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East Africa – Recent Activity

Despite recent recessions in Europe and the United States, political unrest in Kenya, rising prices in Tanzania and Aids in Uganda, the East African mountains continue to attract thousands of visitors each year. Most continue their pilgrimages up the 'normal routes' as a result of which facilities are very stretched during the peak holiday periods (especially December).

Rwenzori

A welcome development is that the Rwenzori are now a national park, slowing the gradual encroachment of human activity up the valleys. Entrance fees at present are very reasonable and all the services provided are much more efficient than in the past. No advance arrangements need be made prior to your arrival in Kasese. Just visit the offices of Rwenzori Mountain Services and in a few hours you will be ready to go. Large new huts at Nyabitaba, Bigo, Elena glacier and Kabamba have taken the pressure off the old huts and limited campsites. Unfortunately the bogs, with their magnificent flora, are being churned up by the increased numbers of visitors. The solid bridge placed just below the confluence of the Bujuku and Mubuku rivers has removed a very hazardous crossing and opened up the mountains for a greater period of the year – in the past this river crossing has occasionally stopped progress altogether. A wood causeway has been placed across the upper Bigo Bog; it is about 300m long, very straight and at present very visible from above. Some say this is visually more offensive than a 20 metre wide band of mud but it is certainly more pleasant to walk on. As usual the classic routes to the main summits are frequently repeated but there appears to be very little new route activity.

Kenya

As independent new lines are almost non-existent on Mount Kenya's main summits, attention has turned to eliminates on the minor summits. A notable addition was the ascent of the almost overhanging W face of Point John (4883m) in January 1992 by Pat Littlejohn and John Mothersele in nine hours. The route is 11 pitches long (just over 300m) and involves sustained, superb climbing, using natural protection throughout. Two of the pitches are graded 6a but despite the surroundings the route itself involves mainly in-balance climbing following good crack systems. The overall grade given was

E4. In December 1992 good snow conditions permitted the ascent of *Christmas Buttress* a line of fine icy corners 50m left of Point John Couloir (Andrew Wielochowski and Chris Mockett, Scottish Grade 4, six pitches).

Park fees on Mount Kenya have gone up yet again and the normal visitor must expect to pay about £12 for every day spent in the park. However, the new warden, Bongo Woodley, is very favourably inclined towards visiting climbers and he has negotiated a special climbers' park entry rate of about £7 per day.

Poi, in northern Kenya, has again been visited. Littlejohn and Mothersele repeated the *East Face route*, eliminating the short aid pitch at 5c, and climbing the following 100m directly upwards at 5b (E3 overall).

The same pair visited some of the minor outcrops in the Nairobi area and confirmed the high quality of the new route activities at Lukenya and Embaribal where Iain Allen and other local climbers are putting up hard new face routes, mainly on clean, high quality rock. Most of these new routes require bolts for protection. Visiting climbers are recommended to visit these two locations and, if time permits, the even more spectacular cliffs of Hell's Gate and Kitchwa Tembo in Tsavo National Park. On these big game park cliffs it is possible to climb and game watch simultaneously.

Kilimanjaro

The prohibitively high entry fees to the more remote areas of Kilimanjaro (more than £35 per day) have deterred climbers from visiting the mountain. The much cheaper and less interesting Marangu route is still as popular as ever and the huts continue to be overcrowded in the December–January holiday period. Sadly, the amount of litter in the remote areas is growing and some of the campsites are becoming unpleasant. It is hoped that a few percent of the entry fees collected by the Kilimanjaro National Park could be directed towards keeping these exceptionally beautiful places clean.

There is a growing tendency noted amongst local climbers for the short November/December rains to linger until January. This means that snow and ice routes can often be in excellent condition in December. In January 1993 the lower sections of the Breach Wall were very well snow-clad and routes such as the *Messner Direct* and the *East End route* (John Temple and Tony Charlton) were in very fine condition. Under good snow cover the *East End route* appears to offer a particularly fine way onto the Ballelto icefield (four pitches of Scottish Grade 4). This could then be followed for about three pitches to the upper sections of the Heim glacier, the lower half of which, in recent years, has become very unpleasant at times.