

Harald Lange

Kilimanjaro

The white roof of Africa

The Mountaineers

1985

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The Mountaineers: Organized 1906

**"... to explore and study
the outdoors."**

Translated from the German by John Paul Roper

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history of the discovery of Kilimanjaro, and for this reason it is interesting to take a closer look at the upbringing and lives of these two men.

Krapf was born the son of a farmer on 11 January 1810, at Derendingen near Tübingen, and had a highly religious upbringing. Stimulated by a book written by the first German professor of Geography, Carl Ritter (1779–1859), entitled *Die Erdkunde im Verhältnis zur Natur und Geschichte des Menschen* (The study of the earth in relation to nature and the history of man), Berlin 1822, the first volume of which dealt with Africa, Krapf's interest in this continent was awakened. Eighteen years of age, he hoped best to transform into reality his desire of travelling to Africa by becoming a missionary. Having studied Theology at the University of Tübingen, he entered the Missionary College in Basle. In 1837 at the age of 26, he went from there to Ethiopia on behalf of the London-based Church Missionary Society. Although his efforts there foundered on the heavy resistance of the local rulers, the long-established Coptic Church, as well as Islam, he rapidly developed into an explorer and man of learning. In only three years he had mastered the Galla language, translating part of the Bible into it, and carried out a number of linguistic studies. The results of his researches were published in London and soon won him such an academic reputation that he was awarded a Doctorate by Tübingen as early as 1842.

Krapf left Ethiopia in November 1843, and at the beginning of January 1844 was sent as an emissary of the Christian teaching in Zanzibar to the mainland, to continue his work in what is today Kenya. He settled initially in Mombasa, which at that time occupied a key position in the economic and social life of East Africa. In the course of exploring the coastal region he learned Kiswahili, and conducted further philological research among the Galla (Oromo), the Wanika, and other East African tribes. Two years later he received the long-awaited support of the German missionary Johannes Rebmann.

Rebmann was born on 16 January 1820, in Gerlingen near the Württemberg town of Leonberg, the son of a wine-grower. Like Krapf before him, he entered the Basle Mission College at the age of 19. Having undergone further training in Islington, London, he was eventually appointed by the Church Missionary Society. He reached Krapf on 10 June 1846, having travelled on the "Arrow", a small sailing ship, to Zanzibar, from where he had been brought to the mainland and Mombasa by an Arab boat.

Together the two missionaries set up the first mission station in East Africa in the Wanika village of Rabai Mpia (New Rabai), a locality some fifteen kilometers distant from Mombasa, possessing a climate favourable to the Europeans. Already by 16 October they had moved in to the finished mission house. In an effort to ensure that they not only spread the Gospel to the coastal tribes, they soon began to undertake extensive journeys into the unknown interior where up to that

time no European had set foot. Krapf later described these journeys in detail in his work *Reisen in Ost-Afrika, ausgeführt in den Jahren 1837–55, von J. L. Krapf, Phil. Dr., vormals Missionar in Abessinien und den Äquator-Gegenden* (Travels in East Africa conducted in the years 1837–55 by J. L. Krapf, D. Phil., formerly missionary in Abyssinia and the Equatorial region).

Whereas in the mid-19th century most of the East African tribes living in the interior were still existing in a state of breakdown of primitive society, at focal points of commercial activity along the caravan routes, the process of transformation to a form of early class society had already been completed. This social development was furthest advanced along the coast and at densely populated commercial centres in the Kilimanjaro region, whereas in the more remote Chagga districts traditional collective forms of property were still deeply en-

The missionary Johann Ludwig Krapf exploring in the Ukambani region

