

## EAST AFRICAN NOTES

## UGANDA

BY D. PASTEUR

SINCE the last notes on Uganda were written in November, 1965, the Ruwenzori has reopened and has now returned to normal. The range had been effectively closed since mid-1964 due to the intimidation of the Bakonjo porters by the local Rwenzururu extremist movement. The activities of the extremists did not finally die out until late 1967, but parties were able to get onto the mountain from January 1966 onwards, when the porters sensibly allowed their desire to earn some decent money to outweigh their fear of reprisals for venturing to take outsiders on the mountain. The threats of reprisals in the event always proved to be hollow.

Activity on the mountain since 1966 has returned to the level of the early 1960's, and even exceeded it. There are, however, a greater number of climbers and walkers from Uganda and neighbouring countries, and fewer international visitors, which is probably a result of the closure in 1964-5. This does not deserve to be so, as the portage and hut facilities are as good as they have ever been, and communications to and within Uganda are good.

Three climbing expeditions deserve to be reported. On the first, R. Hockey and C. Robson of Uganda and C. Bertulis of U.S.A., after approaching the range by the Lamya valley from the north (only two or three times previously traversed by climbers), and climbing the seldom visited Portal Peaks, went round to the Congo side of Mount Stanley. From the Glacier hut Hockey and Bertulis followed a new and in places difficult ice route up the Alexandra glacier to strike the North-west ridge of Albert; then, after a bivouac, they traversed over Albert and Margherita and descended by the East ridge on the Uganda side. This is only a new route in its lower half, but visits to the Congo side of Stanley by Uganda parties are rare, and a west to east traverse has not previously been recorded. On reaching Bujuku hut on the Uganda side, the climbers had a rude shock. Robson, who had set off alone to walk back from the Congo side to Bujuku round the north-west flank of Stanley, had not arrived. As he had by then had two days for the one-day journey, they set up a search that evening and continued searching round the Congo side for several days. Assistance was summoned from below, and an air search even attempted. After six days the search was called off in despair. The route round the flank of Stanley

had been thoroughly searched, but it was impossible to cover all the valleys on the Congo side into which he might have strayed. There was a slender hope that he might have walked down to the bottom on the Congo side.

On the seventh day Robson walked into Bujuku hut. It turned out that he had indeed taken a false turning to the left on his way round the shoulder, and had descended some way down a valley on the western side before realising his mistake. Without map or compass, but recollecting a little of the difficult topography of the area, he decided to continue down until he met the next major valley joining his from the right, and then to ascend it in the hope that it led to the Uganda side. He had to descend to about 10,000 ft. (from 14,000) and then met and ascended the difficult Luusilubi valley to the Stuhlmann Pass (13,650 ft.), and thence to Bujuku. What makes this exploit into an amazing feat of endurance, is the fact that when he left his companions he did not have any food at all, nor even matches to light a fire. The area into which he strayed is totally pathless, being north of the approach route on the Congo side, and in places heavily vegetated. At least he did have two sleeping bags and the shelter of Ruwenzori's numerous rock shelters. It seems odd to be on a remote mountain without map, compass, matches or food, and still more to survive.

Another noteworthy expedition was the second ascent of the North-east ridge of Albert by R. Hockey of Uganda and C. Barton of Kenya, in August, 1967. This fine route, first climbed in 1956, is one of the very best offered by Ruwenzori, and is completed by traversing over Margherita. Hockey and Barton climbed it in good conditions, and found the difficult sections to be standard IV sup.

Thirdly, in January, 1968, a party consisting of R. Roschnik, R. Strachan and A. Weatherhead of Malawi, completed a fine traverse of all the southern peaks of Mount Stanley. The party started by climbing the East face of Elena, and then traversed over Great Tooth, Savoia, Elizabeth and Philip peaks, returning to Elena in ten hours. This was the first complete traverse of all the peaks in this compact group, all over 16,000 ft. They have received less attention than they deserve partly because Margherita and Alexandra are the first objective of any party, and partly because to enjoy their intricate scenery fine weather is needed.

Hut space at Bujuku, the main hut at the centre of the range, was expanded during 1967. The writer, on a farewell visit to the range before leaving Uganda, organised a party to extend the newer of the two huts which was built in 1957. This hut was doubled in size and an Alpine style communal bunk installed with two tiers extending the whole width of the hut. Bunk space was thus increased by fourteen to a total of 24. The hut has been named the Bazarrabusa Memorial Hut in

memory of T. B. Bazarrabusa, a past President of the Mountain Club of Uganda, and member of the Alpine Club, who died in 1966.

The writer also took part in another more unusual hut-building expedition on Mount Elgon. The Uganda Police air-wing was carrying out training and test flights in the area for its Westland Scout helicopters. The air-wing agreed to lift two club members and the sections of a prefabricated aluminium hut weighing about 500 lbs. in two journeys from the foot of the mountain at 4000 ft. to the hut site at 10,500 ft. With the aid of perfect weather and skilful flying, both the builders and the materials were deposited close to the site, and the shell of the hut was erected in time to permit the builders to walk down to the valley the same day.