

CAW-1  
Kilimanjaro

Pound Cottage  
The Green  
Brill, Aylesbury  
Bucks, England  
May 30, 1963

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The memories and scars of our trip into the Ruwenzori were still fresh, and I was secretly trying to negotiate the sale of boots, heavy socks and an ice-axe when Michael suggested that it would be fun to climb Kilimanjaro. Visions of blisters, cold, sleepless nights and miles of hiking swam in my head. There are some occasions when one must put one's foot down, firmly and irrevocably, and this was one of them. I flatly refused; I protested; I pleaded!

As we bounced along the road to Marangu, high on the slopes of Kilimanjaro, I cheered myself with thoughts of a sudden attack of mumps or a broken leg. The day was perfectly clear and Kilimanjaro loomed majestically in the distance. Our thoughts turned to practical problems of clothing and equipment. As we drew closer the excitement of adventure began to seep in,



and we reached Marangu in high spirits.

Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa, can be seen from over a hundred miles away. It stretches up, past several layers of cloud, clears the highest, and spreads its mantle of snow at 19,340 feet. On the slopes below it, rich volcanic soil supports the industrious Chagga, a handsome and wealthy tribe. Like many high places in Africa, Kilimanjaro was traditionally considered the home of the gods, and until quite recently, the Chagga were content to leave them alone. But missionaries and Englishmen will explore, and in the late 19th century several came to see and climb the mountain. Guides, loaned by local chiefs, set up camp in caves and waited for them to return, not really expecting them to do so. On one such trip, one of the guides went further and brought back some ice for his chief. When his surprise wore off the chief was keenly disappointed. The silver he believed to be on top was merely water.

Today, one need not be an explorer or even a climber to climb Kilimanjaro. There are two hotels in Marangu which will launch a comfortable safari to the top; the Marangu and the Kibo. Miss Lany, a former school teacher, runs the Marangu Hotel with a practiced hand and a careful eye on the kitchen. The Marangu became a hotel quite by accident. Miss Lany's father settled on the slopes of Kilimanjaro and ran a small coffee plantation. Soon he had to add several rooms to house

his many friends who came from all over to enjoy the fine view and the good food. Tales of the Marangu spread, and eventually it became a paying proposition. The Kibo Hotel is owned by a Mrs. Bruehl, and although it doesn't have a view of the mountain it compensates for it with a cosy little bar. The two hotels are great rivals, but they work together each season to assure that the hut bookings are arranged without mishap.

Kilimanjaro has two peaks, Kibo, 19,340 feet, snow capped and imposing, and Mawenzi, 16,890 feet, less photographed but equally lovely with its naked jagged crown. Few climbers attempt Mawenzi, for it is as trea-




---

An impala and his three wives in Amboseli seem oblivious to a glistening Kibo suspended in the mists high above them.

Kibo and Mawenzi  
from the Marangu  
Hotel.



cherous as it is beautiful. Its rotten rock comes away in massive chunks as one reaches for hand holds. There are several routes to the summit of Kibo, although the so-called Loitokitok and tourist routes are the best known, most used, and easiest. Some routes involve days of bushwacking on steep terrain, carrying a pack, and camping out with little water and less firewood. They do give one the splendid opportunity of climbing glaciers, however, if one is so inclined. The Loitokitok route joins the tourist route at Kibo Hut and is the one used by the Outward Bound Mountain School. Since we were not interested in tackling glaciers, we naturally took the tourist route.

Every season hundreds of people climb, or more accurately, try to climb, Kilimanjaro. Fewer make it to the top. As mountains go, it is an easy climb. There is no need to use ropes, ice-axes or pitons. Yet, men in good condition, army mountain rescue teams, determined hikers, and hotel guides fail to make it; chain-smoking ladies, hard living newspaper men, beer drinking Game Wardens and ten-year old boys do make it.

"The secret", expounded one ruddy-faced gentleman from his perch at the Marangu Bar, "is to go slowly". "It's best to carry your own pack. It will put you into condition", said a husky eighteen-year old. This gave way to unrestrained advice from all. Encouraging remarks such as, "Don't eat anything the last day", and "Smoking is fatal", were followed by tales of people who had climbed up and down in 17 hours (the usual time is 5 days), others who did it in shorts and sneakers, and still others who carried four-month old babies to the top. There is even an assortment of dogs and cats who made it. This last remark led to a more serious discussion of the inability of cats to breathe at such altitudes; whether or not there really was a leopard, frozen and preserved, on the top; and if it were true that Menelik buried his treasure just below the snow-line. As we left, two old timers (probably relics of the Lupa Gold Rush days), armed with a pencil and a bar chit, were trying to determine where the snow line might have been in Menelik's time.



Steep glaciers on the south side.

The next morning our porters stood around in front of the hotel, lifting loads experimentally, trying to find a light one. The head guide, Kimatari by name, wore a smart pair of newly pressed khaki shorts, knee socks and climbing boots, and sported an army great-coat. I studied his face, hoping to learn, by word or look, if he was prepared to carry the weakest member of the party down if fortitude or whatever else

failed. He had a strong face and a handsome one, but he did not look prepared. At any rate, Michael had taken the precaution of hiring an extra guide, so that if some member of the party gave up, the rest would not be deprived of their summit. We shook hands all around. Loads were lifted to heads and the porters started off. We hopped into the Land-Rover and returned to Moshi. We had to pick up Dick Dunkerton and attend a wedding before we could start up the mountain. Dick had hitch-hiked from Babati early in the morning, and through a series of lifts and remarkable good fortune, he made the Livingstone Hotel at the appointed hour. The wedding cake eaten and the rice thrown, we turned the Land-Rover back to Marangu and the long trip up the mountain.

It is a twelve mile journey to Bismark Hut, and the road winds around closely cultivated coffee and banana shambas. Small children rush to the road to wave and say "Jambo", or peep out from behind their mothers' skirts and then bury their faces when they are spotted. The Rombo Rocket, a local bus-cum-rocket, plies its trade on the mountain with death-defying antics to impassive-faced passengers. Handsome women in western clothes walk gracefully by with four gallon debes filled to the brim with water balanced on their heads. A slight touch to the debe is the only sign they have seen the careening bus. Whitewashed stands selling soft drinks, beer and cigarettes, beg the climber to "Take a Break Here". Farther on a tailor shop boasts of suits made to order. Just outside his shop is the ubiquitous sewing machine and, stretched tightly across two poles, a freshly cleaned cow hide drying in the sun. Finally, our wheezing and spluttering Land-Rover chugged around the last bend and we saw Bismark Hut. A red checked tablecloth was spread, and we sat down to a well cooked meal of fresh meat and vegetables. A fire burned brightly in the long narrow fireplace, and after a hasty

wash we went to bed, our teeth aching from the cold water.

The next morning we had a good if somewhat surprising breakfast of avocados, fish, cornflakes with hot milk, canned apricots and hot fruit juice. We parked the Land-Rover with its nose pointed downward and paid a young man to look after it while we were gone. It was eleven miles and 3,000 feet to the next hut, and we started off with the advice to go pole pole (slowly slowly). The first twenty minutes was through a tropical rain forest. It was steep and slippery underfoot, and the frequent stops afforded a good look around. Heather was no longer a bush but a tree draped in moss, some forty to sixty feet tall. Creeping plants vied with each other to reach the sunlight, clinging to the moss, and securing a hold on the heather. The effect was that of a giant trellis, long abandoned, choking itself in its madness, leaving an unrecognizable and impenetrable plant wall. After a steep rise the forest ended abruptly. We came out onto a grassy plain and had our first view of the mountain. Hiking easily over gently-sloping ground, we rested at the lunch site and lazed in the sun eating finger-sized bananas. Later we pushed on to the next hut which we came upon in about an hour. We were amazed and rather happy since it seemed so effortless, and none of us were greatly tired.

Peter's Hut is the most comfortable of the huts, and a half dozen tiny mice warmed themselves in the last hours of sunlight before joining us by the fire. We watched as the always incredible African sunset became more breathtaking as it changed the glaciers to a pink and then a purple cloak. Suddenly, black clouds appeared chilling the air and hiding the mountain. We hurried back to the warmth and light of the hut.

The next day was bright and warm. We had ten miles ahead of us and some 3,000 feet to gain. We were still feeling fit and despite the zig-zagging trail, made good time. Leopard droppings were everywhere, and tiny lizards raced across the

---

Porters. Even rucksacks are carried on the head.



uneven ground. When we reached the saddle, we saw Kilimanjaro in all its splendor. It seemed even more tremendous than from below, and only about a mile away. The air was so clear that it was impossible to judge distances. It is at this point that many climbers decide to get the last mile (which is really five) over with in a hurry and suffer greatly for their impatience. We took our time and arrived at Kibo Hut feeling fine. We were anxious to make the top, but our resolve not to do anything foolish disappeared with the arrival of a large chicken dinner. We fell to with more than healthy appetites. It was bitterly cold at over 15,000 feet, and we were snug in our sleeping bags by 4:30 p.m. We knew the serious business would begin when we started in the morning. There were only three miles to go, but we had to gain another 4,000 feet.

At 1 a.m. the guide shook us awake, saying we must start off immediately, and he handed us each a hot mug of sweet tea. Because of the cold we had slept in our clothes and had only to lace up our boots and pull on our windbreakers. As we stepped out into the freezing blackness, tears from the biting wind froze in our eyes. Donning our snow goggles to keep out the wind, we began our ascent. The first guide had a lantern so bright that to see at all we had to stay 10 yards behind him, and the last guide had a lantern that didn't work at all but was carried just the same. After the first hour, the excitement that pushed me on flagged, and the cold penetrated every bone. The guide stopped often and we got progressively colder. Finally we asked him to keep going and explained that we got colder when we rested and would prefer to continue on slowly. This made no impression. Our feet were numb. When we reached Hans Meyer Cave we removed our boots and began the painful and slow business of massaging each others' feet. Our backs hurt from the unaccustomed position and our hands pained us from the cold and constant massage. This took us an hour

and I fought back angry tears. To turn back now... At last we started off again.



The wind dropped and we climbed on silently, keeping our thoughts to ourselves. The trail zig-zagged and I followed it carefully, my eyes glued to every curve. A fall on the scree, I soon learned, meant the loss of hard gained footage as well as rhythm and

---

View of Kibo and Mawenzi across the moorlands.

Giant lobelia and groundsel grow in profusion in damp places.



and breath. Hurrying to regain my place dried my mouth and throat and gagged me. We climbed on and my mind emptied itself. All aches and cold fell away and there was only the climb. A breath with every step. Slowly we gained altitude. In the first streak of dawn I saw Dick and Michael. We grinned at each other. The sun came up slowly and shot the black clouds full of gold streaks. We stopped for a moment to watch. We could see the top now and we knew we would make it. The sun warmed us and lifted our spirits.

But it was another two hours before we reached it. The small tongue of snow turned out to be a large one, and instead of snow we picked our way carefully through razor sharp neige pénitentes, so called because the hardened snow looks like hands clasped in prayer. We went on more slowly. The summit was ours in another 200 feet. Our head guide, Kimatari had recovered from his earlier malaise and a few yards from the summit decided that I should be the first on top. With a firm hand on my rear he propelled me upwards. Protesting vigorously but to no avail, I closed my ears to the sounds of laughter arising from below. But even laughter was too much exertion at 19,000 feet, and they suddenly became serious and sat down.

Once on top we could look into the crater. We stared at the blue green masses of ice and took pictures of each other and the view. I was reminded of the professional photographer who upon reaching this same point set up his equipment with great care, took his photographs and proceeded to open the back to be sure all was well. I could understand why. The lack of oxygen was intoxicating. We signed the book with what seemed great wit, and fell asleep in the sun. An hour later we were on our way down, our energy and enthusiasm spent.

One old guide insisted on helping me. The scree, warmed by the sun, was loose and we bounded down in great strides.



The Crater

CAW



East African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*)





I slipped and fell constantly. The guide, sensing that there was some imbalance, shifted the broken lantern, thermos and pole to his back and took an even firmer grip on my arm. We fell again and again and he always came up smiling. Exhausted I sat down to rest, and he took this opportunity for a nap. As soon as his breathing was even I crept away and was off and making good progress. Then, like Lot's wife, I had to have a last look. The horrified old man came to with a start and with a great clanging, rushed after me. Light-headed from the thin air, the sight filled me with uncontrollable laughter, and as I laughed he caught up to me. Clutching my arm once again he started off at an even greater speed.



Dick Dunkerton

At last we reached the hut. Michael was stretched out and I fell on my bunk hoping never to move again. A short time later Dick came in with the news that no one had bothered to bring water to the hut and after tea (made with melted snow) we would have to go down to Peter's Hut. I moaned but later, dazed and on rubbery legs we started the ten mile return hike. It was cold and the mists came down over us. We could hear the barking of wild dogs not far away. We didn't stop to rest. Somehow we made the hut and fell gratefully onto our beds.

In the morning we had a good view of Kibo, and our spirits somewhat restored, we started down to Bismark Hut. We made the Marangu Hotel in time for lunch. The porters arrived late that afternoon, but they had been busy. They made crowns of everlasting flowers for all of us, our reward for getting to the top.

That night after a hot bath we sat around the fire. A sensation of great satisfaction began to steal over me. I held it close, hoping it would be there when I awoke in the morning.

And it was.

Sincerely,

*Catherine A. Wright*

Catherine A. Wright