ELIZABETH PEAK; RUWENZORI

By D. L. BUSK

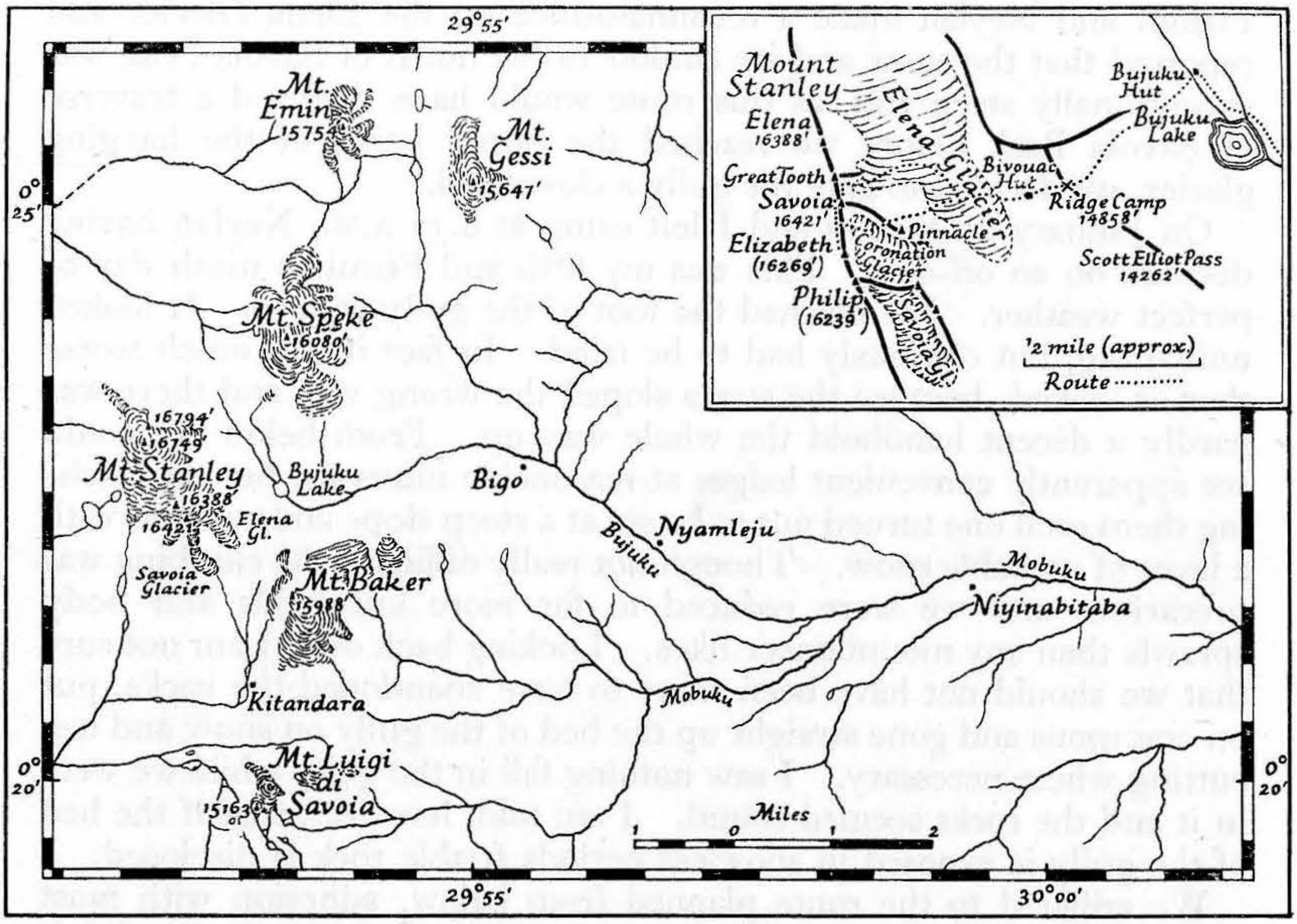
When I first contemplated a trip to Ruwenzori I naturally studied all the available maps and photographs. It was not long before I noticed that, though the former marked the Savoia Glacier at the south end of the Stanley group as abutting against Savoia Peak, photographs showed a hanging glacier descending towards Elena Glacier. This lay between Savoia Peak and the Savoia Glacier and my suspicion that there must be unclimbed peaks at its head, probably invisible from the Uganda side, was strengthened by close study of Sella's photographs and above all by Humphreys' view from the air of the Congo side (*Geographical Journal*, LXXXII, no. 6, p. 483), which showed two high peaks on the frontier ridge south of Savoia Peak. Another photograph of Humphreys' (p. 482) from Mt. Luigi di Savoia shows the southern face of these peaks. The investigation of these matters became my objective and I was fortunately able to persuade Arthur Firmin to meet me on Ruwenzori during the latter part of January.

It took me a fortnight to drive the 2,200 miles from Addis Ababa to Fort Portal (not, incidentally, the best way to get into training), but all arrangements had been made most efficiently by the Mountain Club of Uganda and on January 17, 1953 I started from Ruboni with eight porters and a headman. The latter, Kule Kisuki, I can strongly recommend. Though we had no word of any common language, he dealt efficiently with an incipient porters' strike and looked after me like a mother.

The Mountain Club of Uganda, aided financially and practically by the Government of the Protectorate, have performed prodigies in opening up Ruwenzori. I hope that all visitors recognise the personal sacrifice of officers and members of the Club, who devote some of their hard-won leave to supervising the erection of huts. Though prefabricated and already tried out in civilisation, small parts become lost and major members damaged in transit, so it is no mean task to put them up on sites that have to be carefully prepared after difficult journeys with reluctant porters usually in bad weather. The huts, of different models, are of aluminium and are for the most part as adequately equipped as Alpine huts, though much smaller. Prospective visitors should ask the Honorary Secretary of the Mountain Club for the latest position before planning a trip.

Road head at Ruboni, 50 miles from Fort Portal is at about 5,000 ft. I spent nights at the Niyinabitaba (8,500 ft.), Nyamuleju (10,500 ft.) and Bujuku (13,000 ft.) huts. Each day's stage was 4–5 hours going uphill and not very much less downhill. This sounds fantastically short and the mountaineer in really good condition might well do two stages in one. I made no such effort, partly on account of age and decreptitude, but

largely because of the vile nature of the going, even though something of a trail has been cut. In untravelled country in the Canadian Rockies I have, I think, once seen its equal, though not its like, and in the Rockies there were mosquitos too, but Ruwenzori, even though now opened up, will still make the average Alpine mountaineer not only sweat, but marvel at the fortitude of his predecessors, who had no trails or huts. I had the rare advantage of perfect weather ; in the usual rain or mist the climb must be twice as fatiguing. The chief strain is the unremitting attention required. One has to watch one's feet all the time.



By permission of the Royal Geographical Society.

On the third day the Stanley Group came into sight, a magnificent glaciated wall above the damp greenery of the valley. I could see the hanging glacier clearly and also the gully to the right (north) of it by which the Duke of the Abruzzi had descended Savoia Peak in 1906. As it was face on it looked, of course, very steep ; this did not matter, but it appeared to be blocked at the top by a 50 ft. vertical ice wall. It looked almost as if another hanging glacier were forming, but as all the pundits say the glaciers of Ruwenzori are receding, this could not be. I did not realise at the time that I could see the two peaks I was aiming for. One stands clearly immediately over the tongue of the hanging glacier and the other is just distinguishable behind a rock pinnacle to the left (south) of the gully and to the right (north) of the glacier.

At the Bujuku hut three porters were paid off. Here I would have much welcomed an off-day, but a note from Firmin, who had been in the range for a week, urged me to join him and Pat Neylan at Ridge Camp on the morrow. With Kule and three porters carrying light loads I duly sweated up the steep slopes and was joined by Firmin and Neylan, who had come up from Kitandara after a traverse of Baker. We sent all our porters down to Bujuku with orders to help a South African-Belgian party to bring their loads up next day.

From the camp we had a close view of the hanging glacier and the gully by which the Duke descended Savoia Peak. There was far more snow in the gully than in 1906 and we did not much like the look of it. Firmin and Neylan made a reconnaissance up the Elena Glacier and reported that the snow and ice couloir to the north of Savoia Peak was exceptionally steep and, as this route would have involved a traverse of Savoia Peak before we reached the upper basin of the hanging glacier, we decided to give the gully a closer look.

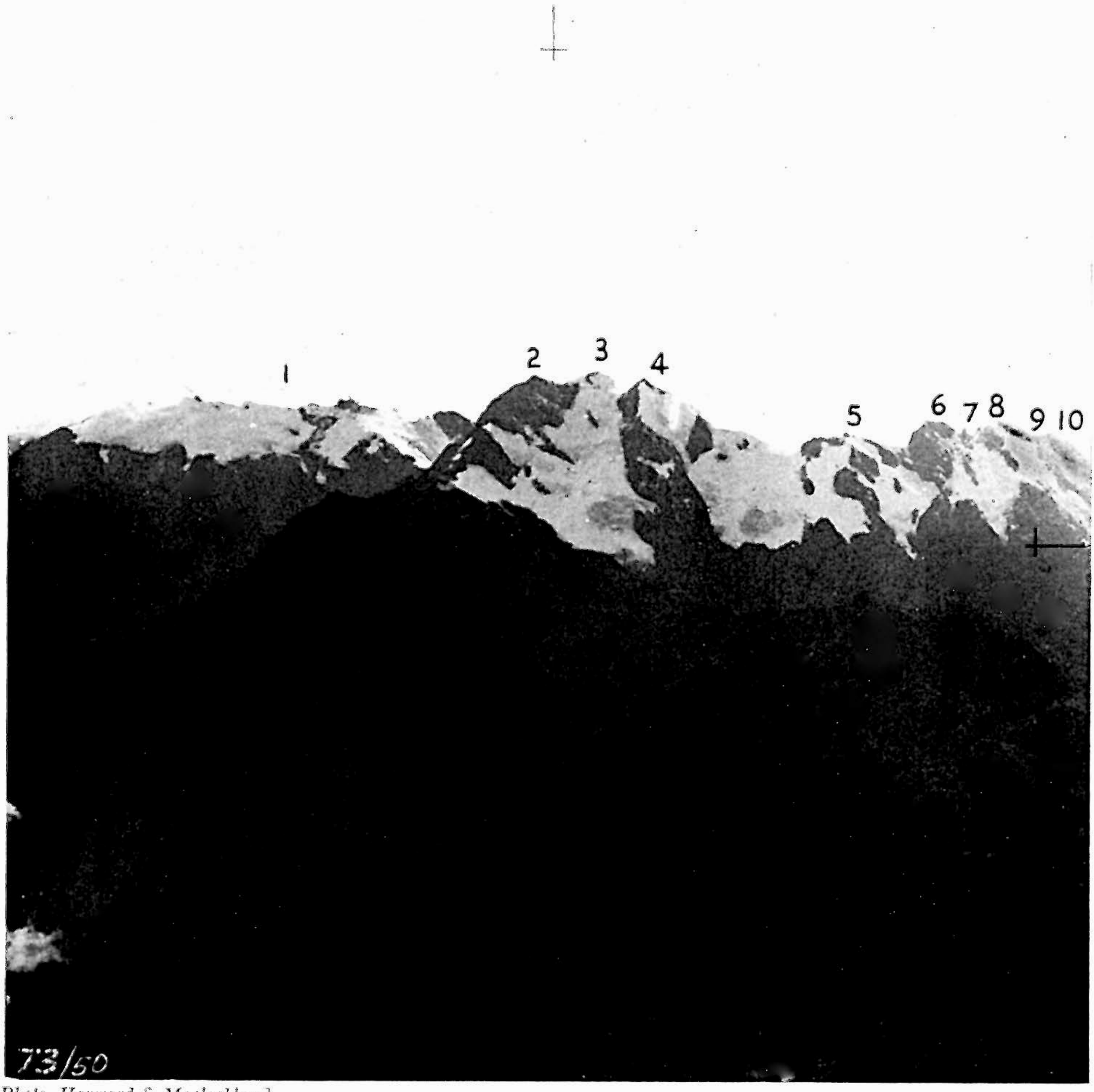
On January 21 Firmin and I left camp at 8.30 A.M., Neylan having decided on an off-day. This was my fifth and Firmin's ninth day of perfect weather. We reached the foot of the gully at 9.30. It looked uninviting, but obviously had to be tried. In fact it was much worse than it looked, because the strata sloped the wrong way and there was hardly a decent handhold the whole way up. From below we could see apparently convenient ledges at reasonable intervals, but on reaching them each one turned out to be set at a steep slope and covered with a layer of unstable snow. Though not really difficult, the climbing was precarious and we were reduced to far more kneeholds and body sprawls than any mountaineer likes. Looking back on it I am not sure that we should not have been wiser to have abandoned the rocks, put on crampons and gone straight up the bed of the gully on snow and ice, cutting where necessary. I saw nothing fall in the gully while we were in it and the rocks seemed sound. I am told, however, that if the bed of the gully is exposed in snowless periods friable rock is disclosed.

We adhered to the route planned from below, adhesion with most of the frontal surface of the body being the usual method. So Pandulph recommended :

> ' And he that stands upon a slippery place
> Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.'

I was feeling the altitude badly and arrived at the top of every pitch panting as if I had run a four-minute mile. The short halts necessary for my recovery slowed us down and we took nearly 3 hours from the foot of the gully to the little col at its head, just to the right of the pinnacle so prominent in the view from Ridge Camp. This, incidentally, is a fraud. It is almost flat-topped and level with the col. Firmin ran up it in 2 minutes to take a photograph.

From the col we looked into the upper basin of the hanging glacier, and, best of all, across it to the two ' unknown ' peaks. (From now on I shall use the names proposed in accordance with the tradition estab-



Photo, Harward & Maclachlan.]

AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF STANLEY GROUP OF RUWENZORI FROM CONGO SIDE. LEFT TO RIGHT: (1) MT. SPEKE IN DISTANCE; (2) ALBERT PK.; (3) MARGHERITA PK.; (4) ALEXANDRA PK.; (5) MOEBIUS PK.; (6) ELENA PK.; (7) GREAT TOOTH; (8) SAVOIA PK.; (9) ELIZABETH PK.; (10) PHILIP PK.

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lished by the Duke. These are shown on the sketch map. We make of course, no claim to the ' discovery ' of a glacier that has been visible to any passer-by for fifty years. We have merely notified its existence and incidentally plodded across its surface.)

On looking round the upper basin of the Coronation Glacier it was obvious that the peak at the south-east corner of the basin was extremely easy from the col between it and Philip, which in turn was readily accessible from the basin. Philip was a very different proposition. From the col rose a vertical step, that offered little hope. The col between Philip and Elizabeth was exceedingly steep and iced from the basin. Above this, too, the ridge of Philip had a high vertical step. (We realized that Philip and the Philip-Elizabeth col are visible from Ridge Camp only on our return there. Elizabeth is hidden behind the pinnacle.) We decided, therefore, to concentrate on Elizabeth, which I had judged from photographs to be the highest. After a halt we tackled the Elizabeth-Savoia col, which though a short climb proved a little tricky and demanded awkward cutting over a bergschrund and some crevasses. From the col the summit of Elizabeth was easily reached by a short scramble on the Congo side. The top is composed of large and comfortable slabs, but there were no suitable loose stones, so we built no cairn and left no record. On our assumption that the height of Savoia (16,421 ft.) is correct, Elizabeth seemed to be about 16,100 ft. and Philip not more than 50 ft. lower. The col at the top of the gully and the pinnacle must be about 15,600 ft. Monsieur Mallieux, Vice-President of the Club Alpin Belge, has since informed me that he has had access to the unpublished map of the Belgian Ministry of Colonies, which marks two peaks (16,269 ft. and 16,239 ft.) in the right positions. These must be Elizabeth and Philip. This map does not mark glaciers.

Returning to the col we had another short halt and then, while Firmin scrambled rapidly up easy scree to the summit of Savoia I prospected the North ridge running down towards the Great Tooth that separates Savoia and Elena, because we were quite determined not to try the descent of our gully. Such places, unpleasant to ascend, are much more dangerous to descend and unlike the Duke we were not accompanied by two first-class Alpine guides. At first the ridge was easy rock, where no rope was needed, but it soon narrowed to a snow ridge with ice bulges and for the first time we put on crampons.

Secured by Firmin I worked down to a sort of shelf about 50 ft. above the col at the south foot of the Great Tooth and perhaps 40 yds. from it. Here there was a vertical cut off and a descent would have involved a nasty, twisting, sidewise jump about 7 ft. down on to an unstable-looking bit of ridge. Beyond this we could not see in detail, but there appeared a strong probability that there was at least one, and possibly two, more short vertical steps in the ridge. I am inclined now to think that we should nevertheless have tried this route, but when I brought Firmin down to look at it he vetoed the idea and then retreated uphill again to his belay to leave me to work out an alternative. We

could, of course, have retraced our steps and then tried a much lower line on the Congo side. This indeed is almost certainly the proper course, but we hated the idea of more uphill work, so I cast around on the Uganda side. By edging down a sort of gutter filled with snow of the same unreliable consistency as castor sugar overlying ice I found a vertical ice pitch 15 to 20 ft. high. This was unclimbable by normal means, but once at the bottom of it we ought to be able to crampon or cut down an exceedingly steep gully into the main couloir running down from the col south of the Great Tooth to the Elena Glacier. We therefore resolved to sacrifice an ice axe and rope down the vertical pitch.

To give us more rope Firmin found with some difficulty a lower belay in which his axe would hold and secured me on the climbing rope in free air down the vertical pitch and then for some feet until I could find a reasonable place to cut a stance. I went further down and soon found good snow overlying ice. Coming up again I cut another stance immediately above mine and unroped. By good luck we had judged distances exactly and the doubled rope just reached the stance. Firmin came down with his usual deftness and to our relief the rope followed after a steady pull.

With only one ice axe between us caution was required and we descended the gully and then the main couloir face inwards for four rope lengths until we were on easier ground and could run down to the Elena Glacier and our camp. All in all a grand and varied climb by any standard, with the additional satisfaction that long-range deduction had for once been proved correct—but how we blessed the unusual good weather that alone allowed such a gamble to succeed.

Next day we descended to Nyamuleju and on the following one reached Fort Portal, three very tired men in search of beer and baths. Throughout my seven days the weather was perfect, but the clouds were closing in on us as we descended the valley and we felt that typical Ruwenzori weather was probably now holding our South African friends tent-bound.

I would like here to pay some slight tribute to Arthur Firmin. Any first ascent, no matter how easy, demands some nerve. To lead a man with whom you have never climbed before and who on the first and every subsequent pitch gives every evidence of disintegration, if not of nuclear fission, is a considerable achievement. I am proud that he enjoyed a climb discovered in my study in Addis Ababa and I only hope that the next member of the Alpine Club he encounters on a mountainside will be less decrepit and more competent. As for Pat Neylan I can only say that we missed him on the climb, because I have not often travelled with a better ' expedition man.' All members of the Alpine Club will know what I mean, when I say that he was always the first up to light the primus and the last to bed after washing up; the first to spot the limp of a porter or the dilapidation of a companion and succour them.

May I conclude with some observations about future possibilities ?

The gully originally descended by the Duke and climbed by us is most unattractive, but an acclimatised and, above all, experienced and wary party should not need more than 2 hours for its ascent. It would be worth trying crampons on the snow and ice instead of the rocks. For the descent the gully would be more difficult and would demand great care, particularly if a party had not previously ascended it.

The peak at the south-east corner of the basin is very easy from the basin of the Coronation Glacier and should be ascended as soon as possible in order to get the view southward.

Philip will be a problem, unless the step on the ridge can be turned on the south side or unless an easier approach is disclosed from the Savoia Glacier. From photographs the latter appears unlikely.

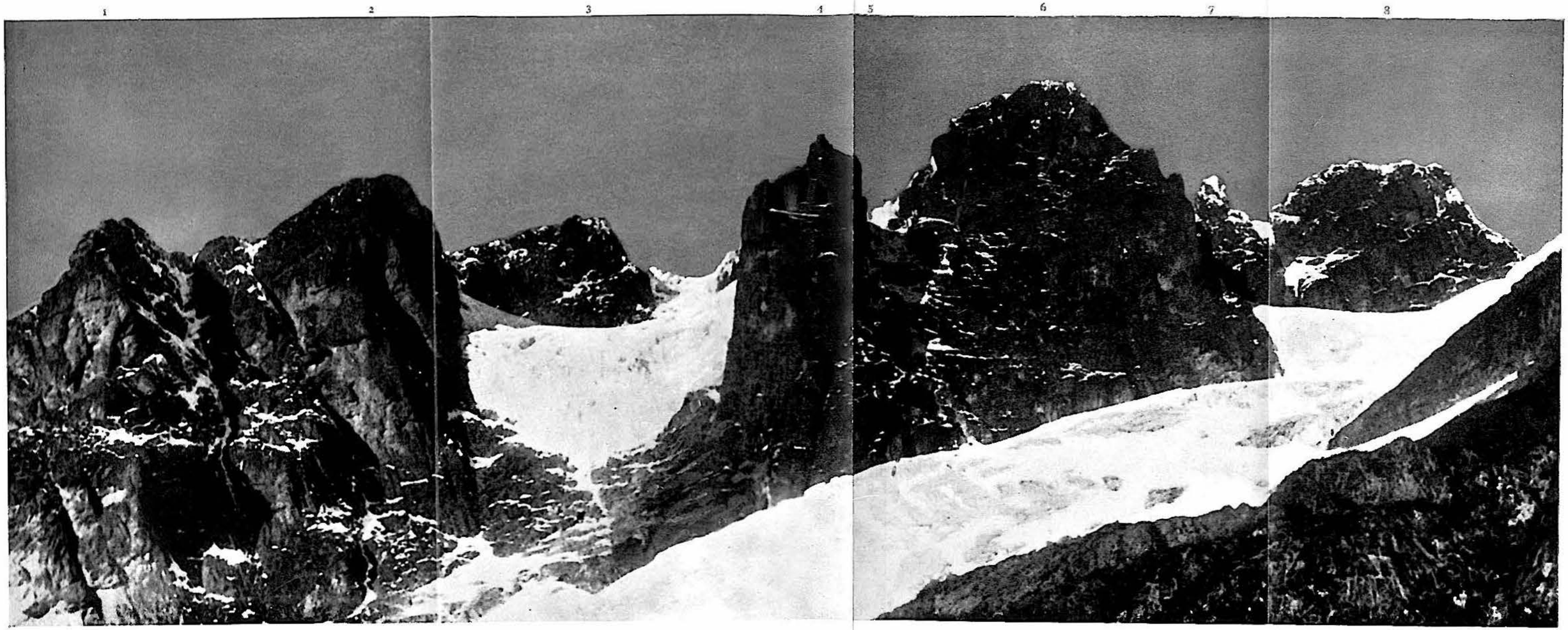
An attempt should be made on Philip from the Kitandara hut via the Savoia Glacier. This would be a magnificent climb and by far the most elegant approach to these summits, which deserve a route of their own.

The Philip-Elizabeth traverse will be difficult owing to the vertical step on Philip's north ridge, just above the intervening col. In going from south to north, however, this step might be roped down. The ideal is an ascent from Kitandara to the col east of Philip, and an attempt on Philip with continuation to Elizabeth and descent by the north ridge and Elena Glacier to Ridge Camp or the bivouac hut.

The easiest route to the basin of the Coronation Glacier, though it will take a lot of working out, is probably by our route of descent, prolonged to the col itself at the south foot of the Great Tooth. From here a route to Savoia should be sought lower down on the Congo side.

The Great Tooth is the last serious problem among the high unclimbed peaks of Ruwenzori and it can only be the bad weather normally prevailing that has prevented attempts on it before. From the col at its south foot it is unlikely to be ascended for many years except by artificial means ; from the col to the north (between it and Elena) the angle is undoubtedly easier according to photographs, but the rocks are much festooned with ice and snow. At a rough guess the Tooth rises 400–500 ft. from either col. The northern col is inaccessible from the Uganda side, so there are two possibilities (*a*) climb Elena, which has, I think only been climbed three times, in 1906, 1932 and 1952, and certainly ought to be repeated, descending thence to the north col (alternatively avoid the actual summit of Elena and from the head of the gully traverse round horizontally on the Congo side). Or (*b*) climb the col to the south of the Great Tooth and repeat the Duke's traverse on the Congo side round it in reverse on what he called easy snow. This year we did not like the look of this ; there were bulbous mushrooms of snow and ice on the rocks, but no continuous snowslope. It would probably be best to make the traverse low down on the Congo side.

In all traverses on this ridge it is as well to remember that the strata slope wrong on the Uganda and right on the Congo side, and that difficulties appear to increase near the ridge summits. Keep west and low.



Photo, E. L. Hinks.]

PANORAMA FROM RIDGE CAMP (14,850 FT.). FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:—(1 & 2) TWO NAMELESS PEAKS; (3) HANGING TONGUE OF CORONATION GLACIER WITH PHILIP PEAK ABOVE IT; (4) PINNACLE BEHIND WHICH LIES ELIZABETH PEAK; (5) GULLY LEADING UP TO COL TO R. OF PINNACLE BY WHICH ASCENT WAS MADE; (6) SAVOIA PEAK; (7) GREAT TOOTH; (8) ELENA PEAK; ELENA GLACIER IN FOREGROUND.

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We hope that the Great Tooth will be given the name of de Grunne after the Belgian mountaineer, who led the first great expedition to Ruwenzori from the Congo side in 1932 and who was murdered by the Gestapo as a leader of the Resistance in Belgium during the war.

I attach some jottings on the practical aspects of climbing in the Ruwenzori Range and a note on the maps.

Notes on Equipment

Usual mountaineering equipment as for the Alps. Ruwenzori is, I am told, a warm range and even at 14,850 ft. we certainly had no more than 8° of frost.

I used Vibram instead of nailed boots and found them entirely satisfactory.

Shorts are preferable up to the top hut, because of the heat and because trousers are tiresome to dry if one falls into a bog or river as is bound to happen sooner or later. I wore Tyrolese *Lederhosen* which are ideal, as they are water and windproof and practically untearable.

Water-proofs are essential. I had a pair of macintosh golf trousers and a proofed nylon windjacket, a combination I have found invaluable for snipe shooting during the torrential rainy season of Ethiopia. Anyhow take an oilskin cape.

Plenty of spare socks or stockings and a change of footwear.

If tents are used they should be double fly with sewn-in ground sheet.

A party is wise to carry one spare ice axe and, though the huts are supposed to be provided with these, a *panga* (bush knife). The headman should be entrusted with this.

A pile of old newspapers is invaluable to stuff into wet boots when drying them and for cleaning pots and pans.

Clothing and all food not in tins must be packed in really waterproof containers. A suitcase, not just a rucksack, in a canvas bag, is ideal for clothes.

Bedding must also be in a waterproof bag. I used a double eider-down bag with a sorbo rubber mattress. I prefer this, when weight is no object, to a lilo. The whole packed in a rubberised bag. There was no condensation when sleeping in this.

Though the huts have wood-burning stoves and primuses, I would take an extra primus. Petrol and/or paraffin must be brought. I should prefer a petrol primus, which requires no methylated spirit to start it. Thus only one tin has to be carried and there is no question of confusion. For lamps see below.

Barefooted porters not unnaturally do not like snow, but they will cover short stretches without complaint. At the Bujuku hut there is a stock of gym shoes which can be borrowed for porters if prolonged exposure to snow is contemplated. This may often be expected on the way up to the bivouac hut by the Elena glacier. The porters would make first-class mountaineers if equipped and trained like Sherpas.

Until recently the rate for porters was 1*s*. per day. They have unfortunately now been spoilt by a recent large expedition, which bribed them to stay for long periods high up, instead of arranging for porters to work in relays. The rate is in consequence now 2*s*. 6*d*. a day. This is very irritating. In 1909 the rate was 50 cents a day. It took over forty years to double and now one expedition has run it up 250 per cent. in a few months.

A headman asks 4*s*. to 5*s*. and if good is worth every penny of it.

Some porters should, of course, be paid off as soon as base camp is reached. A bag of silver is advisable, though notes are usually accepted.

Two climbers spending a fortnight out from and back to roadhead should not need more than eleven porters and a headman to start with. Cost, including small tips, about £20.

Food for porters (maize flour, dried fish, groundnuts, sugar, tea, salt and cigarettes) for the same period about £5 and for Europeans £10. Charge for the huts is 5*s*. per head per night or 2*s*. for members of the Mountaineering Club and affiliated Clubs. Two climbers using the huts at the full rate can therefore manage very comfortably on about 33*s*. per head per day out from and back to roadhead. A longer expedition with more climbers would of course cost a great deal less per head per day, particularly if tents were used.

The huts must be reserved and at the best seasons (January or July) are booked well in advance. Write in plenty of time, therefore, to the Secretary of the Mountain Club of Uganda, c/o Standard Bank of South Africa Ltd., Kampala. The Club is most helpful in arranging for porters to be on the spot and for their food to be packed and ready at Fort Portal.

A car can be left in safety unattended at roadhead, though it is probably wise to employ a small boy at 50 cents a day to keep an eye on it.

Owing to the heat when climbing practically on the equator, mountaineers should beware of salt deficiency if they are at all liable to such troubles. All our party suffered, even when in training, from incipient cramps, which were rapidly cured by lavish use of salt. Those who prefer modern methods can take pills.

Cuts on the legs from vegetation en route are difficult to avoid when wearing shorts and on the arms. There is no time to treat them on the spot at once. Sulfa powder should be carried and attention paid each evening to such abrasions.

I dislike puttees, even the Kashmiri variety, because of their constriction, but they are to be highly recommended on Ruwenzori for the walk up the valley. Perhaps the ankle variety is best. A knee-deep misstep into a river or bog can be faced with more equanimity with puttees than with stockings, which have to be dried and probably washed.

As, within reason, weight is no objection, I used a large electric lamp with a reflector on the side for long range work and another on top for

use as a lantern (obtainable from Blacks of Greenock). These are first class and the batteries will stand several months nightly work. Spare bulbs should be carried because they are different from ordinary torch bulbs. One thus avoids messing about with hurricane lanterns or pressure lamps (with both of which the huts are equipped). Less paraffin and no methylated spirit has to be carried and one's fingers and food do not stink.

The South African party had the standard R.A.F. kapok-filled flying suits. These seemed to be admirable for wear at such altitudes in the evening and in the early morning if one was not starting straight off for a climb.

They also used plastic bags for bread, which keeps fresh for weeks when so treated. Bread should be bought straight from the baker's oven and placed in a bag. The air is then squeezed out and the bag sealed with a hot iron. Twenty-five years ago I used heavily waxed paper for this purpose in the Rockies, but plastic containers are more efficient.

New bread is of course wasteful compared with biscuits (e.g. Ryvita) but it is easy to be comfortable cheaply on Ruwenzori and unless one is a firm addict of the no-spare-shirt-and-nothing-but-pemmican-to-eat school, I recommend comfort.

Full information about the route of ascent from Mutwanga on the Congo side, above which lie four huts, is given in *Congo-Nil*, a guide book published by the Congo railways (obtainable from Editions Van Assche, 10 rue Colonel Bourg, Brussels).

Note on Maps

The following maps have been made available to me directly or indirectly.

1. Duke of the Abruzzi 1 : 50,000 (*G.J.* XXIX, vol. 2). This is as far as I know, the only large scale map of the whole group, though valuable rough sketch maps have been produced by the Mountain club of Uganda. The Duke's map is still most useful.

2. Humphreys 1 : 50,000 (*G.J.* LXIX, no. 6). Based on No. 1 and rather clearer to read.

3. Humphreys 1 : 125,000 (*G.J.* LXXXII. no. 6). This is very good, but on too small a scale to be of much value to the climber.

4. De Grunne 1 : 25,000 (Ruwenzori 1932). This is really only a sketch map of the Stanley group. It shows clearly the routes of access to the higher peaks from the Congo side, but is inaccurate for the area south of Savoia Peak, which de Grunne did not visit.

5. Map of the Belgian Ministry of Colonies. This is unpublished, but the Vice-President of the Club Alpin Belge kindly obtained permission from the Ministry to inspect it on my behalf. It only marks the lines of ridges and trigonometrical points. Glaciers, rivers, etc., are unmarked. It is valuable for heights.

6. Schweizerische Stiftung für Alpine Forschungen 1 : 100,000. This is unpublished. It is very clear as it shows only ridges and the main features, but it is not as detailed as No. 2.

There is of course also the 1 : 250,000 Uganda map, but the scale of this is too small.

In addition there are various sketch maps in the *Alpine Journal*, e.g. LIII., p. 315 and LIV., p. 277. The former is inaccurate in the area of interest to us ; the latter is on a small scale and, though very clear, only marks the approaches.

None of the foregoing, except the map in *Alpine Journal* LIV, marks the huts on the Uganda side, though Nos. 2 and 3 show routes. No. 4 shows the position of huts on the Congo side, if read in conjunction with *Congo-Nil*.

It must be noted that nomenclature is as yet far from established, e.g. Bigo is sometimes Kigo on the maps. As I do not know the local language I can hazard no theories. I have used names as I thought I heard them.