

“Mountaineering/v./slow walking uphill while not feeling very well.”

Our Kilimanjaro challenge ended on the night of the 30th January when Penny and I stood on the top of Africa and completed the project a year in the planning. We left for Kilimanjaro on the 23rd January and our first glimpse of the mountain was the following morning as dawn broke over the town of Marangu and the snow capped peak emerged from the mist six kilometres above sea level.



The following evening we were introduced to our guide Massu who was responsible for leading us safely to the summit. We were a party of six and were supported by a Guide, two assistant guides, a cook, and 20 porters. They carried all our food and camping supplies including our personal equipment leaving us to concentrate on the trek carrying a day sack of about 3 litres of drinking water and sufficient wet weather and warm clothing as may be needed

during the day. Every porter carried about 15kgs of equipment plus his own kit usually in a large holdall balanced on his or her head!

Each day, except the summit day, followed a similar pattern. We were woken with a cup of tea at about 6am! After a hot breakfast of porridge, eggs, sausages and plenty more tea we began walking. We walked over rough terrain, ever upwards for between 6 - 8 hours a day to our new campsite which had been erected by the porters before our arrival. Lunch consisted of pasta, meat, fruit and more hot tea. After a short rest we then climbed upwards for another hour or so as part of our acclimatisation plan and then descended again to sleep at the lower altitude. Each step was taken slowly and deliberately to a rhythm which became second nature and gave our bodies the very best chance of acclimatising. Any attempt by us to increase the pace was met with a short reminder of ‘pole, pole’ Swahili for ‘slowly, slowly!’ followed by “Tempia rasa Twiga, hapana Ngiri” - ‘walk like a Giraffe not a Warthog!’ This was sound advice which many others ignored to their detriment as altitude sickness often overtook those who attempted to climb too quickly. After an evening meal we settled for the night at about 8pm.

Our summit attempt started at about 11pm on the 29th January. The weather had taken a nasty turn



for the worse and the temperature was already below freezing. We found ourselves climbing in the pitch black night through heavy sleet and snow showers with gale force winds. The summit at Gillman's Point was an increase in altitude of nearly 1000m over terrain of large ice covered boulders and scree and took us just over 7.5 hours of extremely hard and concentrated effort. An irritating cough had plagued Penny for the previous few days and because the weather showed no sign of improving and the temperature was now below -20C Mussa decided that having reached the summit we should take the all important photograph and she should start her descent. The rest of us continued on around the crater in the hope that the weather would ease sufficiently for us to get to the tip of the summit at Uhuru Peak. After another 1.5 hours we stood at Uhuru and as by magic the mist parted. We then retraced our steps to our base camp which we reached about 5.5 hours later and joined up with Penny who had beaten us back.

We had been on the move for nearly 13 hours. Well over a hundred people had attempted to reach the summit that night and only 50 of us did so. After a short rest and some hot soup we continued our descent for another 5 hours in the rain before camping for the night. The following day we hiked the final knee racking 19 kms through stunning scenery to the park gate where we were presented with our certificates. A short ride in our mini-bus saw us back at the hotel for a large glass of beer and, sometime later, a hot shower!

For those who may be tempted to stand at the top of the highest mountain in Africa I would say - "Go for it". Prepare well both physically and mentally. Choose a reputable guide service and walk very slowly. Between us Penny and I raised over £8000 for my chosen charities and experienced a journey together which tested our resolve but ultimately reminded us that we are constrained only by our imagination. It's good to be back though.

Derek Brown, Mayor of Salisbury

