

Kilimanjaro

Diary of trip to Kilimanjaro - Penny Kennedy (Northern Ireland)

Left Belfast on **Sunday 10th July**, arrived Kilimanjaro airport **Monday 11th July**. Hot, tired, sweaty - it was lovely to relax at the hotel and lie by the pool to recover from 24 hours travelling. When Mark and I arrived the others were already lounging by the pool!



When we flew from **Nairobi airport** on the short flight to **Kilimanjaro airport** the pilot pointed out the top of Mount Kilimanjaro which we could see out of the plane window on the right. **We were flying at 17,000 feet - 2000 feet lower than the summit!** It was an awesome sight! In the evening all of us went to the bank to exchange our sterling for Tanzanian shillings and then found ourselves engulfed by street traders wanting to sell us jewellery, hats, paintings, tee-shirts It was a bit scary.



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We ate in an **Indoitaliano restaurant** which had been recommended. It served either Indian or Italian food. We had to wait for ages but when the food came, it was delicious.

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Tuesday 12th July, 2011:

Waking up in the **Keys Annexe hotel, Moshi**, at the foot of Kilimanjaro. It was a noisy night as a group had just returned from climbing the mountain and were celebrating by having an all night pool party! 24 of them had attempted the climb but 4 of them did not make it and the rest only spent 5 minutes at the summit as it was so cold. The people talking felt like they were in my room with me. I was glad I had brought my earplugs! I was also glad the beds had mosquito nets as I had noticed a few lizards about the hotel along with a variety of ants in all shapes and sizes!

Late afternoon we were driven into town to look around for an hour or so. **Moshi is very colourful.** There are a lot of street stalls selling fruit and vegetables. We visited a very busy market full of rice, pulses, beans, yams, kasavas; the women wore very colourful dresses.

We ate a buffet dinner at the hotel and **Glenda** video diared us on how we were feeling the eve before our big adventure.



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Wednesday 13th July, Day 1 (5-6 hours;18kms; 1490 to 2980m):

We were told to drink loads of water so I was running to the loo a lot before we started - probably to do with nerves as well. I experienced my first long drop toilet when we stopped at a general store to buy chocolate and biscuits on the way to the starting gate. There was no electricity so I had to borrow a torch. Before we left I talked to an Australian man who had had to come down from the mountain on day 3 of his trip as he had collapsed with altitude sickness. His daughter had had to come down the next day as she was so cold. He was optimistic of our success however as his family were on a 5 day trip whilst we were taking 6 and a half days which would give us more time to adapt to the altitude.

It was long slow drive to **Machame gate** - our starting point. We passed fields of banana trees and coffee plants. When we arrived our luggage disappeared fast as the porters took it in order to set up the first camp. We were given a hot packed lunch - hamburger with fried egg, chicken legs, a bun and 2 mini bananas.

We eventually set off - a long trek of 5 and a half hours through the tropical rainforest. It was quite cloudy, very lush and green. We saw white tailed colobus monkeys in the trees. When we arrived the camp was set up and hot chocolate was waiting for us in the mess tent. **The camp was at the edge of the forest and it was our first night under canvas.** Travel johns are the best invention ever!



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Thursday 14th July, Day 2 (5 hours; 9kms; 2980m to 3840 m)

Awake at 6.15am. Takes quite a while sorting things out and getting organised for the day. Bags were to be packed before breakfast so the porters could start packing up the tents and heading for the next camp. The porters were incredible with what they could carry on their heads - tables, chairs, tents, rucksacks, cooking equipment, barrels of water, etc.....

Breakfast was porridge (made from maize), eggs, sausages, toast, tea, coffee and hot chocolate.

This was a strenuous day - a 5 hour trek which was very steep in places. **People started to suffer headaches and blisters.** We climbed onwards and upwards through the forest. We spotted a striped mouse and black headed huge crows joined us for lunch. We emerged from the forest into more rocky heath land and reached **Shira Plateau** (a huge lava plateau) which was our next camp site. This was the highest point from which someone could be airlifted down and it had a big helicopter pad.

We were delighted to find that the long drop toilet had a seat but it was absolutely stinking and I felt really sick after a visit to the facility. A couple of the group were sick and it was great to have so many doctors to administer medicines and in one case antibiotics for a tooth infection. It was a lovely sunny day and very hot in the sun but as soon as the sun went in it was freezing. **The mountain dust was to become a major feature in our lives for the rest of our climb.** It got into everything - clothes, equipment, shoes, noses, ears, fingernails, hair.... We were given a basin of hot water each to wash each day except summit day when water was harder to source.



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In the evening after dinner we had a short time of sharing and prayer. We read together **Psalm 121** and Davy read from **Psalm 61**. We shared what was on our minds and it was quite an emotional time. **We prayed for each other and for Ian who was not able to make it on the trip.** When we came out of the mess tent the mist had cleared and we were treated to a wonderful view of Kilimanjaro summit on one side of us and **Mount Meru** peaking through the clouds on the other.

It was beautiful.



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Friday 15th July ,Day 3 (7 hours; 15kms; 3840m to 3950m):

We woke after a relatively good sleep at 6.15 a.m. We packed our bags, had breakfast at 8 and then headed off. Our guide for the day was Peter. We went very slowly with lots of breaks. It was a 5 hour climb. Snacks became very important for energy. **A couple of us started to feel very light headed and breathless.** People were getting sore heads. This is all quite normal as you get higher up the mountain. Davy felt particularly bad.

After lunch there was a choice to go 200 meters higher which would add another half hour on to the walk or to take a shorter route down (2 hours) to the next camp - **Barranco Camp**. Brian, Alison, Davy and I chose the shorter route but the others ended up ahead of us as Davy was very sick. This was a day of climbing high and sleeping low in order to acclimatise. We walked down through the mystical, magical Barranco Valley. There were strange looking plants and trees and it was very misty - a little like a scene from **Jurassic Park!**

This was a tiring 7 hour day. We had our hot chocolate and tea/coffee with popcorn and then a short time together when we shared what was on our minds and prayed for everyone's needs. Tomorrow will be a shorter climb and a later start. The mist lifted again and we realised how close we were to the top of the mountain!



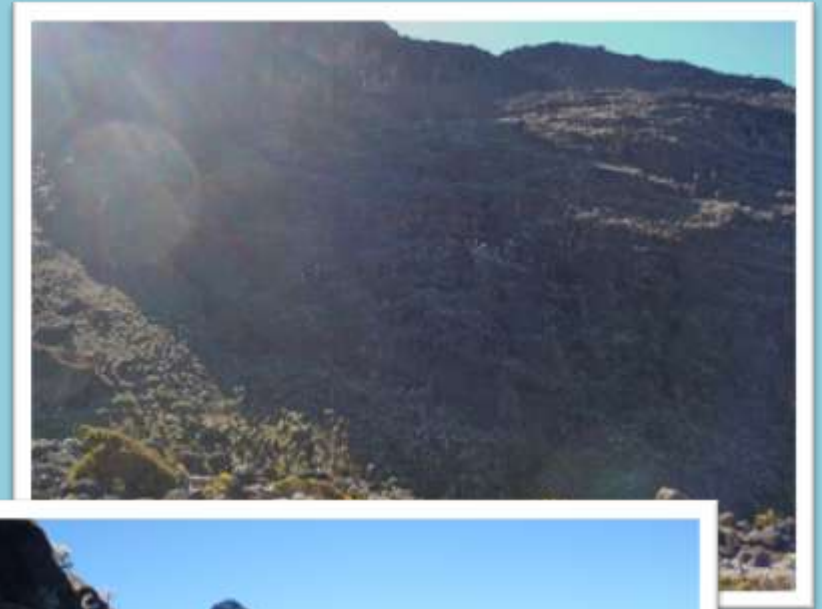
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Saturday 16th July 2011, Day 4 (3 hours; 5kms; 3950m to 3950m)

What can I say about **Barranco Wall**?! The Guides and Porters nickname it 'Breakfast'. Our group leader, **Commanda**, assured us it would be fun. We were literally climbing up a narrow track up a rock face and every so often had to resort to rock climbing to keep ascending. It was rather steep and rather scary.

The most scary bit however was the porters trying to push past us with their huge bundles on their heads. This was mind boggling because I could hardly manage the climb with my back pack on! There was one point of congestion where the climb was particularly tricky and involved both hands and feet trying to get a hold on the rock in order to climb higher. Commanda at one stage had his arms spread out to stop the porters coming through to let us have a chance to negotiate it and the porters were still spilling over and under his arms and pushing past us to get a head.

The wall was tough but there was real elation and superb views when we reached the top.



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Then we walked down into **Karranga Valley** - another day of climbing high and sleeping low. The group really enjoyed today although some are still feeling rather daunted and tired. Davy did not feel sick today and the rock climbing was just his scene. We had chicken and chips for lunch and very refreshing slices of orange. I burnt my hands today - they were exposed to the sun whilst holding the walking poles. Everything is so dusty and our daily basin of water only skims off the surface before it all gets dusty again.

Sunday 17th July, Day 5 (4 hours; 7kms; 3950m to 4550m)

4 hour trek to the last camp (**Barafu hut**) set high on the mountains on very rocky ground. The front of Olwyn and my tent had a stony drop of 10 feet in front of it.

The long drop toilet was reached by climbing over rocks and then up a wooden ladder. The trickiest bit was climbing down the wooden ladder! I only attempted it once!

We had an early dinner at 5.30pm then we had our summit briefing from Guide Lipman. He said to bring lots of water, wear warm clothes (at least 3 pairs of socks). We were to go to bed and get up at 11pm to **start our summit attempt at 11.45pm.**



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Monday 18th July, Day 6; 7 hours up, 6 hours down; 4550m up to 5895m (summit) or 5756m (Stella Point)

We managed to sleep on and off. I put on 5 layers topped with a down jacket. I had also a neck warmer, hat, head torch, gloves, hand warmers, foot warmers (2 pairs of socks) and my poles. I nearly passed out with the heat! It was a relatively warm night and I soon had to take off layers. In my back pack I had my camel back (a pouch full of water with a long straw like tube), a litre bottle of water, my rain coat, biscuits and extra hand warmers. I think this was the start of my problems for the whole way to the summit. I found it hard to get my body temperature right and with each step everything became more and more of an effort. **It was a long walk even to get out of the campsite.**

I soon had to take off my gloves as whilst my palms were warm with the hand warmers my fingers were freezing. But even taking off the gloves was such an effort as I think my hands had started to swell and with the cold I soon had to put them on again. Lipman saw me struggling and helped me put the jacket into my back pack and encouraged me to drink water. Every step was very slow and such an effort. Whilst my hands were still cold I was still struggling with body temperature and was trying to pull off my neck warmer. On my lower half I had thermal leggings, lined trousers topped with waterproof trousers. I had to keep the gloves on but my fingers were so cold I decided to stop using the poles but this made life a little more difficult. If we went a little faster or had to step up a little steeper I felt overcome. **I was trying to keep my mind focused and concentrated upon the feet in front of me - I don't even know who they belonged to!** It was hard to identify everyone in the dark. We stopped every so often for a break and a drink and soon my camel back was frozen. Lipman gave me water from his water bottle which he had obviously boiled before starting and so it would take longer to freeze. His bottle was also wide necked and so less likely to freeze over. Things like this became vitally important. I took off my lined fleece and tied it around my middle but soon had to put it on again. Davy was struggling and was sick a couple of times but they said this was normal. After about 5 hours we stopped for another break. Suddenly we heard Alison cry out for Susanne - Susanne had collapsed and luckily was caught by her husband Tom. There was a flurry of activity as Commanda leapt into action calling for the oxygen.



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Unfortunately the oxygen would not work straight away. Olwyn was taking Susanne's pulse and noting that it was getting weaker. A bivvy bag was brought out and I took off my down jacket to keep her warm. Jonathan measured her blood sugar levels and gave her liquid glucose. Thankfully Susanne came round but she had no option but to take the advice of the guides to go back down the mountain. Shortly after this Davy was sick again and when it was realised that he had been sick a number of times, he was also advised to go down. He has no recollection of this and does not remember that he had to be convinced to go down. He was really suffering from altitude sickness. He and Susanne had a long trek back down the mountain ahead of them. **Susie and Davy had 2 guides with them which left us with 5 guides.**

Then someone asked where Winifred was and when we called her there was no reply. It seemed that things were starting to spiral out of control. But Winifred was being sick and she felt much better after that. With all the delay there was a real risk of hypothermia so we started off again up the mountain. **I was praying for the dawn to come as I had read in the notes that this would bring an uplift to the spirits and a bit of warmth from the sun.** I was finding it harder and harder to focus. The next thing I knew Mark was shouting could someone have a look at Penny. Apparently I had swayed backwards two or three times and he had had to stop me from falling. Olwyn took my pulse and Alison gave me glucose tablets. They asked me did I want to go down at which I got quite tearful. I found it hard to put words together and felt dizzy. I drank lucozade and it was decided that I could keep going for a while longer. Lipman took my back pack and took my head torch off and said we would go up together. We continued to make slow steady progress. Dawn eventually arrived and a lovely orange glow crept up on us. Lipman pointed out Stella Point in the distance which was the land mark for the top of the mountain. It looked close but took ages to get to as we had to take sliding steps up the scree. **Eventually we made it to the top (about 7am) and there was a real sense of elation as people hugged each other and took photos.**



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There was another 140 meters (45 minutes) to go however to get to Uhuru peak and the famous summit furniture. After I went to the 'toilet' behind a rock I could hardly walk back to Lipman and he said I should not go any further. I already knew that I would not be able to - I had really struggled to take the belt off my trousers. So the others headed off without me and **Lipman and I headed down the mountain** with a girl from another group. This was very sore on knees and toes and we fell a few times. It was a real endurance test but I felt more and more well as we dropped in altitude. It took about two and a half hours to come down. A very welcome cup of orange juice awaited our return. The others arrived about an hour and a half later. **They said it was very hard going to get to the summit and when they arrived they only stayed about 5 minutes as it was very cold and the guides were anxious to get them back.**

We all had a short rest and a soup and bread lunch before packing up and heading down the mountain to the forest camp of **Mawenzi** where Susie and Davy were. This was a long arduous 4 and a half hour walk on aching legs and feet. The scenery became less and less rocky and lunar and more and more mystical, lush and green. The Mawenzi camp was a cut above the rest. The long drops had seats! When we signed in there was coca cola for sale and **never has a coke tasted so good!**

We had our last dinner in the mess tent and a time of thanksgiving that everyone was safe. **We were thankful for the care and competency of the guides and porters and thankful for the beautiful scenery we had witnessed.**



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It was early to bed again before another 4 hour walk back down to the gate. **This time everyone slept really well.** The next morning we were treated to 2 songs from the porters and guides and kitchen staff. **The second song saw Brian and I joining in with dancing.** At this stage no-one had any clean clothes left and our hair was matted with dust. Some of our gear had got wet during the night with the forest dew. As we progressed down the mountain the rain started so we ended up tired and wet and splattered with mud but happy to reach the gate. We were a sorry looking lot!

A coach came to take us back to the **Keys Annexe hotel.** We were given the keys to our new rooms and headed off to have our much anticipated hot showers! What absolute bliss! I washed my hair twice but still felt it needed another wash but it felt so good to be clean again!

I asked folk what they felt they had gained from the trip. Everyone enjoyed the challenge and views of the first few days. They enjoyed the experience of being part of a team and acknowledged the importance of the team in the whole venture. They were all concerned for each other and willing to go the extra mile to help each other. **They felt a real presence of God with us and a real awareness that people from all our backgrounds were praying for us.** Everyone found the summit day really hard. Most of us said that it was good to have done it but they never wanted to do it again! There was no pleasure in climbing higher and higher into altitude in the dark and cold.

As for me - I can't believe I slept a whole week in a tent, endured long drop and 'au naturelle' toilets, wore the same clothes over and over again, brushed my teeth without rinsing and walked 75 miles over 6 days!

The best thing of all is to have raised over £20,000 to go towards the building of a home for the disabled and elderly in Romania. These are neglected groups of people who will really benefit from such a facility.

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Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills -
From where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;
The Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
He will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

Team members: Olwyn, Jonathan, Robin Guy; Susanne & Tom McNeilly, Mark McNeilly, Alan McNeilly, Davy Green, Brian McKee; Glenda McElwaine, Winifred Greeves, Penny Kennedy, Alison Patton, Karl Galdins.

