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THE CONQUEST OF MT. KILIMANJARO

by Vitus Acherman

Continuation of feature;
FOUR SWISS KIWIS ON SAFARI
IN EAST AFRICA, page 9/10 Octo-
ber issue of Helvetia.

At last 'Day 1' of our climb has arrived and we meet the rest of the group, each hoping to be successful in climbing the mountain. After being bumped and jolted about on atrocious roads while on safari in Kenya and Tanzania for 15 days, it feels great to be walking. We take it slowly, climbing steadily from 1980m through lush rainforest. It is an easy walk to the first hut, Mandara at 2727m. We have porters to carry our gear so we have only a small day pack.

Next morning we are on our way at 8.15 am and the sun tries to break through the clouds. The trees around us are covered in old mans beard lichen and some are similar to those here in New Zealand; and a giant heather looks very much like manuka.

On reaching Mandara, a very easy walk for the first day, we dump our packs and take a short walk to the Maundi Crater while our cooks prepare dinner of beans, spaghetti, roast potatoes, meat and a nice vegetable sauce. Over dinner we get to know our fellow climbers and swap experiences. The evening gets cool and during the night there is some rain.

'Day 2' involves a 1000m ascent to the Horombo Hut. The track is very good and we plod uphill slowly, making a conscious effort to breathe slowly and deeply. We try to establish a breathing and walking routine which hopefully will help us higher



up on the mountain. The landscape near the hut is dominated by giant groundsels which grow mainly near water courses. The most striking variety grows up to five metres in height, their thick trunks are topped by a bunch of new growth. In the evening as the sun breaks through the clouds briefly, we get a glimpse of the jagged peaks of Mawenzi.

Around midnight I go outside to answer 'a call of nature', and the sky is clear with a full moon and both peaks of Kili were brilliant, like a giant pearl in the night sky.

We stay two nights at Horombo Huts and take an acclimatisation walk up to the Mawenzi saddle at about 4250m. Early in the morning there is thick wet fog and it is cold. On the way up we pass the black-and-white striped Zebra Rocks. Finally we climb above the clouds and the day is brilliant. From the saddle we see our ultimate goal - Kilimanjaro which rises another 1600m; clouds billow around Mawenzi's jagged skyline which is a much more spectacular looking mountain. We can also see

Kibo Hut, tomorrow's target with the track zig-zagging up the steepest part before reaching the crater rim - Gillman's Point; the walk will be a challenge as a few of us have slight headaches due to the altitude.

From Horombo Huts to Kibo, it is another 1000m climb and we now enjoy brilliant sunshine with panoramic views of the mountains with a sea of clouds below us. Between Horombo and Kibo Huts we pass the last water point. As there is no water available from here on, it must all be carried up from this point. We are supposed to drink four litres of liquid a day to avoid dehydration at altitude which I find difficult to do. Scrubby vegetation disappears and the countryside becomes very dry and desolate. Walking now becomes harder and I have stopped talking altogether to conserve energy.

please turn to page 12 to find conclusion of this article with colour photo of the two mountaineers at the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro!

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Vitus and Hans at the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro concluding the report from page 5

Hans and I still walk slowly near the back of the group to avoid the temptation of going too fast. Nearing Kibo Hut there is a short, steep rise which is a real lung-buster! Now every movement becomes more difficult with the altitude not only affecting us but some of the porters are also suffering. Just before reaching the hut, one is relieved of his load as he is now quite wobbly on his feet. Later I sit in the sun, drying boots and socks and admire the beautiful views and at sunset, Kili casts its shadow over Mawenzi. I had to take a couple of Panadol's to ease the headache. We have dinner at 5pm and are told to eat plenty as we will need all our energy in a few hours time.

The next day is Summit Day! We are woken at 11pm with a cup of tea and I take two more Panadol's but once out in the cold night air, my head clears. At midnight we set off very slowly up the scree slope with head torches blazing but bright moonlight makes them unnecessary. Hans and I walk near the front this time and keep to our breathing routine which we had practiced over the previous days. We climb very slowly, zig-zagging our way up the very steep scoria slopes. Every 3/4-hr we have a short stop for a drink of water and maybe a nibble of frozen chocolate. But as we climb higher, everything becomes a great effort; getting out the water bottle for a drink is a major undertaking as it upsets the breathing routine and taking pictures is also difficult.

At 5.30am, long before sunrise, we reach Gillman's Point where some hot tea is very welcome and gives us

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energy. Some of our group have to give up at this point due to the altitude taking its toll. Eight of our group of 16 continue on up and the next 200m or so are very gradual. By now the sun has started to rise and we can see the bright red line to the east on the horizon along the sea of clouds below us. The crater is very impressive with large glacial formations and ice faces several metres high and to the north there are great ice-banks.

We finally reach Uhuru Peak, Africa's highest point at 7.15am. We have the obligatory photos taken and both feel very pleased with our effort and the pleasure of success was definitely worth any hardship. And so to quote Sir Edmund Hillary, "We knocked the bastard off!"



*3rd of October 2001
38000 passengers stranded....
a sad day for Swissair...
see Presidents message
on page three*

*no such worries for the Swiss
airforce; here we see a 'Mirage-jet'
emerging from its cavern at the
Buochs air base (inside the
mountain) preparing for take-off.*



*F-5E Tigers of the Patrouille Suisse
roar towards the Matterhorn*

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