down across the vast ice plateau, down past the great fork, now tightly enshrouded, too.

We reached the hut at 12:30 p.m. and slumped down to rest. Should we stay another night and try again the next day? No, we had had our try and that was that. We were appalled at the thought of another headache-ridden night in the damp, cold and crowded hut. Neither did we like the idea of drinking brackish water for another 24 hours, or of cooking and eating our meals in the driving sleet.

And there was no reason to assume that the next day's weather would be even that good. We wanted to dry out, to get warm, to sleep in comfort. Emotionally we were spent; physically we were exhausted. Ruwenzori had won.

Two crows circled the hut, cawing raucously. The porters arrived and we started down at 4:45. "Oh well," said Peter, "at least our trip wasn't as ill-fated as the South Africans'."

Back at Bujuku hut that evening we found Oriko dancing around outside. He flung his arms about wildly as he pirouetted back and forth. He was frowning intently all the time. "What's this, an ngoma (native dance)?" I asked. "Hapana, my feet are cold," he replied. We found that the South African was improving and would be able to walk down soon.

The next day we reached Nyinabitaba hut. The following day, while in the forest, a herd of elephant trumpeted near us. That put the porters into a panic. The ones in front stopped so fast that those in back banged into them like freight cars in a switching yard.

Then at 12:25 p.m. that day, Tuesday, July 27, we reached roadhead. We had spent a week in the mountains. We had walked nearly 100 miles. From roadhead, we walked another eight miles to the main road. There we found an African truck driver on his way to Fort Portal. He agreed to give us a lift.

As we put our gear aboard, we paid off our remaining porters, now dwindled to eight. Peter had lent a sweater to one of them, a boy of 15. Now Peter asked for it back. The boy burst into tears, saying he thought it had been a gift. It was the best sweater he had ever had. "Damn it, tell him I wish I could let him keep it, but it belongs to a private soldier and you can't get any more like it in Kenya now," Peter said. I told the boy it belonged to a white askari and that the askari had to have it back. Still sobbing, the boy returned the sweater. I gave him three shillings, all the money I had left.

We bounced along in the truck toward Fort Portal. Three buffalo ran across the road ahead of us. Then they stopped and turned to stare. On we went. The mist was lifting. The Ruwenzoris came into view and filed past, one by one, the outer ramparts of that wild and forbidding range. Behind the ramparts, hidden from the world by the eternal mist, the keeper of the secret of the Ruwenzoris, lay the six snow-crowned massifs, the Mountains of the Moon.

All of the difficulties and hardships of those eight days were forgotten now. We could remember only that we had almost broken through our sound barrier.

Sincerely,

David E Reed

David E. Reed

Received New York 9/21/54.