

Count Samuel Teleki's Second Voyage to East Africa in 1895

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COUNT Samuel Teleki von Szek, a count of the Holy Roman Empire, is best remembered for his famous East African voyage in 1887-1888, which resulted in the mapping of Lake Rudolf (now Lake Turkana). Teleki and his travelling companion, Lieutenant Ludwig Von Hohnel, were the first Europeans to see the lake and to visit vast areas of what is now northern Kenya. Their expedition to the lake was one of the last great voyages of geographic 'discovery' by Europeans in this part of Africa. Although Teleki documented his travels with a daily diary and in letters which he wrote to both Crown Prince Rudolf, the expedition's patron, and Alfred Oswald, the consul of Austria-Hungary in Zanzibar, he never authored a published account. The expedition, however, was described in detail by Von Hohnel whose book about the voyage, *Discovery of Lakes Rudolf and Stephanie* (1894), became a classic of nineteenth century African travel.

During the 1887-1888 expedition, Teleki attempted the ascent of both Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya. On June 20, 1887, some four months into the voyage, he ascended Kilimanjaro to an altitude of 17,387 feet, some 2,000 feet short of Kibo peak. There, he was forced back because of the progressive development of symptoms of high altitude illness, including difficulty in breathing, weakness, rapid heart rate, bleeding from the lips, and sleep disturbances.

Von Hohnel's dyspnea was so great that Teleki had to leave him behind at a lower elevation. Nonetheless, Teleki's accomplishment was significant since he had reached the highest point on Kilimanjaro of any known climber up to that time. He later attempted an ascent of Mount Kenya in October, 1887, and reached an altitude of 15,355 feet, but was unable to scale the top of the mountain's 17,058-foot peak because of the snow and cold temperatures. The Teleki Valley, at 13,000 feet on the mountain's slopes, commemorates this historic climb.

Teleki was an unlikely candidate to become a nineteenth century explorer. He was born at Saromberke in Transylvania

(then Hungary, now Romania), on November 1, 1845, into a noble family that traces its roots to the early fifteenth century. He studied at Gottingen and Berlin universities and later entered the armed forces, eventually rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Hussars. Through one of his brothers-in-law, he met Crown Prince Rudolf, with whom he became close friends. Because the Crown Prince was sympathetic to greater Hungarian autonomy within the empire, his relationship with Teleki was not only social, but also political. The Crown Prince even went so far as to sign a document at Teleki's country-house at Saromberke in 1883, promising that he would work towards an independent Hungary. This was not only rash, but also potentially treasonous to his father, the Emperor Francis Joseph.

Teleki was a pragmatic *bon-vivant* who enjoyed hunting and mountain climbing. Yet, there was a serious side to him expressed by his being a member of the Hungarian Parliament, and his active management of his large estates. Weighing some 238 pounds at the outset of his first African trip in 1887, but only 157 at its conclusion, he was viewed by many as the unlikely author of great feats of geographic discovery. In fact, most predicted that his voyage would be a colossal failure. Crown Prince Rudolf, however, was not among the critics, for he knew Teleki to be a determined and intelligent man, possessed of unusual stamina, and capable of putting up with enormous hardships. Teleki was also empowered with a strong sense of practicality, and possessed excellent judgement, traits which would serve him well in the African interior.

Crown Prince Rudolf, who was the patron of both the Austrian and Hungarian geographical societies, took a keen interest in exploration. He had read Joseph Thomson's book, *Through Masai Land* (1885) and was struck by his report of a large lake to the north of Lake Baringo, as yet unvisited by Europeans. This Lake Samburu, as Thomson called it, had been previously mentioned and described by other travellers and visitors. However, Thomson's account was the most confirmatory for Crown Prince Rudolf that this lake really

existed. He decided to induce someone to undertake an expedition in order to 'discover' this Lake Samburu, and to climb both Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya, two peaks which as yet had not been scaled to their summits by Europeans. Crown Prince Rudolf also saw an opportunity for Austria-Hungary to distinguish itself in the field of African exploration, and to perhaps lay claim to a slice of the African interior. While the first objective was achieved, the latter was eventually thwarted by the rapid chain of political events that sped up partition following Teleki's journey, and the Crown Prince's own suicide on January 30, 1889. Teleki came to mind at once, not because he had any particular interest in geographic discovery, but because he was already planning a hunting trip to Africa. Trips of the latter type had already become an established part of European aristocratic culture.

The fact that Crown Prince Rudolf had serious intentions regarding the purposes of this voyage is underscored by his choice of Teleki's travelling companion, Ludwig Von Hohnel. Teleki, who had planned to take along an old hunting companion, was not particularly pleased by the choice of a young navigator of the Emperor's yacht, *Greif*. Yet, he finally agreed under pressure from the Crown Prince and his wife, the Archduchess Stephanie, who had gotten to know Von Hohnel during their stay at Laczroma on the Dalmatian coast. Von Hohnel was skilled in taking geographic measurements and in mapmaking, indispensable assets on a voyage of the type the Crown Prince wanted. Teleki also knew how to take measurements, and to use aneroids and other instruments. However, these responsibilities were better placed, as the Crown Prince saw it, in the hands of a professional. The two men got on well most of the time despite their very different personalities and the trying conditions under which they had to travel and work. At times, the meticulous and fastidious Von Hohnel irritated the more easy-going Teleki, who expressed his exasperation in his 1887-1888 diary: 'But one thing is sure; never again will I take a European with me.'

... voyage

Hohnel is a diligent and useful man, but conceited and always wants to teach me a lesson, and his attitude is quite stubborn like that of a loud-mouthed infantry officer who is not impressed by his superior. I'm afraid I'll have to dismiss him too.' (May 21, 1887). Of course, Teleki did not dismiss Von Hohnel, and both men went on to become the best of friends.

To the consternation of many, the twenty-month Teleki expedition was a resounding success. Teleki and Von Hohnel not only charted Lakes Rudolf and Stephanie, but also mapped vast areas of the East African interior never before seen by Europeans, scaled the two major mountains in the region to the highest points yet achieved, and brought back a wealth of natural history and ethnographic materials. On their return to Vienna in 1889, however, they were not greeted as heroes, even though they had given Austria-Hungary an honored place in the annals of African exploration. As Von Hohnel later described in his book, *Over Land and Sea in Earlier Times and More Recent Days 1859-1909* (1926), jealousy was one reason. Another was that Teleki had fallen from favor at the Imperial Court in Vienna. There, the former close friends of the Crown Prince were scapegoated as being responsible in some way for his suicide, as Von Hohnel noted in 1926: '... he had been a devoted friend to the Prince ... he had to suffer for his friendship in high circles and this also was a reason not to speak of his travels and achievements.'

In the English-speaking world, the geographic discoveries of an Austro-Hungarian were not greeted with great enthusiasm in an environment charged with the emotions of nineteenth century colonial competition. These obscured a fair and objective evaluation of the merits of Teleki's voyage and muted praise for his very significant accomplishments.

While it has been assumed by many that Teleki never returned to Africa, he did in fact revisit East Africa in 1895, six years after the completion of his first trip. This voyage is not widely known, primarily because Teleki never published an account of it. However, he did keep a detailed diary from which it is possible to reconstruct the principal elements of this trip.

Although Teleki had seen many spectacular geographic formations during his 1887-1888 voyage, it was Mount Kilimanjaro which impressed him most. He often spoke about the mountain to his family with a longing which indicated that his first view of it had been a deep spiritual experience. His vivid impressions of the mountain and his response to it may have been shaped in part by the fact that it was the first major topographic formation he encountered on his way into the interior. Also, he saw the mountain early on in the trip, when all was going smoothly and before real hardships began. However, these caveats aside, Teleki had a very special feeling for the



Count Samuel Teleki on first journey.

mountain, and often spoke of his desire to return to see it again before he died.

When he finally set out on his second voyage to East Africa in the Spring of 1895, it was with the principal purpose of visiting Mount Kilimanjaro. By this time, he was suffering from gout, and his general health had deteriorated from what it had been several years earlier when he walked to and from Lake Rudolf. While seeing the mountain again was his major objective, he also had hopes of scaling the summit, even though Hans Meyer had been the first European to do so six years before in 1889 and had written an account of his feat, *Across East African Glaciers* (1891).

Teleki left Zanzibar for Mombasa on March 6, 1895, where he had been the guest of General Lloyd Mathews, who was the Prime Minister. Mathews treated him with the 'greatest benevolence and friendship,' and in Mombasa, Ralph Spencer Paget, representing the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEA), extended every courtesy to him, even lending him a compass. He set out in a boat on March 10, for Rabai, carrying two missionary women who he agreed to take to the mission station there. Rabai had a special significance for Teleki for it was a mission station established some forty years before by two German missionaries, J. Lewis Krapf and

Johann Rebmann, in the service of the Church Missionary Society. Rebmann was the first European to see Mount Kilimanjaro on May 11, 1847, and on December 3, 1849, Krapf saw Mount Kenya. Rabai was also the spot on the coast where Teleki emerged in 1888 from his voyage to Lake Rudolf. He remained at Rabai for three days before setting out on foot for Sambaru, some twenty-five miles to the west. Since his passage six years before, the IBEA had built a road through the area, and he was disappointed by what he found: 'That whole hike is not interesting any more. A broad road has been cleared and the old wilderness is all gone. Every day caravans pass through to Ukambani.'

At Matye, Teleki met Dr. William J. Ansorge, the District Medical Officer in Uganda, who was accompanying Mbogo, the former leader of the Moslem party in Uganda. Mbogo, an uncle to Mwanga, the Kabaka of Buganda, had been defeated by Lugard in 1891 at Bugangadzi. Although Mbogo was a lesser figure in the internecine wars in Uganda between Moslems, Catholics and Protestants, he was dangerous enough to have been sent into exile. Now, with a British protectorate proclaimed over Uganda, which was once administered by the IBEA, Mbogo and his thirty wives were allowed to return.

The following day, the Teleki and Ansorge caravans camped together at Samburu, and then along with Mbogo set out for Taru, fifteen miles to the west. While Ansorge rode a donkey, Teleki walked. It was during this walk that his feet began to swell for the first time. Two days later, after Ansorge had left, his feet were no better: 'I arrived after two hours' hiking here with the intention of proceeding on the 17th, but my feet were already so badly swollen up, I could not wear my boots . . . I do not know how I will be able to make it with these feet . . . I had swollen feet and sore feet, but never to such a degree that I could not get into my boots.'

Because his feet were swollen, Teleki rode a donkey to Maungu, forty-five miles to the west, and continued to travel this way to Taveta which he reached on March 25th. There, he met the Reverend Alexander Steggall, a Bulgarian in the service of the Church Missionary Society, who had established a permanent mission at Taveta.

Teleki left Taveta on March 29th and headed for Useni and Rombo, where he hunted game, including rhinoceros. Reaching the base of the mountain, he met his old friend, Miriali, the Chagga chief who had given him so much assistance on his first trip. The rainy season had begun in earnest, and made both travel and hunting extremely difficult. Along with a flare-up of gout and probable early signs of congestive heart failure, the rains made the scaling of Kilimanjaro impractical. Teleki, ever a pragmatic man, was quick to realize this, and abandoned all plans for climbing the mountain. A genial, yet outspoken and candid person, he was not often given to expressions of sentimentality. However, on his last day at the base of the mountain, he recorded in his diary an entry which reveals not only his feelings about Kilimanjaro, but also his search for the happiness he once experienced while in its shadow several

years before. 'I could not resist taking another look at Kilimanjaro before I lay my head down to rest forever. To see once more Kilimanjaro in all his glory and the country around in which I had been so serenely happy before.

'I don't know if I will ever return again, and I took leave from the snow-covered ancient one like from an old friend I would never see again in my life! And If I were sentimental, I would have cried!

'And yet, I was the one to open up the trail to the summit, and with Hohnel's maps and my instructions, Meyer finally reached the peak. I had been the first human being to violate the virgin snow of Kibo, sleeping below the white summit, and my feet had been the first to soil his veil of eternal snow! 'Today he seems more beautiful than ever before, cloaked in freshly fallen snow up to the saddle.'

These are extremely powerful words, written as they were by a man who had a reputation for being a pragmatist. He clearly felt he had a special relationship with the mountain, given that he had been the first to reach the snow line and the one who had made it possible for Meyer to scale the peak. Yet, it was not merely the grandeur of Kilimanjaro and Teleki's intimate association with the mountain that drew him back. Pleasant memories of idyllic days around the mountain on the 1887-1888 voyage were also a powerful lure. In a way, he was seeking to recapture the feelings of a time past, feelings which may have become more glowing as the hardships of the first trip subsequently unfolded. His longings for the time and place represented by Kilimanjaro intensified with time. His greatest desire, and one which he freely shared with his family, was to return to Mount Kilimanjaro where he had enjoyed a rare serenity and happiness. By contrast, he never expressed a desire to visit again the lake he had "discovered," and which his-

torically represents his life's greatest accomplishment.

Teleki died in Budapest on March 10, 1916 at the age of 71, and was buried in his family vault at Saromberke (now known as Dumbravioara). Most of his African artifacts and hunting trophies disappeared during World War II when Soviet troops entered his country estate. A few surviving trophies are currently on exhibit at the Gongenyszentimrei Forestry School which now occupies his former estate. Small ethnographic collections of African artifacts also survive at the national museums of Vienna and Budapest. Teleki's diaries of his 1887-1888 and 1895 African voyages were smuggled out by his family members after World War II, and are now in the collections of the University of Chicago Library. In 1961, two family members, Charles and Eva Teleki, translated these diaries, originally written in a combination of Hungarian, German and Swahili, into English.

While Teleki's second African voyage did not result in any great feats of geographic 'discovery,' it did partially fulfill the sentimental longings of a man otherwise well known for his candor and pragmatism. His diary of this voyage provides insights not only into a poorly understood aspect of his character, but also into his views of an Africa that was rapidly changing as the colonial era got underway.

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