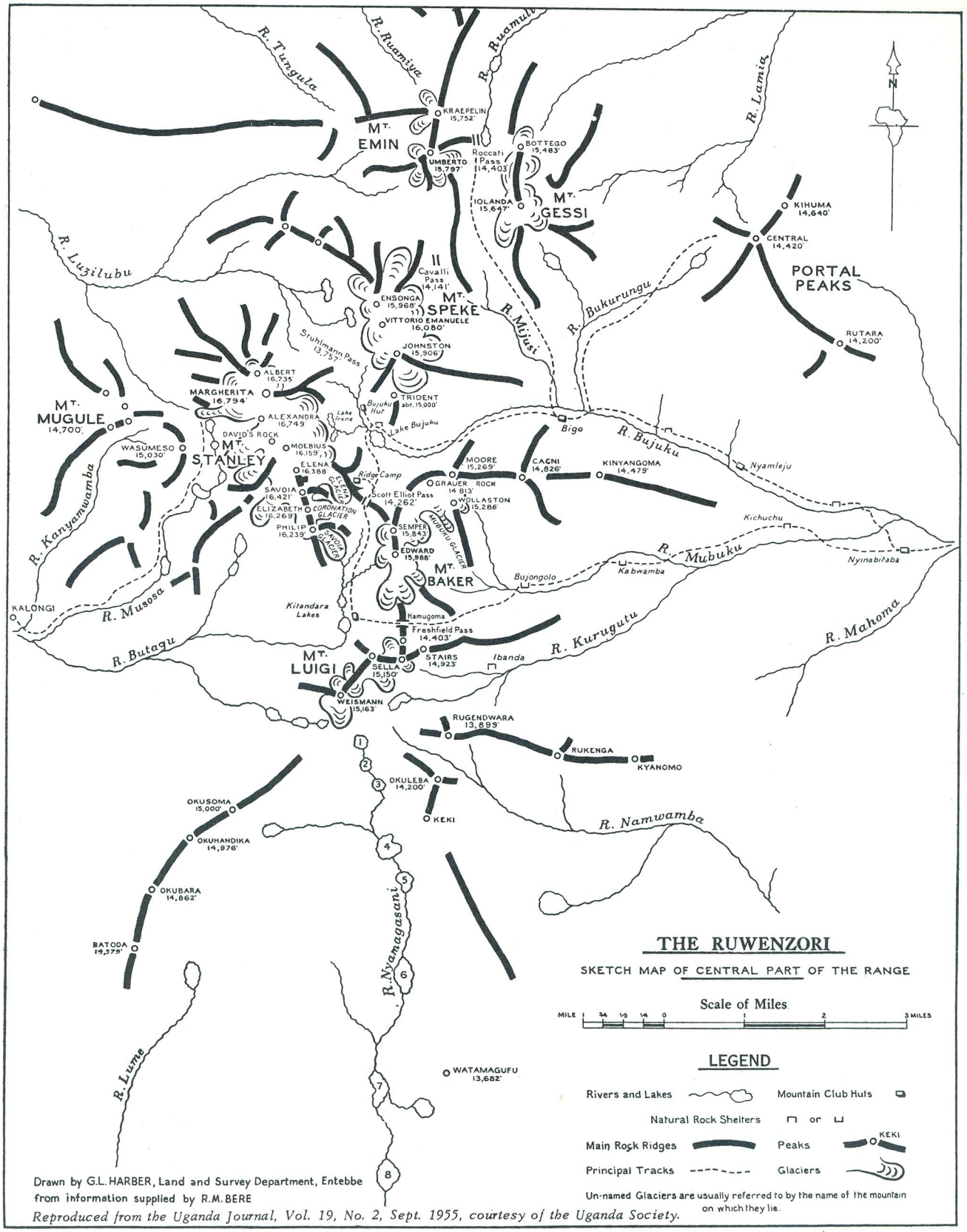

Drawn by G.L. HARBER, Land and Survey Department, Entebbe
from information supplied by R.M. BERE

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Our Ruwenzori Safari

By Ian Michael Wright

Photos by the Author

It all started one warm and sunny afternoon in Nairobi, as Kitty and I were relaxing comfortably with the Hempstones in their garden over a cup of tea. During a lull in the conversation Kitty Hempstone looked over to the gentle Ngong Hills in the hazy distance and, surely dreaming, said, "Wouldn't it be lovely to go to the Ruwenzori!"

Filled with enthusiasm in that easy-going atmosphere a safari to the Ruwenzori, the fabled Mountains of the Moon, didn't seem to present any serious problems at all. We all nodded assent. Later, we were to remember that pleasant conversation often and wonder how it could have seemed so simple; especially as we sloshed knee-deep through stinking bogs and rotting vegetation, or as we cut our way through the dense and slimy tropical rain forest (with the help of local Bakonjo porters, it must be admitted). I, at least, should have known better, for this was to be my second trip, but by then the decision had been made and there was to be no turning back.

In this simple way our mountain safari was launched.

The Ruwenzori lie along the western border of Uganda just to the north of the equator. Formed by a tremendous block sixty miles long and thirty miles wide which was tilted and thrust up during the development of the great Rift Valley system, the highest peaks rise almost to 17,000 feet, a good 13,000 feet above the floor of the valley. Unlike the other great mountains of East Africa, they are not of volcanic origin although numerous craters, of a later date, are found in the surrounding countryside.

In the center of the range there are six main mountain masses, each carrying permanent snows and glaciers. No fewer than nineteen summits exceed 15,000 feet. As they are virtually on the equator and capped with snow the weather, to say the least, is almost always unsettled. Warm, moist air from the great Congo forests is swept up over the icy summits, resulting in one of the highest rainfalls recorded anywhere on earth. Climbers joke that it rains at least 366 days a year. If one is lucky enough to escape the constant downpours, thick mists usually make up for it. There are few dry moments in these mountains, even during the supposedly dry seasons, at the end of February and from mid-June to mid-August.

It is just this amount of rain, however, which makes the Ruwenzori as interesting as they are. One of the main attractions, besides the peaks themselves, is the plethora of fantastic giant vegetation which abounds in regions above 10,000 feet and which includes the giant forms of lobelia, groundsel and heather, the latter often growing as high as forty-five feet. This vegetation is almost prehistoric in appearance, and I, for one, wouldn't have been at all surprised to meet a winged pterodactyl at rest among the giant groundsel in the mist.

At lower levels the rain forest is the most luxuriant of dank, dark places imaginable. The rich variety of trees, ferns, and vines only rarely allows the sun to penetrate into the cool world below in

myriads of small dancing patterns. Over a hundred different kinds of orchid abound, from large specimens to small exquisite flowers no larger than a dime. It is a botanist's paradise.

The dense vegetation, however, makes it difficult to see the wildlife. Birds there are aplenty, including the brilliant Ruwenzori Turaco, among the most beautiful of living creatures. Black forest leopards, chimpanzees, blue monkeys, red forest duikers, and hyrax are the most common animals, although only the latter are seen very often. It is said that poisonous snakes often lie in wait on branches over the trails, ready to drop on unsuspecting creatures passing underneath. A porter was once killed by one, but luckily we saw none of the great variety that exists. Elephant and buffalo are common in the lower valleys.

Historically, the Ruwenzori have played an important role by encouraging African exploration in the search for the source of the Nile. The first problem was to find them. In A.D. 150 Claudius Ptolemy wrote that the Nile's source lay in great lakes fed by streams from snow-capped mountains which he called the "Mountains of the Moon." His map was remarkably accurate, and it is now commonly accepted that his mountains are, in fact, the Ruwenzori. Others, among them Herodotus, Aristotle, and later the 12th Century geographer, Edrisi, knew of their existence. In more modern times, it was ostensibly the search for the Nile's source that brought most of the early European explorers (Burton, Baker, Speke, Grant, etc.) to East Africa.

Porters on the trail.

In 1864 Sir Samuel Baker became the first European to set eyes upon the Ruwenzori, but naming them "The Blue Mountains" he failed to appreciate their full geographical importance. Sir Henry Stanley (of "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" fame) did, though, and it was he who first proclaimed their existence to the modern world. He claimed to have made the discovery himself in May 1888, but, in fact, two members of his expedition had seen them a month earlier. They reported this to Stanley, who dismissed their find on the improbable grounds that they were looking in the wrong direction. Stanley first caught sight of the Ruwenzori only when a boy directed his eyes to a mountain said to be covered with salt. Without realizing it both he and Romolo Gessi had seen the mountains on earlier expeditions.

It was Stanley who gave the mountains their name, "Ruwenzori." This was one of the many names he thought the people of Toro had told him. Actually, and most appropriately, the word means "the place whence the rain comes." It is improbable the inhabitants had a name for the massif or for the individual peaks, since those who live nearby only give names to rivers and places which they know and which are of value to them. It is for this reason that the peaks are named after famous European explorers.

Once discovered there began a steady stream of attempts to penetrate the range both from east and west. Between 1889 and 1906 such men as Scott Elliot, Mumm, Sir Harry Johnston, Freshfield and the famous Swiss guide Moritz Inderbinnen all tried

their luck. The snow line was reached and a few of Mt. Baker's minor peaks were climbed, but perpetual bad weather, difficult terrain and the innate complexity of the range were enough to turn back even the most determined of explorers.

In the summer of 1906 two strong parties headed for the Ruwenzori. The first, a British Museum Expedition, planned to study the flora and fauna of the region, but among its members was an avid mountaineer, A.F.R. Wollaston, who succeeded in climbing a few subsidiary peaks and who was on the verge of even greater accomplishments. Bedevilled by lack of funds, however, its members were forced to sit idly by, while the second expedition, headed by that great explorer and mountaineer, H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi (Luigi Amadeo di Savoia), caught up with them and passed them by. The gentle Wollaston recorded his emotions in a letter to a close friend:

> "We ought very soon to be starting round to the Semliki side of the range but we are stuck here by reason of exhausted funds and can move neither forwards nor backwards. Meantime the Duke of the Abruzzi draws near with a great following and will be at the top of the highest peak before I get within fifty miles of its foot. It is one of the most grievous ill chances that ever befell me and I am inclined to curse all royal dukes and wish they would stop at home."

Wollaston, however, was anything but bitter, and later he visited the Duke and gave him much valuable information about the mountains. He was greatly impressed with him, "lean and tough, about forty . . . and a climber by the look of him."

Wollaston was justly impressed. In the comparatively short span of six weeks the Duke's party climbed nineteen major summits, some of them several times, and carried out a program of scientific research, mapping, and exploration that would be a model of accomplishment even today. As a result of this great Italian expedition, the Ruwenzori no longer remained *terra incognita.*

If anything, their success was the direct result of elaborate and thorough preparation. No expense was spared. There were twelve Europeans, including scientists, a surveyor, the great mountain photographer Vittorio Sella, two Alpine guides and two porters. It was altogether the largest and most formidable party yet to visit the range.

They arrived in Fort Portal early in June 1906, having walked all the way from Entebbe in three weeks. On June 8 they established a camp at the upper end of the Mubuku Valley at about 12,500 feet, and by 6:30 a.m. on the tenth the Duke and his two guides were on the terminal ridge of Mt. Baker. Unlike most previous expeditions which had gotten that far only to become helplessly lost in the mist, the weather was beautifully clear, and they could see the whole range spread beneath their feet. Within half an hour they were able to unravel the topographic mysteries of the range which had been so

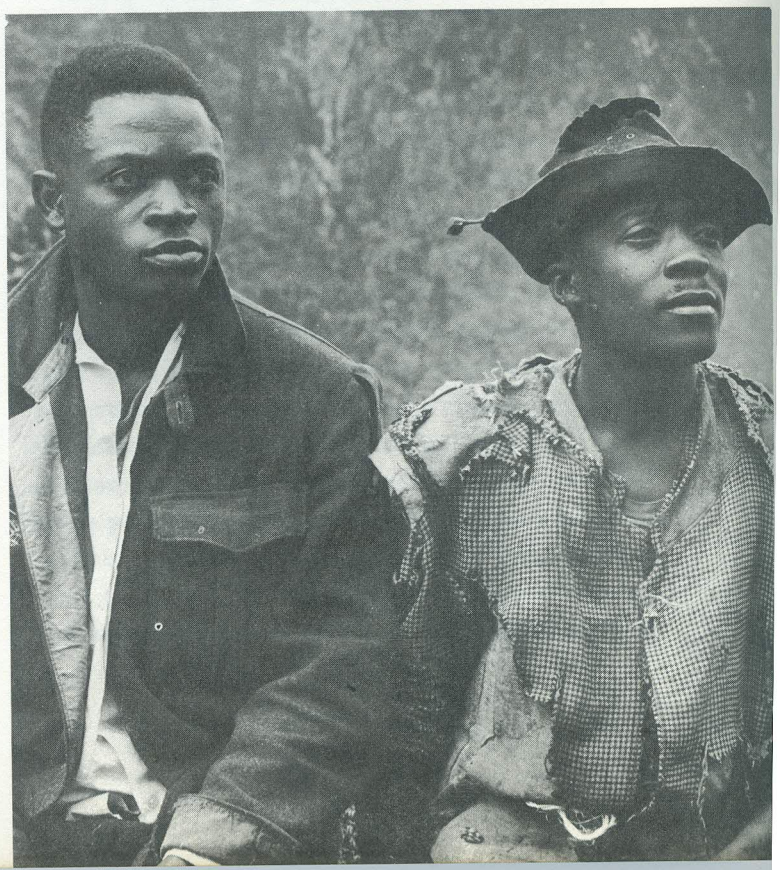
to page 22, please

Kitty Wright following the trail through elephant grass.

Mount Baker, 15,889 feet, is one of the principal peaks in the Ruwenzori. Photo by Arthur H. Firmin.

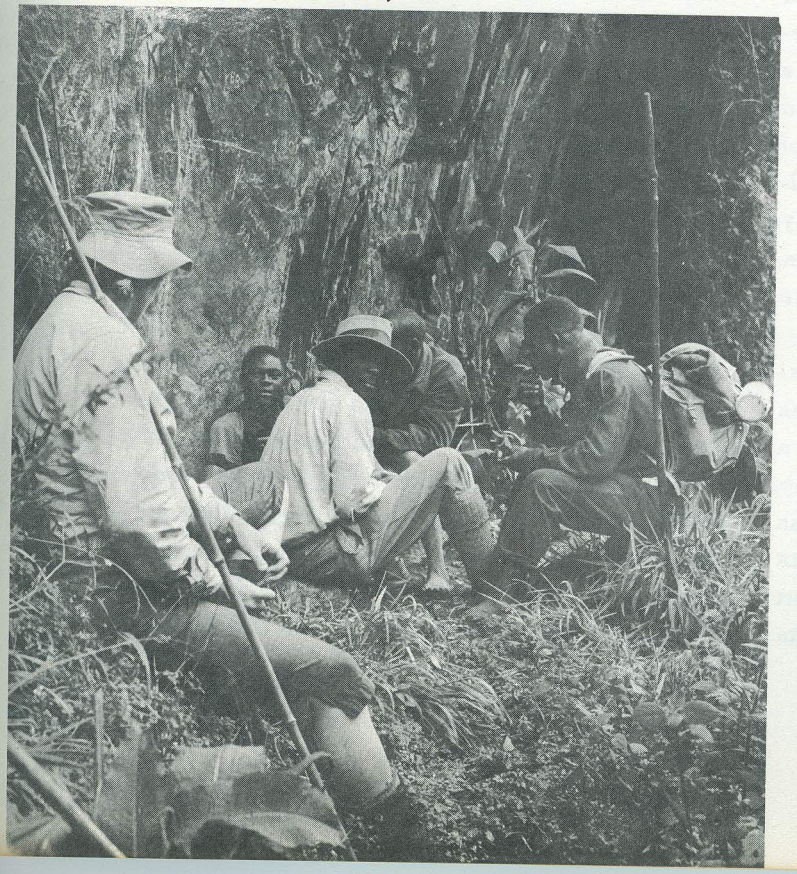
Smith distributes a blanket and sweater to each of the porters.

Saulo, our headman, and one of the porters.



Alexandra, 16,590 feet, and Margherita, 16,763 feet, the two major peaks of Mount Stanley, are the highest points of the Ruwenzori. Photo by Arthur H. Firmin

A rest stop near Kanyasabo.



It was in rock shelters, such as this one at Nyamuleju, that our porters slept each night.

largely responsible for the failure of earlier parties. An hour later they were on the summit gazing at the weird new world they had discovered.

It was this half hour of clear weather at the outset which so helped them realize their rapid and complete success. They at least now knew where to go and what to do. The expedition had its fair share of bad weather, but the Duke's characteristically thorough organization, excellent equipment and the knowledge gained on that first climb helped over come this.

The remaining peaks were tackled one by one, until virtually none remained unclimbed. At one stroke the Duke of the Abruzzi had solved all the important problems of the range. The scientific and mountaineering results, with Sella's incomparable photographs, were duly published upon their return.

The expedition did such a thorough job that interest in the range declined. Fully twenty years passed before people began to return to accomplish anything of importance. Climbers like Noel Humphries, Eric Shipton, and H.W. Tilman stand out particularly in this period. By 1932 the last major details of topography had been brought to light. The mountains and access to them were now open to all those who wished to use them.

While a safari into the Ruwenzori is not yet "an easy day for a lady," it is hardly the heroic enterprise it once was. A convenient hotel nearby, a system of comfortable huts, numerous trails, and experienced porters, all help ease the burdens of Ruwenzori travel, even if they do not entirely eliminate the elements of chance and adventure. Anyway, our expedition was not to be in the grand tradition, and so avoiding Spartan rigors, we planned to make it as comfortable as possible.

There were to be four of us: Smith Hempstone, ex-Institute Fellow who as Africa correspondent for an American newspaper was determined to report on a wide range of African experiences; Kitty Hempstone, his wife; Kitty Wright and I. Kitty and I formed an advance party to make the necessary arrangements for porters and their supplies in Kasese and Fort Portal. We planned to meet at the Hotel Margherita in Kasese on Sunday, July 15 (in time for curry lunch), and later that afternoon drive to the end of the narrow dirt track at Nyakalengija, well into the Mubuku Valley. We would start up the trail early the next morning.

After a hectic trip to the supermarket in Nairobi where Smith and I provisioned the expedition with every imaginable delicacy, Kitty and I left for Uganda, our Land Rover filled to overflowing with food and equipment. We arrived in Kampala the next day to find every hotel full and the Mountain Club's equipment secretary on holiday (with the keys to the equipment depot, of course). The first problem was not solved until late that evening when we were ushered into a room at the Speke Hotel Annex. Only then did we fully appreciate why the Speke has such a grim reputation.

The next day we met the Mountain Club's president who very kindly lent us most of the equipment we needed. Having covered the local bazaar in search of burlap bags for porter loads, we departed for Fort Portal, happy at last to be on our way.

At Fort Portal the most important item was to arrange for porters. These come from a small tribe (Bakonjo) which lives high in the foothills of the Ruwenzori. Taking everything into consideration, they are a cheerful lot and first rate carriers. Until Europeans began visiting the area, the Bakonjo never went further into the hills than their hunting took them. Traditionally, they believe the snows are the province of a diety named Kitasamba who lives there with his four wives and who should not be disturbed. Today, passing along their hunting trails, one runs across a number of little thatched shrines with an egg or some edible morsel inside with which to placate Kitasamba.

In hiring porters the Mountain Club has established a well-organized system. Each has an employment book and in it are recommendations from his previous employers. He carries a 45-50 pound load for which he receives a fixed wage of seventy cents a day. He is also given a daily food ration of 1¾ pounds of cassava flour and smaller amounts of dried fish, peanuts, sugar, salt, tea, and two ciga-

rettes with the imposing name of *Kali* (fierce). Each man is also given a blanket (traditionally white with colored stripes) and a sweater (brightly colored and undersized). Finally, for every eight porters or so there is a headman. He is not made to carry a load, but he is expected to relieve tired porters or *bwanas*.

It might appear an easy process to determine the number of porters needed, but in fact it is quite complex unless one happens to have a bent for mathematical progressions. I don't! It took a lot of figuring to decide on seventeen porters and two headmen. The crux of the problem was food (about three pounds per person per day). We knew we expected to be in the mountains for about ten days, and that we needed eight porters to carry our own gear, but this was just the beginning. Other porters have to carry the food, and further porters are needed to carry food for the extra porters. And so on. Then there are headmen, and they eat, too. To complicate matters still more, time adds another dimension. Nineteen men times three pounds is more than one porter load of food consumed each day, leaving an extra man. Naturally he can be sent home, but he needs food to get there. At last we found we needed nine men to carry porters' food, but I was up to my ears in scraps of papers covered with tiny jottings.

The ever-helpful Mountain Club had warned us about labor trouble. "There are sometimes arguments before leaving roadhead," the president told us, "but this is a try-on, and once on the march they are forgotten." Remembering a previous experience when eight of our porters went on strike, leaving headmen and *bwanas* to carry loads, the former suffering from a slight loss of status and the latter suffering, I didn't have great confidence in our ability to subdue an uprising in the ranks.

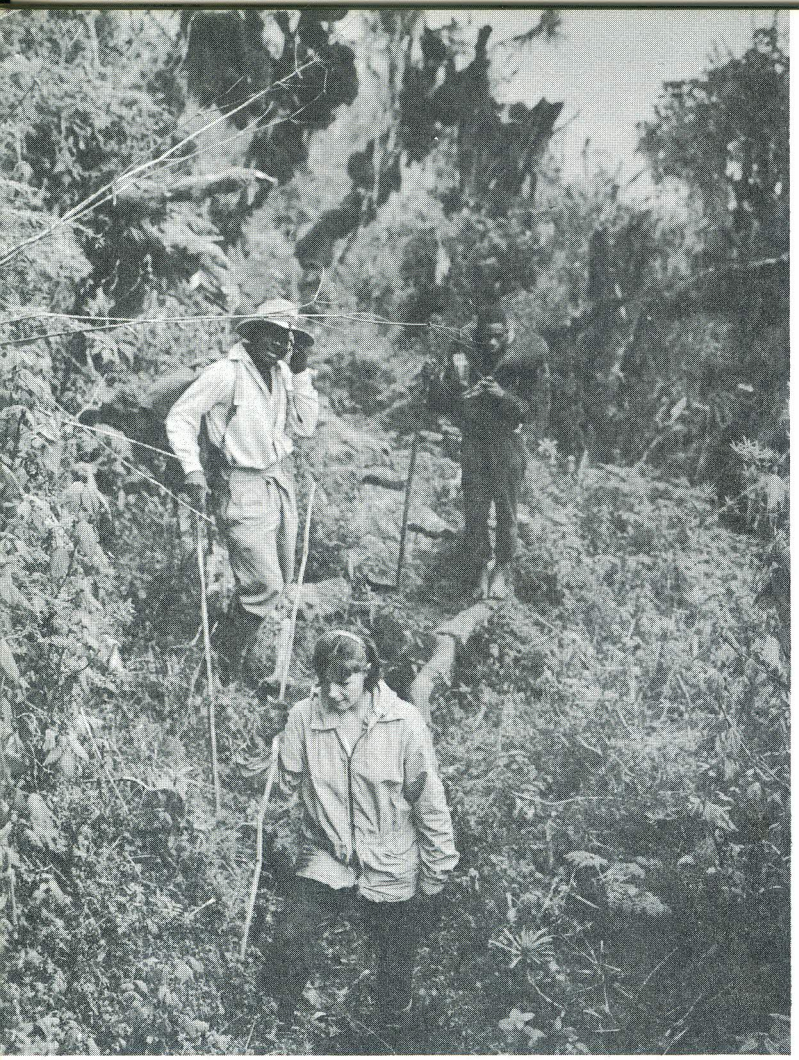
Luck was on our side, however, for we never had the slightest trouble. Kitty W. is convinced our antics on the trail convulsed them and kept them in such a state of expectant anticipation that they couldn't bear to part with us. I would guess a recent raise in their wages may also have had something to do with it, or the tip we gave the headman to promote understanding.

Crossing the Bujuku River.

Having unravelled the complexities of porter logistics, the purchase of supplies went smoothly. Ahmed Bhimji, who runs the local *duka*, had everything packed and ready in a couple of hours. We continued on to the Margherita in Kasese to wait for the Hempstones who were due to arrive the next day.

We slept late the next morning knowing it would be our last comfortable rest for quite a while. Time dragged as we waited for the Hempstones, but they arrived on time and soon we had returned to the little hut at Nyakalengija. By this time word had spread of the piles of food in the hut and of our impending expedition. Men, women, children, goats and sheep turned out in force to welcome us, some to apply for jobs, others just to enjoy the spectacle.

Against almost insuperable linguistic handicaps (the Bakonjo speak little Swahili and less English),



Saulo carries a red forest duiker to the next camp.

we managed to round up those actually looking for jobs. Smith and I pored over their employment books We first chose two headmen, John Mati and Saulo Kule, and with their help picked the rest. Tomasi, a headman who applied and whom we didn't hire, had been with me before although I didn't recognize him. While looking through his book, I found I had written a carefully worded disapproval (so he wouldn't tear the page out), as he had not only worn a friend's best climbing boots through the worst of the bogs, but he had also tried to run away with a fifty-pound load of cassava flour, even going as far as demanding a porter's wage for carrying it home.

We finally sorted everyone out and the crowd dispersed. We set up camp and picked out the dinner which was to be a special one combining our own send-off with Kitty W.'s birthday.

The next morning we were up at dawn and just finishing breakfast when the porters arrived. For the next two hours confusion reigned. Porters rushed among the loads lifting them all to find the lightest, and then each man lined up next to his choice. When the dust settled we found we needed an extra porter, and this meant we didn't have enough blankets or sweaters to go around. Since they are considered elements of prestige rather than comfort, we were hard put to find a porter who would accept money in their place. Those who received blankets and sweaters invariably gave them to relatives, while they depended on sturdier army surplus clothing.

Eventually we straightened everything out and departed for Bujuku Lake, three days' march to the west. At first our route lay through a heavy growth of elephant grass (named for its size, not for the dietary habits of elephant) whose sharp blades sliced our hands and legs, covering us with small, painful cuts. Oil from other plant's leaves got into these and almost drove us mad with itching. Since it was I who had recommended shorts be worn, my ability as adviser was quickly cast into doubt. Although I had been in the Ruwenzori before, I found the trail overgrown and considerably changed. During the next week my recollections often proved far off the mark.

As we walked through the elephant grass, one of the porters yelled, "Tembo" (elephant), dropped his pack and fled. All twenty-four of us followed his example in an undignified scramble down that narrow, crowded path. No sooner had I gotten going at a respectable clip than I heard a snort and a tremendous crash right behind me. Convinced I was about to be dispatched by an angry bull elephant, I screwed up my courage and turned to see Smith sprawled across a root.

That brought most of us to a halt, and we listened intently, huddled together just off the trail. We were silent for a long time. Saulo told us he wasn't afraid of elephants. Kitty W. suggested someone climb a tree, but no one did; there were too many nettles under them.

When the danger had passed, we retraced our

steps past fresh elephant droppings and on up into the rain forest. It was a gentle but steady plod upwards through bushes and weeds covered with dew. Soon it was we who were covered with dew, and our energy and enthusiasm flagged as we got progressively wetter and wetter. We stumbled regularly over roots and logs which earlier we would have neatly side-stepped.

Suddenly Kitty W. tripped and fell into a horde of *siafu,* or driver ants, which promptly covered her, all the while biting viciously, as she danced about in pain. These extraordinary ants have powerful pincers whose painful bite brings blood as often as not, and they have been known to reduce small animals and children to bones. We all rushed to Kitty's aid, picking them off her one by one. Kitty's motions must have been comic, for our porters were slapping their thighs and roaring with laughter at her indisposition. They had walked through this same horde in bare feet, merely stamping regularly to shake them off.

Before we finished we had taken a good number off ourselves as well, and we quit the accursed spot, having come out, I fear, somewhat worse for the wear in our first two encounters with Ruwenzori wildlife. The trail continued up, then down and up again. We crossed several streams by wading through in our boots. Kitty W. seemed fated to suffer from *siafu* again (and again, and again), but in her next encounters the rest of us suffered too. At one point we plopped down to rest, Kitty quaintly mumbling something about never moving an inch farther. She did, however, and quickly,, but it didn't take us as long to get them off her (and us) this time.

It was a bedraggled group that arrived at the Mahoma River, our lunch stop. Some chocolate, a few nuts, and a wash in the cold water revived us. Soon again we were ready for anything. From here the trail goes directly up a steep ridge to the first hut. If one doesn't fall into the Mahoma while crossing it (as I did, but luckily on the return journey when the danger to morale was negligible) or fall off the path and down the precipitous slopes, one may arrive at Nyabitaba, as we did, utterly spent.

It was hot tea which brought us back to life this time, and we immediately set about choosing two cooks, Kambere and Adiwad, and instructing them in the complexities of safari cooking. There were elephant nearby and it took all our powers of persuasion to get them to fetch some water. Kitty W. held her first sick-call. Although Kitty H. had the remnants of a cold which appeared to be getting worse and some of the porters had headaches and a few cuts, everyone was in fine spirits. The porters quickly settled under the shelter of a vast overhanging rock and started cooking their meal, chatting incessantly. We watched and were glad they didn't offer us any of the resulting pasty mess.

We relaxed. enjoying the spectacular scenery. Nyabitaba (meaning mother of tobacco) is a delightful spot on the crest of a sharp ridge amidst a cool wood. It was a beautiful evening. Mount Gessi stood out in the distance and the steep walls of the Portal Peaks (named after Captain Raymond Portal) towered over us from across the valley. We were tired and went to bed soon after dinner. The porters still chatted on.

We were up at dawn the next day, but the sky was overcast and it looked like rain. We started down to the Mubuku River, some 400 feet below the hut, slipping and sliding along the steep trail through thick growths of bamboo. When we reached the rickety suspension bridge across the surging river, it started to drizzle. In spite of what seemed inevitable, no one fell in, to the evident chagrin of two photographers. From then on the trail went up, up, and up.

It rained harder and the trail became increasingly slippery. We passed a spot known as Mubyatomasi (meaning the place where a headman named Tomasi got into trouble with his employer), and we wondered if it was the same Tomasi we knew. We continued up. Nettles larger than ourselves stung us painfully, raising large red welts. Drenched to the skin, we had lunch at a rock shelter called Kanyasabo, place of mud, and understood.

Mercifully, the rain stopped, although the fog stayed with us for the rest of the day. We hiked

on with little clouds of steam emerging from our clothing as we gradually dried out. We slithered over roots and moss-covered rocks which looked secure but which often threw us. There were no landmarks, and in the fog it was difficult to know exactly where we were. We wondered why we ever got involved in this.

The porters had gone ahead, setting traps to be emptied on the return. While looking into one of them, Saulo found a fat red forest duiker which he carried over his shoulders to the next hut, Nyamuleju, where we arrived late that afternoon, covered in mud.

The porters waiting for us were jubilant over the prospect of duiker steaks, but at 10,900 feet we were pretty pooped out and not very enthusiastic about anything. Sick-call was busier than the previous evening; there were many nasty cuts and new colds. The hike through the rain hadn't done Kitty H. any good, and her cold was considerably worse. To complicate matters I had pulled two ligaments in my left knee and was limping around the hut. No one had any *gufu* (energy) left.

It is amazing how quickly the body forgets such torture. Just before dusk the mists cleared, and from the top of a nearby rock we had a magnificent view of Mts. Stanley and Speke. We agreed that today's hike was more pleasant than yesterday's, if only because it was cooler. We retired to the warm and smokey hut. After picking out our dinner, Smith bellowed for Adiwad. When he arrived, he meekly suggested we pronounce his name properly: "It's not Adiwad; it's Edward."

Smith slept on the floor that night. One of the bunks had been chopped up by a previous occupant for firewood.

By the next morning Kitty H. had developed a severe cough, and she thought she might have to return to roadhead. Since my knee was no better, we decided to spend an extra day at Nyamuleju recuperating, and if Kitty hadn't improved, she would then return to civilization.

The following day was cold and clear, and we all felt immeasurably better. We pushed on, eager to see the weird new world we had heard so much about, especially Bujuku Lake, a dark and mysterious tarn below the three main mountains of the range.

Soon after leaving Nyamuleju and in the middle of a bog, we came across a whole field of giant lobelias. In 1906 Wollaston wrote to his father, "I have a lot of seeds of lobelias. . . which I think ought to grow well in England. I wonder if you are damp enough at Flax Bourton? (They) are very handsome things and would be a great ornament to any garden if they could be made to flower." These fantastic plants, sometimes fifteen feet high, symbolize the weird other-worldness of the Ruwenzori, but unfortunately Wollaston's hope came to naught for all attempts to grow them elsewhere have failed.

Shortly after, we entered a forest of giant heather festooned with moss and lichen. This giant version of heather, often forty-five feet high, has little in common with its smaller cousin on the English moors. We also saw our first giant groundsel (senecio), up to twenty feet high, again a giant form of the English plant. This Brobdingnagian world is known botanically as the Erica Zone, but we had another name for it.

We crossed the Bujuku River, only a swift mountain stream at this point, and entered the first of the bogs. Bog-hopping is the best known aspect of Ruwenzori travel and certainly the most unpleasant. The bogs consist of silt brought down by the rivers and are a mass of thick, oozing black mud with numerous grassy tussocks scattered about. One crosses a bog by leaping from tussock to tussock with the help of a bamboo pole for balance. This is not only exhausting but a miss is fatal, for then one sinks up to his knees or waist in smelly mud. At first one is extremely careful, but eventually everybody misses a tussock and lands in the muck, and sometimes it takes several porters to pull him out. Altogether, it is a most frustrating business.

We bog-hopped across the first bog, past Bigo Hut, then up a slithery path over tangled roots and fallen trees onto another bog covered with helichrysum, as well as tussocks. At first the heli-

chrysum, a variety of everlasting, appeared a god-send for it helped us keep our balance, but it is fickle and sometimes held and sometimes broke off, invariably depositing the unlucky person in the muck. Its name is said to originate from "'hell' cry some, and others use stronger language."

Having passed this obstacle, we found ourselves below a spectacular headwall leading up to Bujuku Lake. It was a sloppy trudge along the Bujuku River, now reduced to a small rushing brook, up the steepest mud we had ever seen. This is the famous vertical bog, the Ruwenzori's answer to the waterproof boot.

When we got to the top, the peaks were hidden in mist, although in the distance we could dimly make out the two huts on a rise above the lake. After a dramatic experience in which we almost lost Smith and Kitty W. in the quicksand near the lake shore, we reached the huts late in the afternoon. We were cold, muddy, and miserable, but we had made it to the top hut, and we were all rather happy at the accomplishment.

It would be a gross understatement to say the upper Bujuku Valley is a weird place. The word itself means hostility, cold, and harshness, and in this respect it is well named. It would be hard to imagine a more inhospitable place. Bujuku Lake in the mist has an eerie, ghostly countenance which is amplified by its still, black waters. When it clears, however, the three mountains (Stanley, Speke, Baker) tower majestically above it, and the many waterfalls grow in volume as the sun melts the snows that feed them. It is an unbelievably beautiful spot, and being there was worth every discomfort we endured in getting there.

We paid off the unneeded porters who wasted no time in leaving for Nyamuleju where it wasn't quite so cold. The rest huddled around their fires in a rock shelter just below us. They would probably have to stay awake all night in order to keep warm.

We retreated to the warmth of our hut after performing the minimum ablutions that decency demanded. As the icy air swept down from the three glaciated peaks above us, we found it inordinately

Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax arboreus*)
By Miss Ruth Yudelowitz. Courtesy of The East African Literature Bureau and Longmans, Green & Co., Limited.

cold, and we wasted no time getting into our warm sleeping bags fully clad. As we lay in our bunks, we were startled to hear a series of bloodcurdling screams. These were from a charming little nocturnal creature, the hydrax, which although only the size of a cat, is the closest relative of the elephant with which it has many structural similarities. It looks like a large, furry rat and eats bark, although it prefers, of all things, lobelias. In turn, it is eaten by the Bakonjo and leopard, both of whom consider it a delicacy. There are tree and rock hyraxes, and in character with the mountains in which they live, the Ruwenzori variety is a type of tree hyrax, but since there are no trees over 11,000 feet, they live in rocks.

We had seen them often that day, scurring about in front of their nests, and had become quite attached to their alert antics. Kitty H. asked John Mati to bring her one if he found one alive in a trap, which he did the next morning. He was only a youngster and quite terrified, but Kitty promptly christened him Rocky and went in search of succulent lobelia leaves, while Kitty W. made a splint from a match box and bandaged his leg, which he had almost chewed off in his efforts to escape. Far from trying to bite her, he seemed genuinely grateful for the assistance, and in no time he was hopping about the hut. We wondered if he would survive the trip down.

Smith and I went up to Stuhlmann Pass where we hoped we could look westwards into the Congo, but by the time we had arrived, the mists were already surging upwards, and we could see nothing. To the

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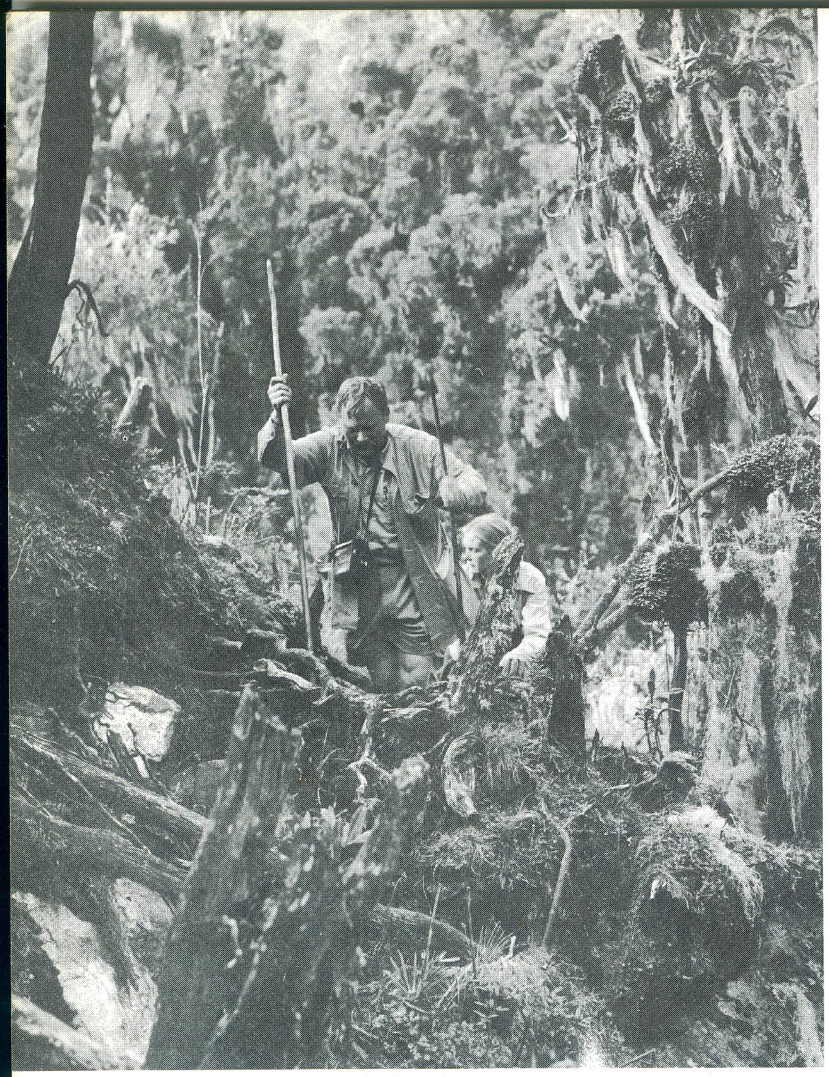

Rough going through the jungle.

Ruwenzori Safari *from page 27*

east Mt. Baker played hide-and-seek in the mist. We were surrounded by a forest of giant groundsel and tired from our exertions at more than 13,000 feet. We appreciated the expressive name of a nearby mountain called Rwatamagufa, the hill that breaks the bones.

As we gathered about the stove that evening, we considered the situation. Kitty's cold was still bad and wasn't improving. My knee was worse and gave no indication of getting better. Kitty W. had an altitude headache which was driving her to distraction. Only Smith was in good shape, but it was clearly impossible for him to do any further hiking or climbing alone. We regretfully decided to cut our visit short by a day and head down the next morning.

What a beautiful morning it was when we reluctantly started the long descent to Nyakalengija. Mt. Stanley stood out clearly as we trudged along in the mud above Bujuku Lake. It was crisp and clear, the finest weather we had had on the entire trip. The incredible views which were hitherto hidden behind thick layers of cloud and mist seemed to beckon to us to reconsider. Lake Kitandara and the Irene Lakes remained to be visited, as did other less picturesque places like Groundsel Gully and Omukabamwanjara.

On the whole the trip down was uneventful. Rocky travelled in Smith's pocket in a nest of lobelia leaves, all the while protesting ineffectually at this indignity. We were unable to cut much off our time up because the trail was just as difficult going down. We spent the night at Nyamuleju but skipped Nyabitaba, thus arriving in two days.

This time it was Kitty H.'s turn with *siafu.* They got her just as we were nearing roadhead. Only the prospect of a hot bath and a cold beer drove us on. The hike through the elephant grass seemed endless, and at the end we had to race a grass fire which was crackling all around us. We finally made it to the cars and, paying off the porters and a last sick-call while Kitty W. pulled ants out of her hair, we headed for civilization, and our expedition ended where it began, at the Margherita Hotel.

It had been an exciting time in the Ruwenzori. By some miracle we had not only missed the usual downpours, but we had enjoyed several really beautiful days. This is most extraordinary, especially after remembering what the pioneers encountered. Some people think the Ruwenzori are slowly drying out, because of a diminishing cloud cover. Certainly all the glaciers are receding, although not at as rapid a pace as the glaciers on Mts. Kenya and Kilimanjaro. Nevertheless, we were kept wet enough by bushes, trees, and, later, mud. It has not yet dried out completely, as a party that left soon after our return learned to their dismay.

Several days later, as we drove north towards new adventures, we looked back to the Ruwenzori and saw massive rain clouds forming and heard the crash of thunder. We were glad to be down.