INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

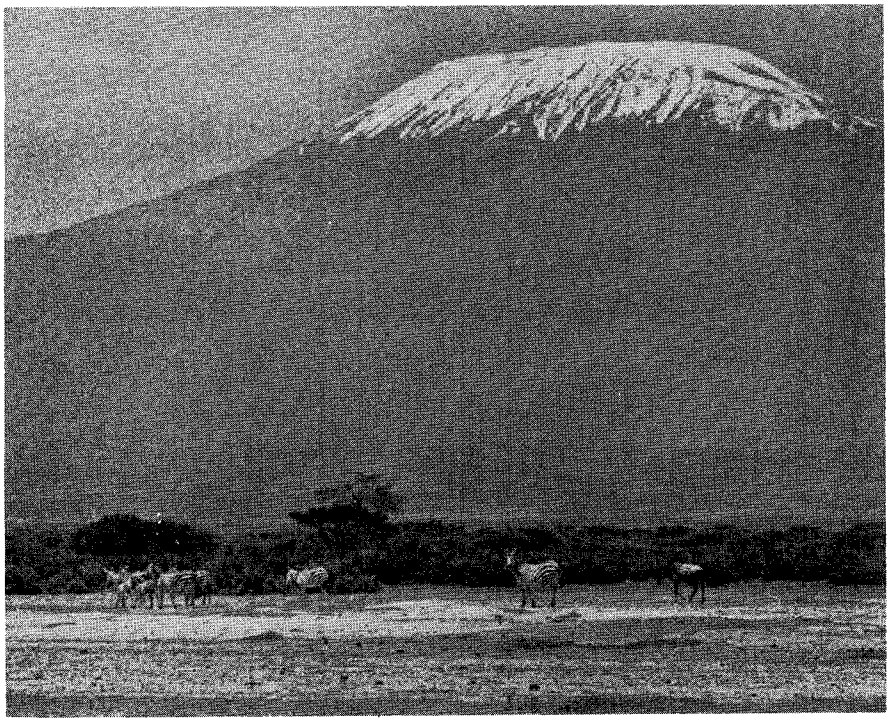
DER - 16
Up Kilimanjaro

March 9, 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:

For millions of years the plains of East Africa rumbled with volcanic explosions. Lava boiled up from the earth, building first one mountain, then, after weather and erosion had partly destroyed it, a new one on the ruins of the old. The new mountain cooled eventually and a glacier formed on its top. Africa's highest peak and one of the world's most spectacular mountains had been born. It is known that it existed in its present form half a million years ago.



Eras of time passed. Civilizations rose and fell in Greece and Rome. The Crusades were fought, trade was established with the Far East, the Americas were discovered, Great Britain became a world power and the United States began its rise. Yet still no white man had ever seen this mountain.

The Portuguese who came to the East African coast in the 16th century and the British who followed later heard tales from Arab traders of a giant, glacial mountain only a few hundred miles inland. It was called Kilima Njaro by the coastal people

(meaning "The Mountain of Njaro"---a demon supposed to cause cold weather.) But such was the skepticism and, perhaps, indifference of those sweltering on the coast, and such were the difficulties of traveling inland in those days that no white man ventured into the interior for a look.

Finally in 1848, the year that revolutions swept Europe and gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in California, Johannes Rebmann, a German working with England's Church Missionary Society, made the journey and became the first white man to see Kilima Njaro. According to one account, he fell on his knees and recited the 11th Psalm.

Rebmann was a deeply religious man, but the sight of this mountain seldom fails to awe even the most world-weary visitors to East Africa. Mount Kilimanjaro, as it came to be known, towers 19,318 feet above sea level. Its actual rise from the dusty, sun-baked plains below varies from three to four miles. There are higher mountains in the world, but whereas these lie in ranges, Kilimanjaro stands alone on the flat plains. Its nearest neighbor, 14,990-foot Mount Meru, is more than 40 miles away. And the most spectacular aspect of all is the glacier, lying only a few miles above the parched plains, only 200 miles south of the equator.

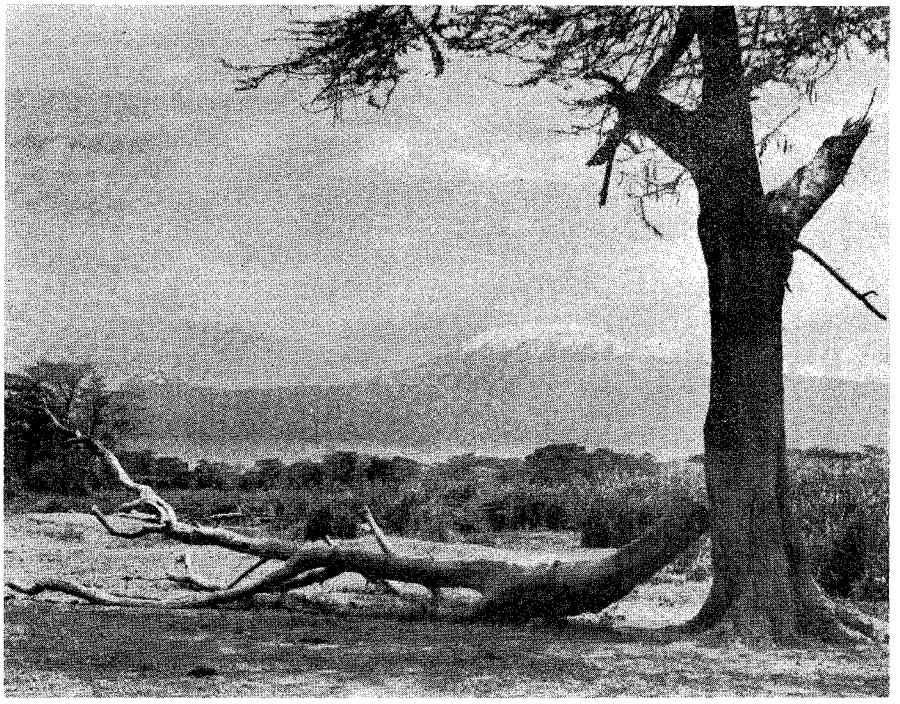
The experts back in Europe scoffed at Rebmann's report. One even wrote an article, proving, conclusively and finally, that an ice-capped mountain could not exist so near the equator. But eventually, as others confirmed Rebmann and as ice-capped Mount Kenya, which lies right on the equator, was found, this theory underwent extensive modification.

During the next 41 years, several attempts were made to climb Kilimanjaro, but these always ended in failure. The early climbers, not knowing the advantageous routes, were always driven back by blizzards, exhaustion and lack of proper equipment. Then, in 1889, three years after Kilimanjaro and Tanganyika were taken over by the Germans, a German named Hans Meyer finally made it. He gave the name Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze to the topmost crag along the crater rim.

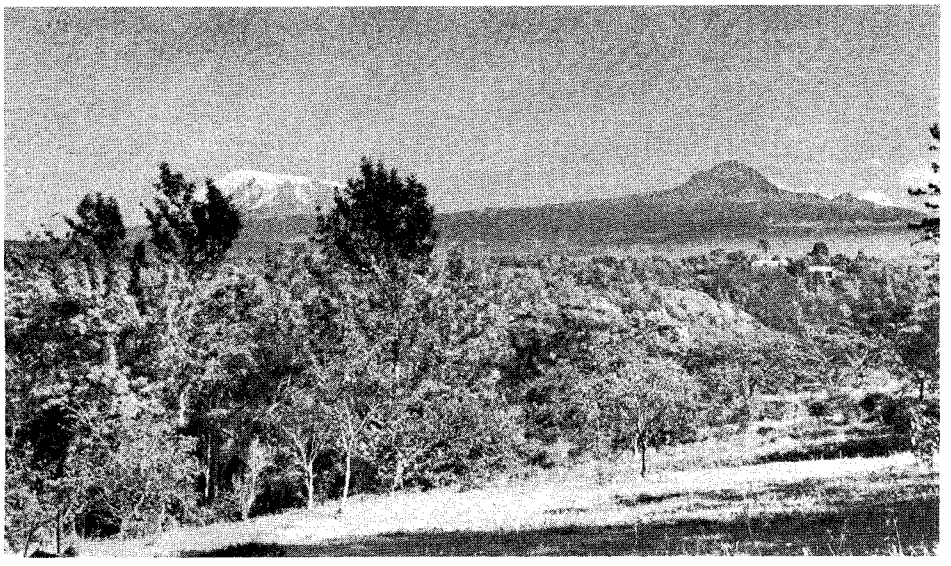
Better routes have since been found so that climbing Kilimanjaro now presents no difficulties from the mountaineering point of view. A well-beaten track now wends its way 30-odd miles to the top from the Kibo Hotel on the lower slopes near the town of Moshi. Hundreds of persons have made the ascent, which, with the descent, usually takes five days.

But though no ice axes or ropes are needed, Kilimanjaro still is not easy to conquer. Because of the lack of sufficient oxygen near the top, other hundreds of would-be climbers have been forced back. Breathing is exceedingly difficult. Some climbers, too, find that they suffer from attacks of mountain sickness---violent nausea and severe headaches---brought on by the lack of enough oxygen. Barroom opinion in Nairobi holds that Kilimanjaro is a walk-up. But if any of these hardy souls ever

ventured up the mountain, they would find the last thousand feet or so more of a crawl-up.



The picture above, like the one on the first page, was taken from the Amboseli National Park, on the northern (Kenya) side of Kilimanjaro. Picture below was taken near Moshi on the southern (Tanganyika) side.



Oxygen or no, though, Kilimanjaro continues to bewitch travelers to this part of the world. And up they go to try their hand at conquering it (or being conquered by it). Kilimanjaro's latest victim, at least as of Feb. 22, was me. A friend, Alastair Matheson, Press Officer for the Kenya Government, was of the same state of mind. So up we would go.

I had been eager to climb Kilimanjaro ever since I first saw it on arriving here last July. Several months ago, Alastair and I made arrangements with the Kibo Hotel to supply us with a guide and porters for a Feb. 22 ascent. But then, early in February, I went up into the Aberdare mountains of Kenya with a patrol from The Devonshire Regiment on an anti-Mau Mau operation. After three days of plodding up and down the Aberdare slopes, sometimes lugging 50 pounds of equipment, I was a bit cool on the snows of Kilimanjaro. But, after resting my feet for a couple of weeks, the old lure of the mountain returned and bright and early one Sunday morning, Alastair and I left Nairobi by car for Moshi.

The land around Moshi is hot, dry and arid plains---classic East African bushland. A few runty cattle and goats poke around among the thorny bushes, hunting for a stray blade of grass. Now and then one sees a herd of gazelle or zebra. There is little rain there. The altitude is only 3,000 feet, too low to benefit from the rain clouds drawn to Kilimanjaro's heights.

For the first few miles upmountain to the hotel, the road leads through sisal planatations. There, too, the rainfall is scant and only the cactus-like sisal thrives there. But higher up, at about 4,000 feet, the land changes.

That is where Chaggaland starts. It is something like Kikuyuland in Kenya, but even better. The Chagga country is crossed by ridges and valleys leading down from the mountain. Icy streams, fed by Kilimanjaro's glaciers, bubble down from the heights. Practically every inch of land is covered with deep green coffee bushes and tall banana plants. Coffee, first introduced to the Chagga tribe by British officials, has brought much prosperity and advancement. This year coffee prices are high and there is plenty of money in everyone's pocket, and in the native treasury.

At the Kibo Hotel, we were welcomed by Mrs. Bruehl, the German proprietress. "Yah, we got der telegram and der guide and der porters is waiting to take you up in der morning," Mrs. Bruehl declared. She is about five feet tall and, despite her bird-like legs, can make the springs of a car sag sadly. Mrs. Bruehl is middle-aged and is the widow of a professor at Berlin University. She came to Tanganyika after the last war. "Is so difficult to get porters these days," Mrs. Bruehl was saying. "Ach, these Chagga are naughty children. They are making so much money on der coffee these days that they don't want to work as porters. I have such troubles. Ach, such troubles. Der porters want 20 shillings now for each climb." Twenty shillings

is $2.80. Mrs. Bruehl assigned us to room "funf" and we turned in early that night to get a good rest for the climb.

We had a long haul ahead of us and this was the set-up:

Kilimanjaro has two main peaks, Kibo and Mawenzi. They are connected at about 14,000 feet by a "saddle" about five miles long. The larger of the peaks is Kibo, topped by the glacier and snow and reaching to 19,380 feet above sea level, nearly a mile above any peaks in the United States. At the top there is a crater, which drops down about 600 feet from the highest point on the crater rim. The name Kibo means "The Speckled" and was given to it by one of the early tribes in the vicinity. It refers to peculiar rock colors on one side.

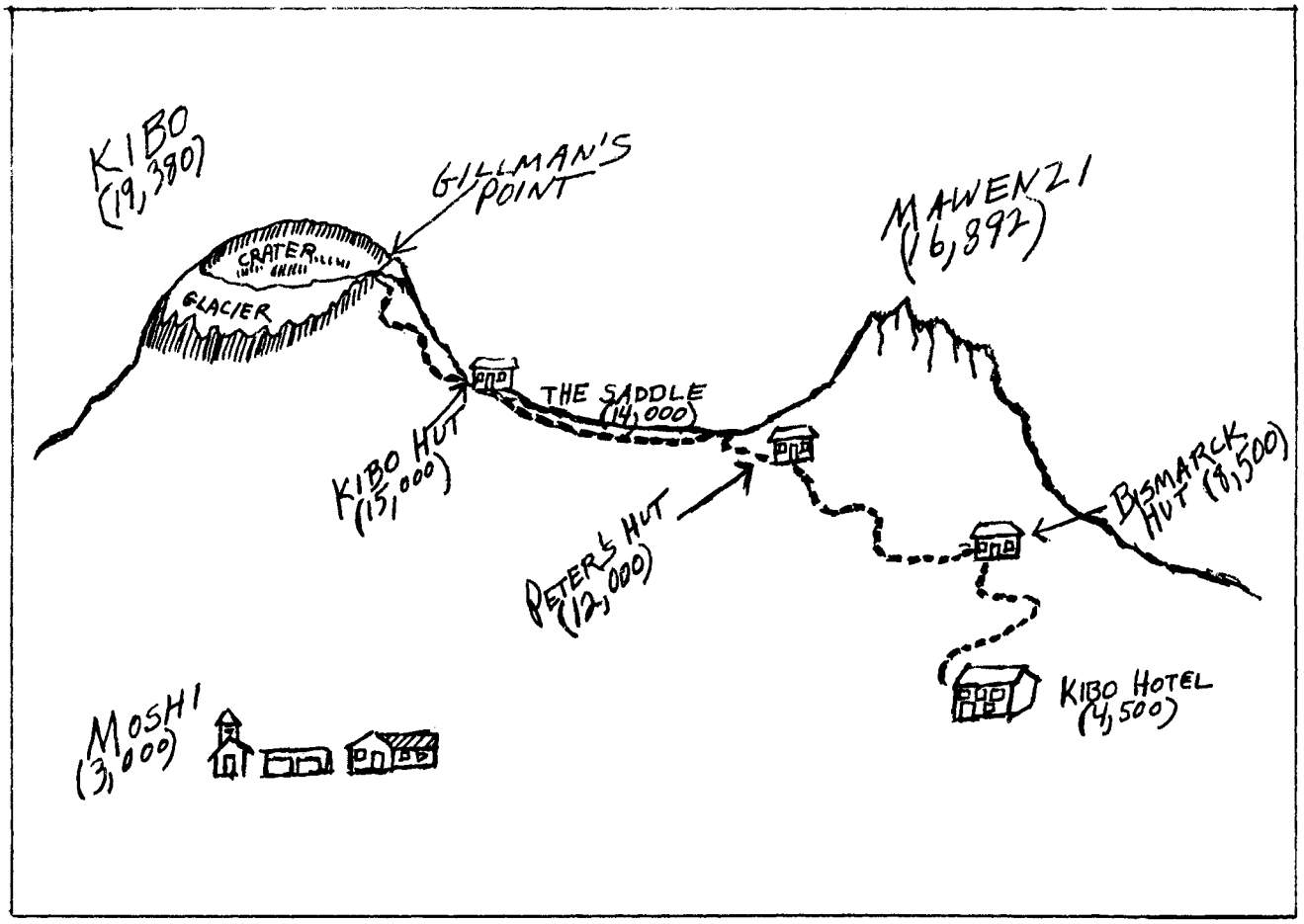
Mawenzi, the smaller peak, presents a real mountaineering challenge and the odd climber who scales it does so only with the aid of ropes. Mawenzi is the older mountain, the one that was battered down by weather and erosion. The core of the volcano is all that is left. The crater walls have disappeared, leaving behind huge pinnacles and needles of rock. Mawenzi reaches to 16,892 feet and only a small amount of ice and snow is found on it, usually in rock crevices. Its name means "That Which Is Scarred."

We were going up Kibo and it would take us 3 1/2 days to get to the top. The hotel is on the southeastern slopes of the mountain, at about 4,500 feet. Our first day's climb would take us to Bismarck hut, at about 8,500 feet. The second day would bring us to Peter's hut, at nearly 12,000 feet.

Peter's hut lays beneath Mawenzi and the third day we would skirt along the bottom of it, climbing up onto the eastern end of the saddle. Then we would cross the saddle and spend the night at Kibo hut, 15,000 feet up and at the foot of Kibo summit itself. Then, during the early morning hours of the fourth day, after three days of slowly acclimatizing ourselves to altitude, we would try the final ascent. Whether we made it our not, we would start down that day and on the fifth day we would arrive back at the Kibo Hotel.

In the morning, we were ready to leave at 9 a.m. At 10:30, Mrs. Bruehl was still rushing about, uttering unkind words about the Chagga tribe and the wisdom of teaching them to grow coffee. She had the guide and five porters lined up, but was still one porter short. No one wanted the job. Finally we decided to go up without the extra porter.

At 10:45, we finally got underway, with Mrs. Bruehl and a couple of hotel guests waving us goodbye. We walked down the road a little way and then picked up the path that would take us to the top.




Alastair was in good spirits. Mountain climbing is a hobby of his and he had always wanted to try Kilimanjaro. His previous experience had been in South Africa's Drakensberg Range and in Wales and Scotland---never anything the size of Kilimanjaro. "Mountain climbing is exhilarating," he says. "Otherwise you're in a depression---you're hemmed in."

He is 35 years old and of medium stature and build. He talks with a trace of a Scots accent. Unlike me, he doesn't smoke so mountain climbing is easier for him.

Alastair was born in Edinburgh and went to South Africa at the age of 18 to take a newspaper job. He stayed there 10 years in newspaper work and later as an information officer for the South African government. Then, disliking the growing Nationalist atmosphere in South Africa, he returned to England and worked in the London bureau of the Associated Press. Later he was with the British government's Central Office of Information and came to Kenya a year ago on a Colonial Office appointment to handle press relations.

Though a government official now, Alastair is still very much the newspaperman in outlook and personality. He thinks quickly, talks rapidly and knows his speciality---Africa---well.

The path led us up through Chagga shambas. In practically every one, men, women and children were busy gathering in the coffee, shelling and washing it and spreading it out to dry. The land is green and good and it is very pleasant to hike up through it.

As we were one porter short, Siara, our Chagga guide, had to carry a load. "I don't like to do this work because I am a guide and a cook," he said to me. Siara, who is 27 and just got married, has been a guide for five years. Before that he was a porter for eight years. He speaks no English, but my Swahili has gotten to the point where I can carry on somewhat intelligible conversations.

Siara has been up Kibo perhaps 200 times and has made several rope ascents of Mawenzi. He likes the work, he says, and he uses the 25 shillings ($3.50) he gets for each trip to supplement what he earns from his shamba. He grows some of that old money-maker, coffee, on the shamba, but the shamba is too small for anything extensive, he said. His father had had six sons and had divided his own shamba among them equally.

As we climbed up, Siara stopped each man we passed to find out if he wanted to make 20 shillings by going along as a porter. "Hapana," each replied, using the Swahili negative that lends itself so well to emphatic distain. But Siara wasn't too upset. He would get an extra 20 shillings for carrying a load.

At 12:30 we reached 5,900 feet and the forest edge. Cultivation ends there and clearing is not permitted so as to preserve the watershed. Alastair and I sat down next to a tiny stream to wait for the porters to catch up with lunch. We had sandwiches, tea and chocolate bars and then started up again at 1 p.m.

The forest was dense. It reminded me of the Aberdares and of the three days I spent up there slogging along with a rifle, wondering if a Mau Mau was lining up a potshot at my head at the moment. Alastair got the idea too. "I wonder if they'll be fighting the Chagga up here some day," he said. The Kilimanjaro forest is almost as dense as the Aberdares, where a man becomes invisible at a few yards.

We climbed without too much effort, up and up over roots and boulders in the path. The stream flowed alongside it and every now and then we stopped for a sip of icy water. We were wearing shorts and every now and then bumped our knees into stinging nettles. We passed places where elephants, sauntering through the forest, had steamrollered a path through the tangled undergrowth. But we saw no game.

Up Through The Forest

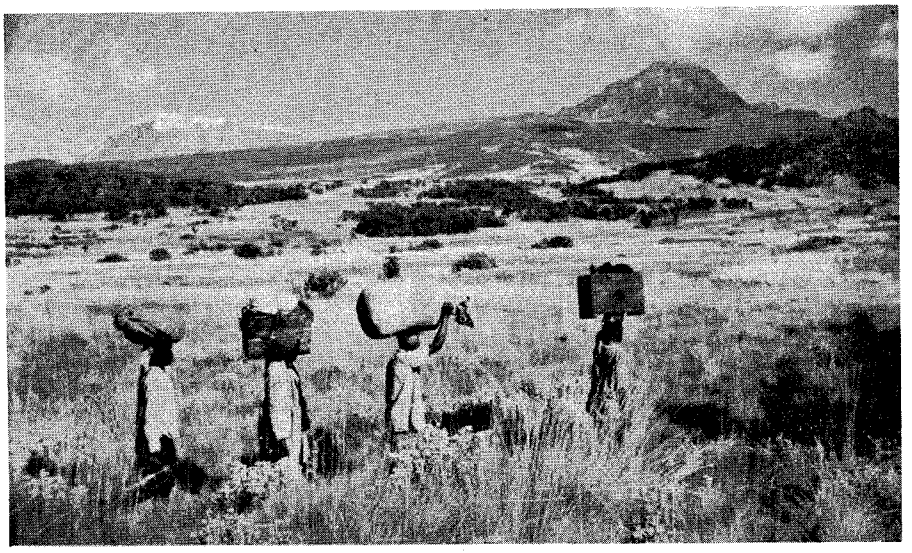
At 1:15 p.m., four porters passed us. They were going down. A young man was following them. He wore a garland of everlastings, an alpine flower, in his hat. That is the "victory wreath" that the porters present to climbers who make it to the top. The young man had five days' growth of beard and his clothes were rumpled and dirty. He was tired. "Would you do it again?" I asked. "Not on your life--- once is enough. Cheerio," he said and went on down.

At 2:20 we were at 7,000 feet. We rested while the porters built a fire in the path and cooked meat for their lunch. Each man would bite into a big piece of meat, then take a knife and saw off what he couldn't get into his mouth.

We started up again in a few minutes and then reached our first scattered giant heather. "Grows only six inches to a foot in Scotland," said Alastair. This heather ranged up to tree size. We began to be bothered by large, biting flies. They may have been tsetse. We hurried along to get away from them.

At 3:23 we were out of the forest and on the upper-altitude bracken and grasslands. Kilimanjaro, unlike Mount Kenya and the Aberdares, has no bamboo forest belt. My altimeter read 8,000 feet. The grass was tall and the expanses of it deserted. "Good grazing, this," said Alastair. "Looks just like Scotland."

The porters bounced along behind us. Each man was carrying a 50-pound load on his head, but they chattered continually as they climbed. What human porterage still exists in East Africa never fails to amaze me. Africans who have difficulty lifting 50 pounds will, if the load is placed on their heads, bounce up steep slopes singing and talking. One of our porters, who smoked continually on the trip, was only 12 years old.



Across The Grasslands
(Mawenzi is to the right and Kibo to the left. Because of its nearness, Mawenzi looks much larger than it actually is.)

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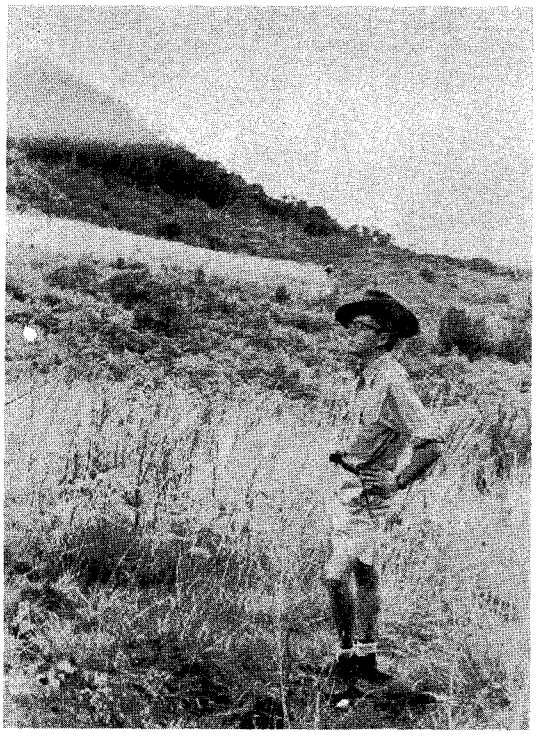

Author

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At 4:20 we arrived at Bismarck hut, 8,500 feet up. The porters went out to collect firewood and returned singing Christian hymns and "God Save the Queen."

The hut was a stone building divided into two bedrooms and a kitchen. Double-deck bunks, with planking for springs, lined the walls. Previous visitors had decorated the walls with their names and Alastair discovered to his disgust that one of the African herrenvolk had written "Suid-Afrika Bo Alles" ("South Africa Over All").

There was nothing to do but wait for dinner and time to go to bed. "This is an old ladies' climb," I said to Alastair. "Tomorrow, instead of climbing only to Peter's hut, why don't we go all the way to Kibo hut?" Alastair agreed. We decided it would be a good idea to spend two days at Kibo hut and either go up to the summit twice or spend the second day inspecting the base of

Mawenzi.

We interrupted Siara, who was busy preparing dinner, to see what he thought of the idea. "Hapana," he said. We said we would be inclined to give him 10 shillings ($1.40) and each of the porters five shillings ($0.70) for the extra effort. Siara said he would see what he could do. He had to talk with the others.

Dinner consisted of boiled meat, boiled potatoes, boiled carrots and boiled cabbage. And tea. Dinner over, it became very cold in the hut. We turned in at 7:30 to keep warm. A big baraza (meeting) was going on in the porters' hut next door about our proposition.

We were up at 6:30 in the morning and Siara, making breakfast, told us that the porters would only go to Peter's hut. There is no water or firewood at Kibo hut and they couldn't carry enough from Peter's to last two days, Siara said. There was another safari at the top already and there would not be enough room, either in our hut or in the porters' hut, for everyone. "And," Siara said, "Memsahib Bruehl might find out. She says we must not go on to Kibo if anyone else is there." The baraza had spoken. Alastair and I resigned ourselves to an "old ladies' climb."

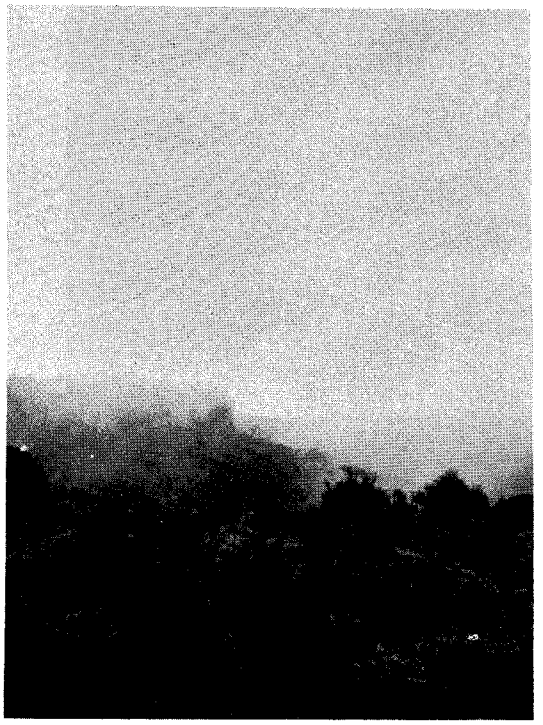
Alastair and I started up at 8 a.m. while the porters were finishing their breakfast. They would catch up. We climbed through a finger of the forest for an hour, then emerged on grasslands again. I was feeling sick---a malady that comes from bad water. I stretched out in the grass and dozed while we waited for the porters to catch up. They arrived and I still felt bad. We started across the grasslands and I couldn't keep to the pace.

I took a blanket and stretched out in the grass, telling the others to go on. I would sleep for an hour or two and, if I felt better, I would meet them at Peter's hut. If not, I would return to the hotel. Alastair started to argue, but I was too sick to listen. Siara told one of the porters to stay with me and left a couple of oranges and a water bottle. Then they went on. It was 9:45.

It seemed like I slept for only a few minutes, but when I sat up and looked at my watch, it was 11 o'clock. The porter was sitting a few inches from me, motionless, silent and on exactly the same spot where he had sat down an hour and a quarter earlier. I ate a chocolate bar. The sun had gone behind clouds. We were at about 9,500 feet and the air always chills quickly there once the sun disappears. I stood up and was surprised to find that I felt fine. "Let's go," I said to the porter. We started up after the others.

The others had an hour and a quarter head start on us. But we were fresh, so we hurried along without ever stopping to rest. From the grasslands, we passed into the heather proper. There we met an Army officer coming down. He too was unshaven and bedraggled. Yes, he had made it to the top. "I'd never do it again, though," he said. "Once in a life-time is enough." But he was glad he had

done it. It had been very cold on top. His water bottle had frozen only a few minutes after he left Kibo hut. He had met Alastair and the others up the trail and they had told him to wake me up. They were more than a mile ahead of me, he said.

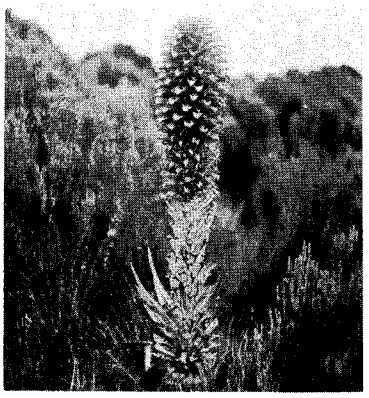


Clouds Settle Down
On The Heathlands

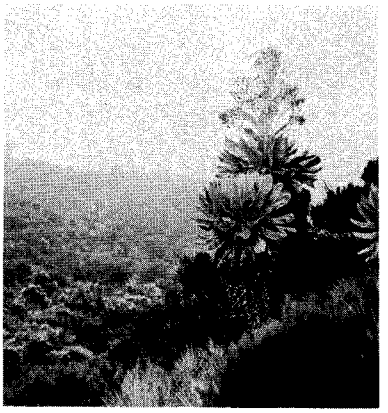
Higher up in the heathlands it got quite chilly. I put on a quilted ski jacket and gloves. But I still was wearing shorts. Your legs never get cold because of all the exertion. The path became very rocky. Big boulders began appearing. The clouds were settling down and it was becoming misty.

There I got my first look at Kilimanjaro's "ice age" vegetation. Along with the giant heather were giant groundsels---looking like a deformed palmetto---and giant lobelias---looking somewhat like a cactus. Hardy flowers like protea and everlastings cropped out from between the rocks. The vegetation of upper Kilimanjaro bears the scars of a tough battle for existence.

At 1:30, the porter and I dropped down into a rocky gorge and found the other porters having lunch next to a stream. In a few minutes I caught up with Alastair.



Giant Lobelia



Giant Groundsel

Protea

"You certainly must have hurried," he said. "The guide was telling me that Bwana was just behind us but I didn't believe it."

We climbed for another hour and a half. The temperature went down to around 45. At one place we found elephant dung. Elephants are said to cross the 14,000-foot saddle sometimes. Then, at 3 p.m., we reached Peter's hut. It may have been an old ladies' climb, but these two old ladies were tired. We kicked off our boots and sprawled out on the plank bunks, reading ages-old copies of English magazines such as Courier, Men Only and London Opinion. It was very cold in the hut. The tiny stove, which, like everything else in the hut had been carried up by porters years ago, gave off but little heat.

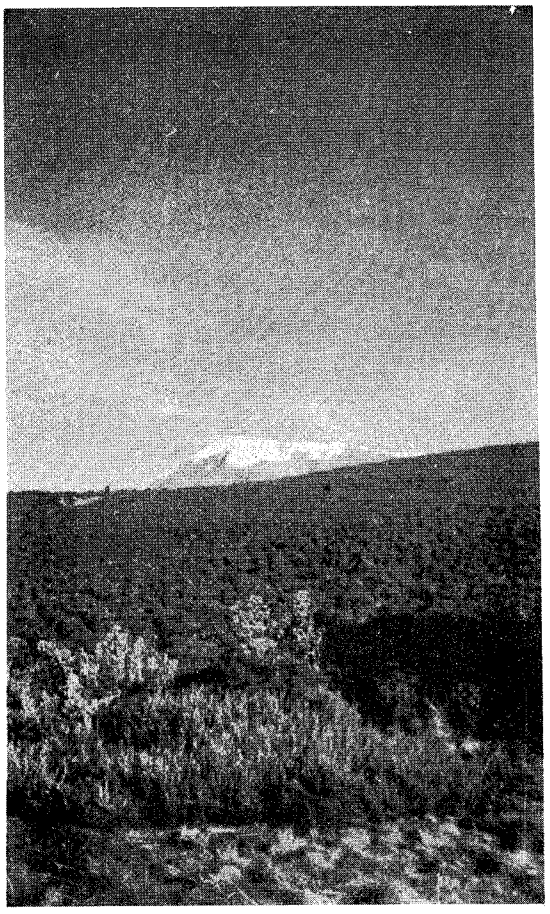
Just before sundown, the pinnacles of Mawenzi, towering several thousand feet above us, emerged from the clouds. When Kilimanjaro is viewed from the distance, Mawenzi seems like just a small outcropping. But viewed from below, the battered old hulk becomes a massive peak in itself. Icy blasts of wind swept down from it. Kibo remained hidden. Below us lay the dark green belt of Chaggaland and further down the dusty plains where it never gets cold. I noticed for the first time that there was a stretcher next to the hut. "If someone gets sick or dies," Siara said.

For dinner we had boiled meat, boiled potatoes, boiled carrots and boiled cabbage. And tea. We got into bed at 7 to keep warm. I fell asleep right away. I didn't wake up till 6:30.

The ground around the hut was covered with frost. It took the breath away to wash in the icy little stream nearby. At breakfast, Siara told us that one of the porters was "very sick." We decided to leave him with two porters from the earlier safari who had come down from Kibo hut to spend the night at our hut. That left us with four porters and Siara. We dumped everything we didn't absolutely need to lighten their loads and started up at 9:30.

The scarred spires of Mawenzi rose in the clear sky above us. Off to the left and higher still, Kibo's glacier shimmered in the sunlight. But it was only a fleeting glimpse. In a few minutes the clouds settled down and both peaks were gone. We never got another good daylight look at them again during our trip.

A half hour from Peter's hut and the porters stopped at a spring. It was the last one on the mountain and they filled several tin cans. They also went out and gathered heather roots and branches. This would be all the water and firewood we would have for 24 hours.



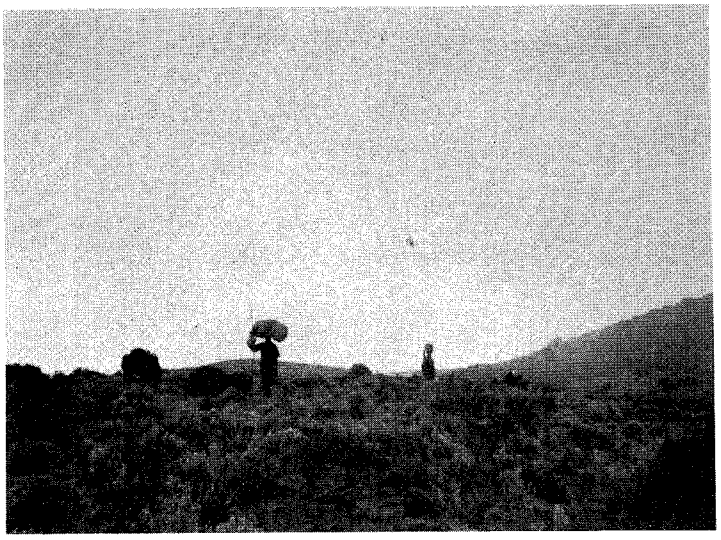
Kibo From Peter's Hut
That Morning

At 12,500 feet we were in the clouds. The vegetation had thinned out, to be replaced by boulders. Nearby crags were only dimly visible in the mists. At noon we reached the saddle. Mawenzi was close by and sometimes we got quick glimpses of it through the swirling clouds.

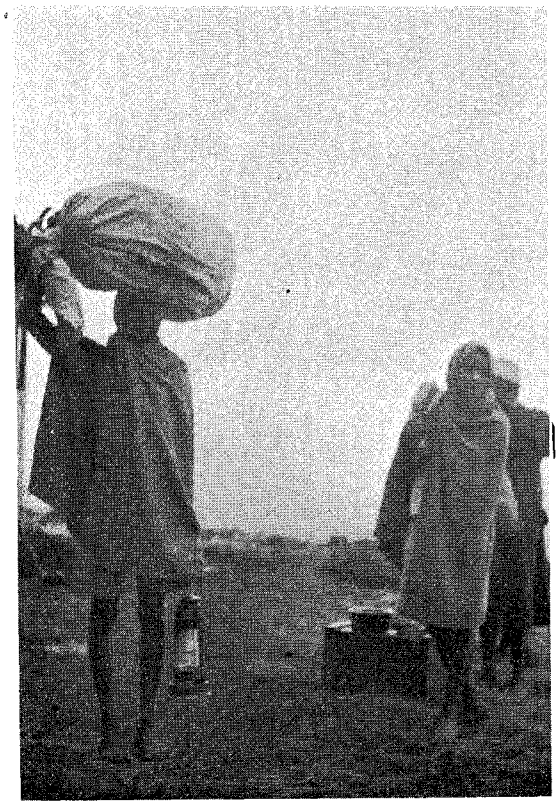
Two women and a young man passed us on their way down. "Didn't make it," the young man said. "I started up from Kibo hut, but I got only a half mile and I blacked out." He had just come from Dar es Salaam, which is at sea level. The altitude was too much for him. He is an officer in a Tanganyika battalion of the King's African Rifles and I had had dinner with him once at Nyeri. East Africa is such a small place that you bump into acquaintances even on Kilimanjaro.

The two women had also turned back on the final ascent. "Terrible," said one. "I'll be glad when I'm down off this mountain."

There was a fourth person in their party, a young man, and he had made it. He had been sleeping it off in Kibo hut and was to catch up with the others later on. We ran into him a few minutes later. "It was interesting," he said, "but I'd never do it again."



We started up the saddle toward Kibo. There was only one sign of life on the saddle---a crow. Why he was there I couldn't say. There is no vegetation, no insects, no animals. Just rocks and sand. The wind was cold and biting. It was whipping across from the north. The porters had wrapped blankets around their shoulders and over their heads. Some were barefooted and they hurried along ahead



to reach the shelter of the hut.

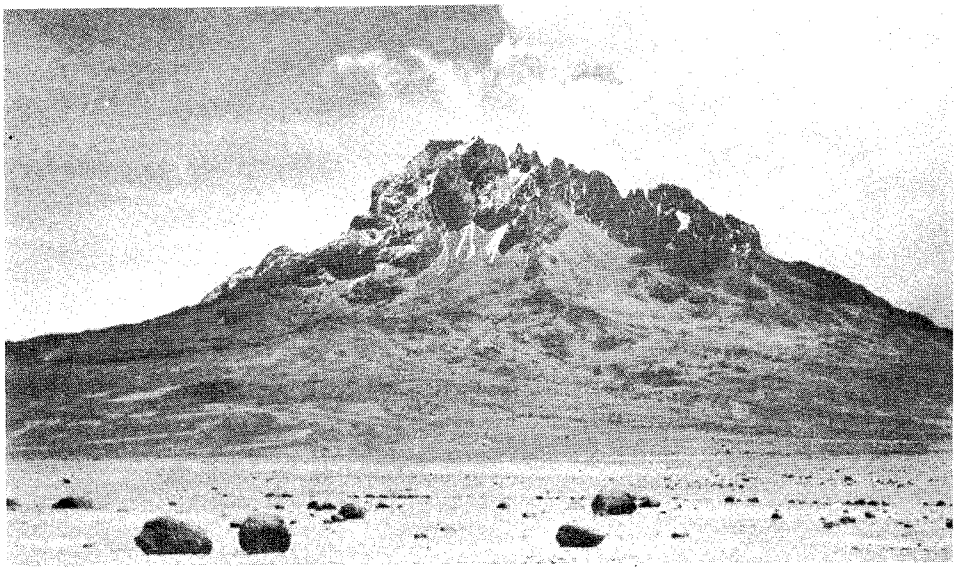
At 2 o'clock, Alastair and I flopped down on the sheltered side of some boulders. "What are we doing here?" he said. He was feeling sick--- mountain sickness. And we were both very, very weary. Going up the ever steeper slope of the saddle in that rarified air was hard work. We started up again and soon were seeing snow between boulders. The clouds settled down even lower. Soon the porters ahead were lost in the mist.

We were taking little 12-inch steps when we finally got to Kibo hut at 2:50. The hut lies next to a wall of boulders, but they afford little protection from the raw wind. The hut is very small. Inside are crowded five bunks, a table, a bench and a tiny cooking stove. The stove pipe was blocked up and the room was always filled with smoke. But it is too cold to open the windows. Next to the hut is a floorless shelter for the Africans.

Alastair

I had the camera, so he didn't get any pictures of me like this.

Siara placed our dinner before us: boiled meat, boiled potatoes, boiled carrots, boiled cabbage. And tea. A fierce hail storm beat down on the hut. Then the hail turned to snow. Soon the ground was covered with snow. It was the first time I had seen snow and really cold weather since last winter in Chicago.



Above, Mawenzi. Below is a view of Kibo. Both were taken from the saddle on a clear day.

Altitude makes people irritable and some climbers had vented their rage in the journal kept in the hut for recording impressions and dates. One woman had lamented bitterly that four Rover Scouts had come direct to Kibo from Bismarck, causing "great inconvenience to Mr. and Mrs. Bishop, who were here at Kibo." The Scouts were "rude and noisy," the woman informed future generations. Next to her outburst was another one from the Scouts. They complained that they had found the hut dirty and stated that far from causing any noise, they went to bed early "after prayers."

Siara and I huddled close to the tiny stove, talking in Swahili. I asked him if he knew Irving Kaplan, an American doing research among the Chagga. "Yes, he is a great friend of the Chagga," Siara said. "When he drives along the road and sees you walking, he stops and says 'Where are you going? Get in.' But Memsahib Bruehl---ptui---her car is for Europeans only!" Siara stared into the fire. "When Europeans like Africans, the Africans like them," he said. Then he got up to go to the porters' hut. We told him that if he wanted to, he could spend the night in our hut. But Siara said he would rather be with the Africans. He went out, letting a blast of snow and cold air through the door.

Darkness came at 7. What heat the stove provided was soon lost as the wind forced its way through cracks in the walls. I couldn't sleep. My blankets kept slipping off and I got into a high-altitude rage about it. Even when I had the three blankets around me, I still was cold. A sinus headache had appeared. Alastair tossed and turned, too. He was suffering from mountain sickness badly now. He recalled a book where an unsuccessful Everest climber told how he and his companions grew irritable and couldn't sleep at the higher altitudes.

Finally at 1 a.m. I flung the blankets aside and got up. Siara would be around in an hour to take us up. Climbers always start the final ascent around 2 a.m. so as to be on the top before too late in the morning. Kibo usually clouds over at mid-morning or later and the view is then lost.

I tried to start the fire. It wouldn't burn well. "I don't know whether to go to the right or the left when I go out that door," Alastair said. To the left lay the path back down to civilization and comforts. To the right the path rose to Kibo's 19,000-foot glacier. "I don't care any more," I said. "If you want to go down, it will be fine with me. If you want to go up, I'll go along, but I'm not eager to do it any more." Alastair said, "I don't care either. You make the decision." We recalled reading how Everest climbers sometimes lost their will to go on, even though they were only a short distance from the top.

"It's too bad," said Alastair, "that we're not in the German Army or something. Then we'd have someone to order us up and we'd go without all this nonsense." "Schweinhund von Matheson, marsch!" I shouted. Alastair bounced out of his bunk. We laughed. Then we sat down weakly. "We've worked three days at this," I said, "but now I don't care if we turn around and go back." Alastair said, "I couldn't care less, either. I think this mountain climb is an

invention of the Germans to torture the British." The fire had gone out. The kerosene lamp didn't work well either. We sat there almost in the dark, shivering, trying to make up our minds.

Siara came in, letting in a blast of cold air. "Ready?" he asked. He was wearing a coat, heavy mittens and big mountaineering boots. Coming up he had worn shorts and sandals. "Ready?" he repeated. We didn't say anything. He bustled around, re-lighted the fire, pepped up the lamp and started water boiling for tea.

Alastair started putting on heavy clothing. I did the same. I put on two pairs of trousers, four pairs of socks, the climbing boots, two T-shirts, a khaki shirt, two woolen shirts, a muffler and the quilted ski jacket. Then I smeared vaseline on my face as a protection against wind and sunburn. We had been told not to shave while on the mountain as a further protection. I drank my tea. Alastair was too nauseated to drink his, so I downed that one, too. Then I put on a balaklava helmet---a tight wool cap that covers all of your head and neck except for your eyes, nose and mouth. I also put on two pairs of gloves, woolen ones on the inside and thick leather ones on the outside.

We stepped out of the hut. The temperature was well under 20. The snow had stopped. The rocks were covered with a thin layer of it. There was a half moon and, 4,000 feet above us, Kibo's glacier gleamed in the pale blue light. The stars were very bright. Among the constellations was the Southern Cross.

The porters were awake. They had a fire going in their hut. They too couldn't sleep. They would wait there around the fire till Alastair and I had gotten over the white man's madness and were ready to go back down.

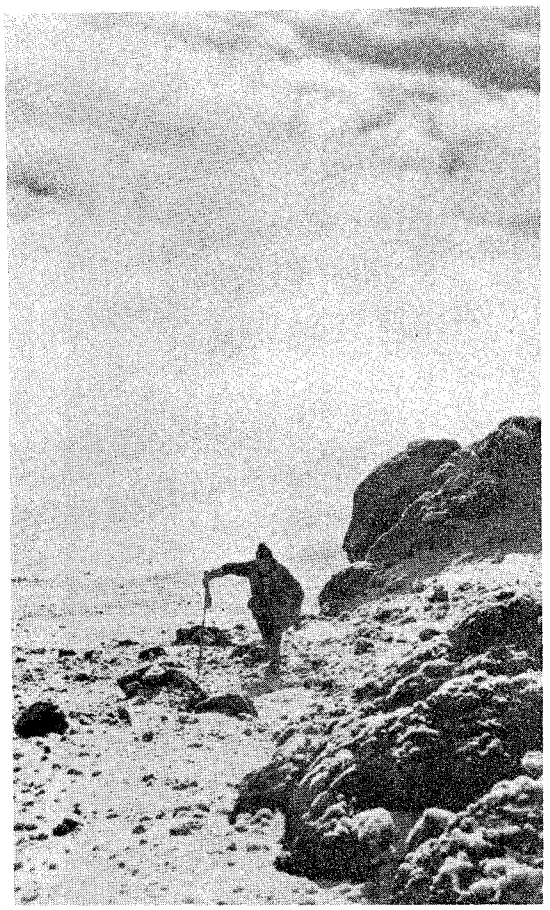
We began the final ascent. It was 2:15. Siara went first, then Alastair, then me. We took tiny 10-inch steps, resting every few minutes. Kibo's snows were beckoning us on.

We were trudging up a "valley" between two massive rock shoulders. They led right up to the edge of the crater. They looked like giant buttresses. It was rough going. We were trudging up the scree---tiny loose pebbles and stones. With each step we slid back half a step. The wind was raw. Even though I had two pairs of gloves, my fingertips were numb.

The incline got steeper. We zigzagged back and forth, jabbing our alpine sticks into the scree to keep from sliding back too much. Up and up we went, skirting around huge boulders and precipices that had been fashioned out of hot lava when Kilimanjaro was young.

Three o'clock came. Then four, then five. All of a sudden I had a pressing sensation over my heart. It got worse with each step. "I've wrecked my heart on this crazy stunt," I thought. The pressure increased. "Alastair!" I said. It was the first time we had spoken. We had agreed not to talk so as to save breath. He and Siara stopped. "Alastair, I'm having trouble with my heart," I said.

I took my gloves off and ran my hand down into my shirt. There I found that my fountain pen had shifted around in my pocket so that it was poking me in the chest. I put it into another pocket. The "heart attack" ceased.



Alastair Coming Up The Scree, Just After Dawn.

Snow started to fall. Shortly after 5 o'clock we reached the cave. Climbers always flop down there to rest. But you can't rest very long. You get too cold when you stop moving. Alastair stretched out on the rocky floor of the cave, resting his head on a sharp rock. I sat down and leaned back against another rock. We were puffing, breathing with wide open mouths in an effort to get the most oxygen. "I think we're the original Schmoes of Kilimanjaro," I gasped out.

I looked around at the cave. It consisted of a big boulder held off the ground by some small ones. I felt uncomfortable and crawled out. "What's the matter?" Alastair gasped. "Afraid it'll fall?" I said, well, no, well, maybe. "Frankly," he said, "I couldn't care less at this moment."

We started up again. The cave is two-thirds of the way in distance, but only half in time. The last third was the hardest. We were going up a huge scree slide that led up, at an angle of almost 45 degrees, to Gillman's Point and the crater rim. The scree slide was about a mile long. We could see the jagged outlines of Gillman's Point and it seemed so near. Yet it was so very, very far.

Fifty steps from the cave and Alastair stopped. "I'm going back. Too sick," he said. "You can't," I told him. "If you do, I'll take possession of the top in the name of the United States." As we puffed for breath, we laughed about that one for a minute, then sat down in the snow to rest. Only Siara, the veteran of perhaps 200 climbs, was unaffected by the altitude. He stood there next to us, bundled up so much that you couldn't tell if he was white or black, waiting silently for us to get up and move on. Alastair got up and we started climbing again. I had only altitude fatigue to cope with. He had mountain sickness as well.

Dawn came at 6 o'clock. Clouds started gathering around the summit then. It quickly disappeared. Soon we could see only a short distance. The snow fell faster. We slipped and fell in the

scree. Sometimes we just lay there, panting for breath. A dozen times I said to myself, "The hell with it, I'm going down." But I always kept on going up.

We were taking 10 steps, then stopping for five gasps of air. Then we were taking 10 steps and stopping for 10 breaths. Then five steps and 10 breaths. Then five steps and 15 breaths.

Seven o'clock came, then seven thirty. We were progressing only a few feet a minute. The incline got so steep that we moved over to the boulders at the edge of the scree slide and started crawling up over them, jabbing our alpine sticks into the crevices to keep our balance.

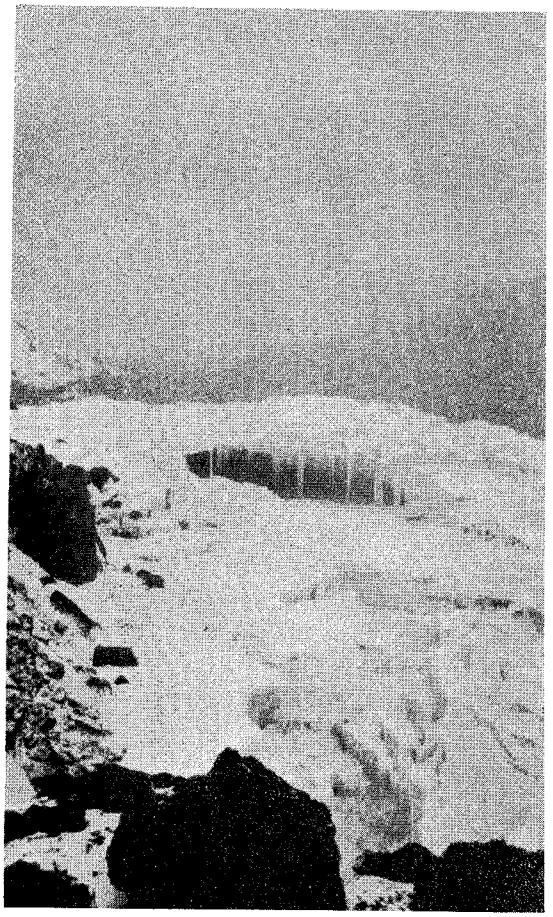
By now, I had only two things on my mind: getting air, getting up. Everything else was gone from my mind. There was no stream of thought. Nothing but air, getting up.

At 8 a.m., Alastair fell down in the snow. "Go on," he gasped. "I'm going to crawl in that cave and sleep. Meet you at the top later." I couldn't argue. I was too winded to talk. Siara and I started up. Alastair crawled into a nearby cave. Another 20 exhausting steps and we couldn't see him anymore in the snow and mist.

From then on, I was aware of only Siara, always in front of me, always zigzagging back and forth in the scree, always climbing up over boulders, always going on. My heart was pounding like a hammer. My temples throbbed. With every step, I stopped for air. "It's not far, it's very near," Siara kept saying. The temperature rose to around freezing. I pulled off the balaklava helmet. Then the temperature dropped again. The snow in my hair turned to ice.

Soon we were only 200 feet from the top, three and a half days, 30-odd miles from the hotel. I stopped, determined this time to turn around and go back. "Why go on? What's the use of going through this? You get to the top and so what? So you go down again, that's all. I'm close enough now so that I'm up for all practical purposes." But the mountain would have a mocking look forever after if I gave up. Two hundred feet. Just two hundred feet. It was like running five miles at sea level. I started up again. After 10 feet I halted. My heart was hammering again. A minute's rest, then another 10 feet. And another.

Fifty feet from the top and I stopped again. I couldn't get my breath at all this time. I felt punch drunk. "Down," I said to Siara, mustering all the strength I could. "Hapana," he shouted, like a command. All right, I went up another 10 feet. "I'm up on top now, really---what difference does another 40 feet make. Now I'll go down." But Siara kept bobbing up ahead of me and I kept following.



Looking Down Into
The Crater

Ten feet from the top I had the biggest struggle of all about turning back. It wasn't worth it ---even when it was that near. It took just too much energy. Even 10 feet. Siara was on top, standing on a rock. He saw me wavering and he came back down. He gave me his hand to pull me up the rest of the way. I pushed him aside. I would finish this off myself. With one furious burst of energy, I hauled myself up. I was on the top.

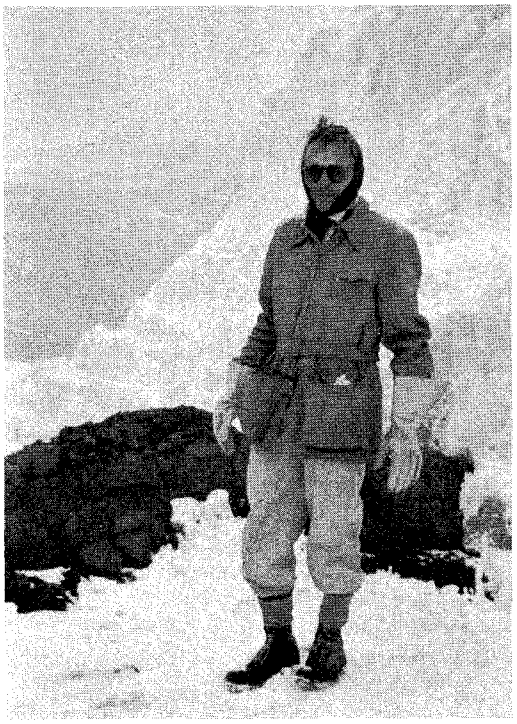
Siara sat down, winded for the first time. I walked, wobbly, across what was the first flat stretch of ground that morning. I went around a pile of boulders and then it came into view.

I was looking into the outer part of the crater. A massive wall of ice to my right dropped a hundred feet to the crater floor. The crater was filled with grotesque ice masses. Across from me, shrouded sometimes in the swirling mists, a series of 50-foot icicles hung down from an ice shelf

The wind howled among the crags just overhead, but it was quiet down in the crater. The snow fell lightly there as the mists swirled slowly back and forth. There was stillness in the frozen beauty and the beauty was strange, of a sort I never imagined existed. I remembered that I had never thought before of what the top of Kilimanjaro would look like. And now this was what I had come to see.

You realize, standing there, that you have no place atop Kilimanjaro. Your world lies below, on the dusty plains, in the lush and sweltering coastal strip and in the cool upland forests. There you can change the face of nature, reversing rivers, cutting through hills, removing forests. But here you have stumbled into something else, a different sort of world. Here you can be but a visitor, grudgingly received. Here it is too cold, the winds too biting, the air too thin. There is no firewood, no food. There is only massive, frozen beauty.

The glacier is not eternal. Like everything else, it changes. Twice within the time of man, Kilimanjaro's glacier has disappeared. Each time glacial retreats in Europe resulted in less rainfall here. But each time the glacier returned.



Now the glacier is receding again, and rapidly. Within the time of living men, it has been much larger. Why? Africa is getting drier for one thing and less snow falls on the summit. But another reason is advanced as well.

Each year, deep down beneath millions of tons of ice and rock, Kilimanjaro is becoming hotter. Men bundled in their warmest clothing have found sulphur and steam jets in the crater pit. Under the ice, Kilimanjaro is still churning, and perhaps it is building up slowly but powerfully for another lava eruption in the far distant future. Kilimanjaro is not finished yet and the world may not have heard the last from it.

Now, though, there is only the majestic ice. Siara was standing next to me at the edge. "Beautiful, isn't it, Bwana?" he said. To the Chagga, Kibo is "the embodiement of all that is beautiful, eternal and strengthening."* "Yes," I said, "it is so." It was 8:50 a.m. It had taken us 6 hours and 35 minutes to get to the top. I lay down in the snow and slept.

I woke up a half an hour later. Siara was gone. I tried to make a few jottings in my notebook. But I was a bit groggy from the altitude. A trace of a headache had come on. I tried to light a cigaret. I usually smoke two packs a day, but I hadn't smoked that morning because of the climb. The cigaret kept going out, so I threw it away.

I walked back to the other edge and looked down the scree slide. Siara had gone down a little way and was watching Alastair coming up. He gave Alastair a hand and both flopped down when they reached the top. Alastair was very ill. But he had made it.

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* Charles Dundas, "Kilimanjaro And Its People," London, 1924.

Alastair stayed for only a few minutes, then started down. Siara and I remained a moment longer to sign the climbers' book. The book is in a tin container and everyone who reaches the top is supposed to sign his name. I wrote our names in it. The snow was blowing fiercely now and we could see only a short distance. The weather was getting worse and we had a long way to go before we could get back down to comfortable altitudes again. We started down. It was 9:45 a.m.

We jumped down in the scree, sliding five feet with each jump. It was like skiing and we used our alpine sticks like ski poles as we jumped and slid down and around boulders. Every 20 painful steps we had taken getting up were retraced in each effortless leap. Down and down we raced. The mist and snow were so thick that we didn't see Alastair till we were 25 feet from him. He was racing down, too.

In a half hour, we reached the cave, the one from which it had taken us three hours to reach the top. In another half hour we were back in the "valley." We never paused to rest. It was no effort to go down. With each step, we were getting more oxygen. I felt exhilarated. At 11:15, an hour and 30 minutes after leaving the top, we were back at Kibo hut. We had come down in less than a fourth of the time it had taken to get up. "All the way to the top?" one of the waiting porters said. He was shivering from the cold. I said yes. "Good," he said. The porters started packing to go down.

We rested in the hut for half an hour. Then I had a big meal, my first one since the previous afternoon. You don't eat before you make the final ascent as it would aggravate any mountain sickness. Alastair couldn't eat anything.

We left at 12:25 p.m. The snow was whipping across the saddle, but it was easy going as it was all downhill. We never stopped. In the middle of the saddle, where the altitude is well under 15,000 feet, my headache left. It took us an hour to cross the saddle. Coming up it had taken three hours.

Down we went around the base of Mawenzi. The snow turned to rain. Clumps of grass and heather began appearing. We jumped rapidly from rock to rock. We arrived at Peter's hut at 3:10. Alastair was feeling better and Siara made an omelet for him. We decided to go on to Bismarck hut instead of spending the night at Peter's. There was an American girl in the hut who had given up her attempt to climb the mountain and she went down with us.

We walked slowly, taking photographs along the way. Darkness came on us while we were still on the grasslands, several miles from Bismarck hut. Much rain had fallen at that altitude and the trail was slippery and deeply rutted. It was tough going in the dark. All of the porters except one had gone on ahead. The remaining one lighted a lantern so we could see our footing.

While we were still a couple of miles away from the hut, the porters came back with more lanterns looking for us. With more light, we could walk a bit faster but the going still was slow. We got to the finger of the forest. The path was steep and slippery. Everytime someone fell down, the others would say "kwaheri" ("goodbye"). The Africans howled in amusement at this and were soon joining in the kwaheri chorus.

Finally at 9:05 we arrived at Bismarck hut. Alastair and I had been on the go for 19 hours. We had climbed 4,000 feet and had descended 10,500 feet, covering in all a distance of about 30 miles. The first thing I did was to take off my boots and stand for a while in the ice-cold spring.

For dinner, Siara dished up boiled meat, boiled potatoes, boiled carrots and boiled cabbage. And tea. Alastair made a face at it. Siara, insulted, dumped all the desert spoons in front of him and stormed out. Then Siara gave one of the porters a dressing down, ending a tirade of abuse in Kichagga with (in English) "you bloody damn bastard." We slept soundly in our wooden beds that night.

In the morning we were awakened by the porters singing church hymns. They presented Alastair and me with garlands of everlastings for our hats. Kibo and Mawenzi were still shrouded.

Alastair and I and the porters of the two safaris. Siara (wearing a hat) is on the left.

We started down at 9:15, going first through the grasslands and bracken and then through the forest. Our legs were stiff and we walked very slowly. We didn't reach the edge of Chaggaland till 11:45.

Then it let loose. Torrents of rain, the beginning of the spring rains, poured down on the countryside. Soon we were soaked to

the skin. The little irrigation ditches overflowed and the rain flattened down the banana leaves. Chagga men stared in good-natured amusement from their huts and from duka (store) porches as the crazy Europeans kept walking in the rain. A few Chagga ran past us on the path, holding banana leaves over their heads for umbrellas.

At 1:15 p.m. we arrived at the hotel. "Congratulations," Mrs. Bruehl shouted and some of the guests crowded around. Siara unpacked the porters' loads and Mrs. Bruehl slapped him on the back exuberantly. She kept pounding him while Siara, half-annoyed and half-amused, grinned sheepishly. "When he came to me, he was only a little kike (girl), but now he is a man!" she exclaimed.

Later we gave Siara a 20-shilling tip for himself and 15 shillings ($2.10) to distribute to the porters. "Don't tell Memsahib Bruehl," he whispered. In a few days he would be going up the mountain again.

Then we sat down for what we hoped would be a pleasant change of diet. There is no menu at the Kibo Hotel and what the waiter brought was: boiled meat, boiled potatoes, boiled carrots and boiled cabbage. Well, at least we didn't have to drink tea.

That afternoon we were sitting in the roof garden restaurant of the Kilimanjaro Native Co-operative Union building in Moshi. We were very tired. My feet and legs ached. It was hot in Moshi. Kilimanjaro had been hidden in clouds all afternoon. It was 5 o'clock.

Then the clouds parted. Mawenzi came into view first, its jagged spires lighted by the late afternoon sun. The clouds opened further and Kibo appeared. Its lofty snows seemed so cold and blue and very distant. Only a day before we had been up there.

I remembered what Tenzing said after conquering Everest. "When you get there you are thinking about the return. The real happiness comes later."

And there it was now. You feel very happy. You have conquered a mountain, you have met one of the better challenges that nature can produce. You have climbed up out of the world you have always lived in and for a while you had climbed out of its troubles. You went up to a region where everything is massive, awesome and clean and when you descended, you hoped that somehow it did something for you.

Alastair and I had said, while crawling up the scree 36 hours before, that it was a nightmare. Now we agreed that it was one of the great experiences of our lives.

The clouds returned again to Kilimanjaro. First Kibo disappeared, then Mawenzi. The moment was gone. We had had our look. Now it was time to go.

Sincerely,

David E Reed

David E. Reed

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