

Ultimate Kilimanjaro Expedition

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SUNDAY 02-11-12

Made it to Kilimanjaro after being in airplanes for 18 hours and airports for 9 hours. Packed planes, screaming babies but good food and wine. They even offer you free cognac after your meal! We got bumped from 1 hotel where everyone who is climbing stays, to another hotel then to another hotel where the air conditioning did not work, no lights in the hallway and the room only had 1 double bed. They eventually gave us 2 rooms so I didn't have to sleep with Dan, we will be doing enough of that over the next few weeks!

After writing an email to the booking company they moved us to where we were suppose to be in the first place and giving us \$50 back each. Now we are with everyone in our group and met only 3 others. The other 3 are MIA! 2 young men from Australia ages 21 (personal trainer) and 25 and 1 man from England who is 35. I haven't seen any older people, I think I am the oldest out of the 60 climbers that are staying at this hotel.

We leave tomorrow at 8:30 for a 2 hour ride through a dirt road to the gate and start our 6 hour hike, can't wait!

We toured all of Moshi today and everyone is begging or wants to be your guide through town. Went to a Catholic mass at 11 this morning and it was all in Swahili and it only lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes. A lot of African singing and hand clapping. We were the only white people in the church and got a lot of stares. Wish me luck and say a prayer for me. I will try emailing you tomorrow night. Sunday...

12:30 A.M. Eastern time the trek will commence, 2 hour drive on dirt roads and then a 6 hour hike. Ready or not!

Monday...

LeMosha route: least traveled most scenic. I discovered what off roading truly is after being tethered by a white knuckle grip from the dust bowl to the slippery mud rink. Never been more ready to hike. "The rainforest jungle has uncontained wildlife." Ooh ooh ahh ahh! Now at Mti Mkubwa camp, this is camping in the wild.

Tuesday Shira 1 CampJambo! (Hello in Swahili)

It's getting steeper now at 11,483 feet, a gain of 2,360 feet today. We left the noisy jungle behind and are in the misty quiet of the heather zone. We are literally in the middle of nowhere, where flowers are everywhere. Millie you would love it here. I am starving way beyond what a Clif bar delivers. So hungry could eat a lion but the menu is plantains and carrot stew...yes I am going to eat them, need all the energy I can muster for tomorrow.

Wednesday Shira 1 camp to Moir Hut 13,580 feet

This route is called Ultimate Kilimanjaro for a good reason. Dan and I are proving that the older men of our tribe can trek. Right now it is all about acclimatizing. We hear the rhythmic voice of our guide call out "Pole! Pole!" and we follow his lead. At first I thought he was talking to me alone but as we are into learning Swahili I know he is telling us to go "Slowly, ever so slowly" to avoid altitude sickness. Climb we did to the Shira Plateau which has a magnificent view of the Western Breach. It is getting colder now...more tent time and a new meaning to on the rocks.

Thursday: Lava Tower 15,000 feet to Barranco Camp 13,000 feet

NIMECHOKA in Swahili translates to really tired but more like completely exhausted. I can only think one step at a time, which is how you reach the summit. The rocky scree made this the most demanding and toughest day so far. We climbed high then went low to sleep which helps the lungs and heart adjust to the thin air.

SERIOUS FATIGUE and the thrill of being so close to the top are odd partners then again thin air does play tricks on the mind.

Monster plants loom and cast scary shadows as vegetation is sparse and they are tall.

Rehydrate, rehydrate, rehydrate are the words in my head...so glad I brought along gel packs, they keep me moving supplying energy which seems to dissipate on every step.

From John:

We are 4 days into the climb with 3 more days to go, then the brutal midnight ascent for 6 hours up to the peak. Then immediately 7 hour hike down. Bitterly cold, especially at night but not as cold as the summit which is expected to be minus 20 below zero! Can't wait. Meals are good or I'm just extremely hungry. Even eating foods u would not expect me to eat but am so tired I could care less. 7 hours a day hiking up steep cliffs, hardest thing I have ever attempted. Hope all is well with everyone. Say a prayer I stay safe and make it to the top. Jambo

Friday...Barranco camp to Karanga camp 15,331 feet elevation

Climbed a sheer cliff wall today....hard to do carrying a pack. My breath echoes into the crevices, my socks smell, I am drenched with dust and layers of dry sweat, and my feet hurt...but I can see for miles and miles. The summit nears as we sit so close to the massive snow covered dome you shudder at its sight. Unanticipated pleasure and exhilaration build as I am seeing from new heights. My months of training have paid off...thanks ICE, my gym of choice. Starbucks Via easy pak and easy pour great up here in the freezing cold. Sleeping in the clouds tonite

Saturday Barafu..Camp Ice

Freakin frigid up here! I mean bone chillin cold, so silent, so remote, what an unforgettable journey. Onward and upward!

Prepare for summit checklist:

6 layers deep for warmth

camera next to body

Knights of Columbus banner

positive attitude

brutal midnite ascent awaits

2 steps forward then slide one backward

long day ahead 7 hours up then 6 hours down

Will I be victorious??? I will let you know when I get down.

A beer would taste good right now.

Monday

This was the most difficult thing I have ever done times 1000. Why did I do it? After hiking 5 hours uphill to get to base camp at 15,300 elevation, we woke up at 11PM to start our ascent at midnight. The guides said it was the worst conditions they have seen with gale force winds and ice pelting us all the way up. It took us 8.5 hours to make the

ascent with below 0 temperature and 5, 5 minute breaks to pee but it was too cold to pee! Once up top, someone with a thermometer said it was 20 below plus the wind chill! After only 10 minutes at the top, u must descend because of the altitude which takes about 3 hours running down but this time in daylight. Once u rest at base camp for 3 hours, u have a 5 hour hike down the mountain to your next camp sight but knowing a shower is coming the next day at our hotel after only a 3 hour hike. Got some great pictures to share. PS. Had no altitude sickness, vomiting or shortness of breath like others have. Maybe the working out helped!

Sunday Uhuru Peak VICTORIOUS!!!

ARCTIC COLD...rooftop of Africa

They call it an expedition for good reasons, it has been a long and arduous journey filled with exhilaration and exhaustion. Undertaken why? With the objective to reach the summit. Beyond this reasoning you meet the mountain and survive the challenges it presents. To push oneself beyond the limits, boundaries, and restrictions we tag ourselves with is the greatest conquest. Along the trek one learns the value of friendship despite language barriers and the audacity of teamwork. Conquistadors have always battled the odds to gain new perspective of the world inside...thus have I.

Climb and punishment 60 miles of treacherous terrain and I stood on top of Africa.

Monday

Back at hotel with my certificate of accomplishment. All down hill today for 3+ hours and didn't train for climbing downhill. The hot shower after 8 days of no bathing was awesome. We leave for safari tomorrow morning. I need my daughter the massage therapist!!! Where are you Nik?