

To the Snows of Kilimanjaro

The Idea

Martin and I had a list of places to which we wanted to travel. It was less a bucket list, more a set of adventures that arose from pouring over maps, reading great books, and knowing that some things wouldn't last long. Banks Island, South Georgia Island, Mayan and Inca Ruins, and Mt Kilimanjaro have been on the list for a long time. The most endangered and possibly the most physically challenging was Kili. A window of opportunity opened when we paid off the home mortgage. Knowing the glaciers would be gone possibly within the decade, we took the leap and started planning.



We started by talking to friends and doing a fair amount of research. At over 19,340 feet, altitude would be an issue. I have a history of acute altitude sickness and some impaired lung function due to pneumonia several years ago. We knew there were medications that would help, and getting those prescriptions was among our first tasks. Additionally, improving general fitness was established as a goal. The hike is not technical nor particularly steep. However, better physical fitness might make it possible to keep going when the altitude sickness hit. I did obtain a prescription for Diamox and used it successfully in Colorado in December. That helped a great deal. I had lingering doubts that I could make the summit, but I knew I'd probably be fine at least to about 12,000 feet.

Training

A friend who had attempted Kili several years ago climbed the stairs in the Mayo Building every day for training. That seemed like a good idea. We started climbing the stairs in the Gonda Building every day, all 553 of them. Within a couple of weeks, we were waiting until the end of the work day, changing clothes, and doing 3-4 laps of the stairs, some running, some laps at two steps at a time, with single laps during the day on non-workout days. I did try taking the elevator down once, but it wasn't any faster. We also realized that we were using different muscle groups for the descent, and it seemed to help improve general leg strength. That turned out to be very effective. We would find out months later just how effective that activity would be. I also did repeated uphill sprints, weight work, lower back and abdominal exercises, and running, as time permitted. It would have been nice to ski more, since we both planned to participate in the Birkie in February, but the weather did not cooperate. In six months of training, I didn't lose much weight, but I did lose 8% body fat, and my cardiovascular fitness was much better.

I tried very hard to stay healthy. I skied conservatively, I tried to rest sufficiently, and I ate well, keeping the wine down to a minimum (at least for me). I even tried Airborne and Zicam, hoping that I would avoid the flu and other

"crud" that made its way around the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center. The latter didn't work. Four days before leaving, I had a sore throat and fever. Two days prior to departure, I had a cold. We had to stop on the way to the airport to purchase cold medications.

Getting There

I didn't know that there was a Mount Kilimanjaro International Airport until I started looking for flights. We found a direct flight to Amsterdam, then a direct flight to Kili. Our outfitter-guide, Tusker Trails, picked us up at the airport and drove us to the city of Moshi, Tanzania. We left on Saturday, March 2, arrived in Tanzania on March 3, met with our guides on March 4, and hit the trail on the fifth.

Entry into Kilimanjaro National Park and climbing the mountain require the services of an outfitter guide service. Most of our pre-trip research involved choosing the guide and ascent route. We knew I'd probably have a problem with altitude sickness at some point, so we looked for the longest possible route, which provide the most possible time for acclimatization. Tusker Trails is one of the companies that uses the Lemosho Route, one of the longest and least-used routes. They also carry oxygen and a hyperbaric oxygen bag, have guides that are certified high altitude first responders, and avoid a midnight start on summit day. It seemed to be the best possible choice. They're a little more expensive, but the odds of making the summit would be much higher. TuskerTrails turned out to be a very good choice.



Lemosho trailhead

On the fifth of March, we left Moshi for the trail head. We travelled a paved road, which turned into a gravel road, which became a dirt road. We took a short break in a small village on the flank of the mountain to wait for our porters, then continued up a narrow lane to the park entry. We signed in, and got back into the vehicle. The narrow lane wound its way up a thousand feet or so past the agricultural fields and timber lands on the mountain's lower slopes. We saw a few Colibus monkeys and some rather exotic storks. The lane also became wetter and more rutted. It seemed that we barely made it through the mud and mire when we arrived at a clearing. There were boxed lunches waiting for us-chicken, sandwiches, mango juice, sweet biscuits, and an apple.

It was time to get to know the group. Martin and I were joined by Jim and his daughter Emily. Jim is from Cincinnati and retired from IBM. Emily lives and works in London. The final member of our group was Barry, a retired allergist from St. Louis. Everyone was well-travelled, but that's where our commonalities left off. Getting to know our companions and our leaders would prove to be the best part of the trip.

Finally, the time came to hoist the load and hit the trail. Our loads were not heavy. Each of us carried only a day pack with camera, rain gear, sun cream, a small stash of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and three liters of water. The porters, three per person, carried everything else. They took off quickly ahead of us. We walked slowly, very slowly, polé, polé. The altitude at the trailhead was about 8000 feet, not a tough altitude. We were being trained

to take it slowly.

We walked for about four hours that day, all in tropical rainforest. Martin took pictures of some of the plants and flowers. I just tried to soak it all in. I remember hearing voices and then walking into a clearing, Big Tree Camp. The tents were all set up, a central mess tent was available, there was a portable toilet, of sorts, and the Tusker flag was flying. It was an exciting site.

Big Tree Camp



When we met with our guides on the previous day, they provided an overview of our schedule and the route and made it quite clear to us that drinking lots of water and following their instructions would significantly improve our chances of making the summit. Upon arrival at Big Tree Camp, we received instructions describing what would be our camp routine for the next eight days. We used baby wipes to clean up, organized our clothing and sleeping gear, cleaned bottles and camel backs, and then made our way to the mess tent for a snack (popcorn, fruit, peanuts) and warm drinks (tea, cocoa, warm milk and honey). Dinner was created by a chef with an assistant and served by a waiter about 90 minutes later. Our first dinner was zucchini soup (with lots of cinnamon), chicken and rice with vegetables, fresh mango, and banana crepes. We figured out later that the meals were designed to be familiar, yet high in fluid, electrolytes, and protein.

Snack time and dinner time were also our times to sit, relax, work on journals, and talk to our fellow travellers. For the sake of group cohesion, we avoided discussions of economics, politics, and religion. We found that we had similar tastes in food, similar beliefs in the value of good diet and exercise, and similar hopes for world peace. The government of Tanzania has worked hard to promote tourism, partly for jobs and partly to minimize the need for poaching. We appreciated the fact that this opportunity was available to us, and we agreed that some Western influences, particularly religious and economic, were not necessarily good things.

Shira I Camp

Up at about 7:00 the next morning and on the trail by 9:00, we hiked in rainforest for about 90 minutes before emerging into the heather/moor zone, which is more like the highlands of Scotland than equatorial Africa. We had started on the west side of the mountain and were working our way toward the southern flank. At one point, we actually had cell phone reception, so we stopped for a snack and bathroom break. By mid-afternoon, we



made our way to the Shira Plateau, the collapsed cone of one of the original volcanos. We could see the Tusker flag and the roof of the Shira ranger hut from high on a hillside overlooking the plateau. Twenty minutes later, we walked into camp, checked in at the ranger station, and proceeded through what would become our normal camp routine.

We figured out several things after a time. The menu planning was the previous day's revelation. This day, our lead guide Tobias watched each of us sign in, clearly watching for signs of impaired cognitive ability. His continual observations plus our twice-daily medical checks would help him decide whether or not we would be allowed to summit. Every morning and every evening, our oxygen saturation and pulse were checked, we were asked about nausea, headache, and vomiting, bathroom habits, medications we were taking, and general well-being. In the mornings, they also listen to our lungs for indications of edema.

One of the realities of this type of trip is that we get to know our fellow travellers, not only their passions and dreams, but also their bathroom habits, tendencies for gas passing, and daily caloric intake. It's all natural.

After we finished dinner, our guides provided us with the plan for the next day - the timing of our wake up call, length of hike, how much water to carry, what kinds of clothing would be best, and what other items we might want to have in our day packs.

Moir Camp

It was clear all night. The Diamox made it likely that each of us would be up at least once during the night to go to the bathroom. The stars were spectacular, some familiar, Orion directly overhead, and some from the southern hemisphere completely unfamiliar. It was usually clear at sunrise. This morning provided our first good view of the mountain. We had been on the mountain the entire time, but the summit still seemed a long way. Barry wasn't

feeling well and lingered in his tent. Not being morning people, Jim and Emily also missed that sunrise and a couple of others. No worries, Martin and I took plenty of pictures.

We didn't gain much altitude during our hike to Moir Camp. We crossed the Shira Plateau and worked our way a little back to the north. As we left that morning, one of our guides, Stanford, taught Emily and me a little song. We had been curious about the type of music he enjoyed. This sounded like a common Swahili folk song:

*Jambo, Jambo Bwana
Habari gani, Msuri sana,
Wageni, Mwekaribishwa,
Kilimanjaro, Hakuna Matata.*

Yes, they really do say "Hakuna matata," it really means "no worries," and The Lion King is quite popular in Tanzania.

As we approached Moir Camp, we could see the Tusker flag from half a kilometer away. Closer, we could see that our porters were waiting for us, presumably to welcome us to camp. They were always cheerful, welcoming, and congratulatory as we made camp. This time, however, they were in two rows. They sang the song for us, with harmony and huge smiles. Martin and I dropped our packs and danced. It was incredible.

Later, Stanford wrote the words for us along with the translation. It was clear that every day was going to bring a major revelation. It rained that night. We could hear the thunder from quite some distance followed by a steady rain for a few hours. It stopped well before dawn, and the rain drops froze on our tent.

Sunrise at Moir Camp was also spectacular. Unfortunately, Barry was not able to proceed with us. He had been sick from the beginning. Our guides spent a great deal of time talking to him. We didn't know what was

to come, but it seemed as if they knew Barry would not have been able to make the next few days. He headed to the evacuation point near Shira Camp along with Stanford, the camp chief, and two porters.

The rest of us, led by Tobias and Gaudence, hiked up to Lava Tower at 15,000 feet and enjoyed a lunch of soup and grilled sandwiches. The idea was to hike up to 15,000 feet and stay for a couple of hours to acclimatize. Having learned and written down the words to "The Song of Kilimanjaro," we sang to the porters as a thank you for lunch before we left camp. Then, we descended to Barranco Camp, slightly lower in elevation than Moir Camp. Where it had waiting until we made camp on the previous two days, the rain started at lunch time, and our

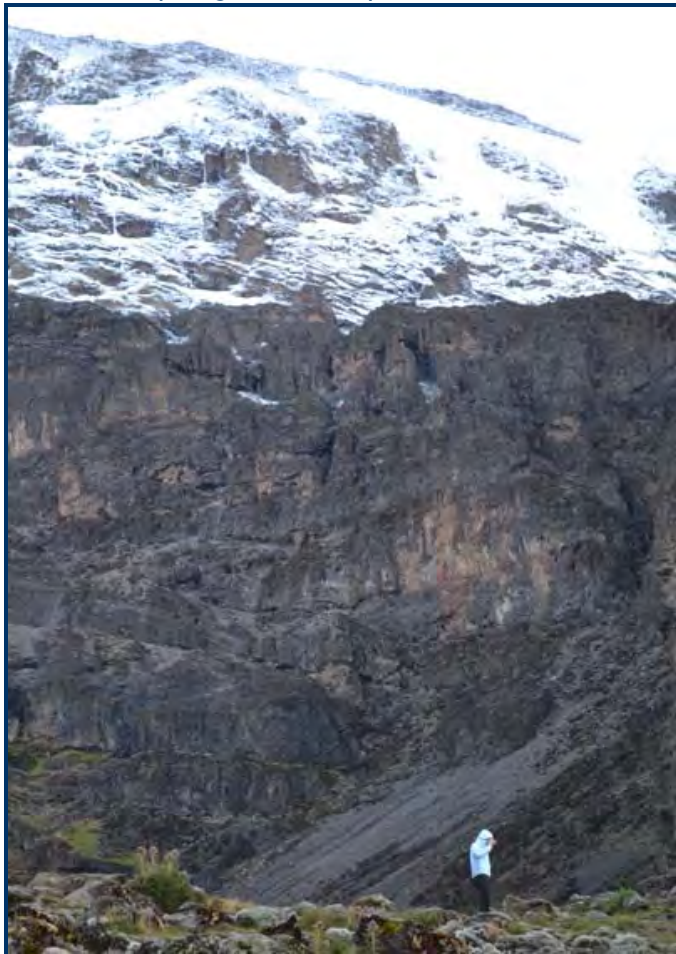


descent to Barranco Camp was wet and a little treacherous. I was happy to have trekking poles.

Barranco Camp

We were wet as we made camp, and carefully laid our gear and clothing out to dry in the mess tent. The warmth of the kerosene lamp might have helped a little.

We had



heard about the Barranco Wall and knew it would be challenging. Our camp was at the base. I admit being intimidated. But I felt a sense of trust immediately upon meeting our guides, and there was no question that I would do everything they asked me to do. During our discussion of the next day, Tobias told us to pack away our trekking poles. We would need our hands for some scrambling and climbing up the Barranco Wall. In spite of quite a bit of rock climbing experience, I felt some anxiety. It looked like the Con Diagonal in the Black Hills, a climb that I cannot handle.

The next morning, we could see tiny specks of white and yellow on the wall, other people making their way up. However, it turned out to be not so bad. There were many switchbacks. It was never particularly steep, and the wall was a bit further from vertical than it had appeared from camp. Our hike that day was only about four hours. Perhaps I was beginning to get into the rhythm, but I felt good as we made Karanga Camp. Martin, Jim, and Emily also handled the route well. Martin is simply in great physical shape and probably has a fairly high V02 max. Jim is a tennis player. In fact, his second, post retirement career involves tennis coaching. Emily is younger, to her advantage, but she is also an accomplished runner and traveller. Her relative youth allowed her to acclimatize faster than the rest of us. She was in excellent physical shape and handled the rigors of the hike very well.

Karanga Camp

We hiked through the clouds to Karanga Camp, at a bit over 13,000 feet. Karanga means "peanut" in Swahili. From

that point, we would be above the clouds and the rain. We were well above the tree line. The vegetation was limited to a few shrubs and flowers, and there were only four species of birds - White-necked raven, Streaky seedeater, Alpine chat, and Dusky ground dove. We still heard thunder for a while during the night. However, when I got up to go to the bathroom, I could see the lights of Moshi town. It was spectacular. Karanga Camp had the last water available on the mountain. From that point, the porters would carry in jugs all of the water we needed for drinking, cooking, and the bathroom. Out of curiosity, Martin tried carrying one of the porters' packs on his head. He could not get the balance right. However, he was able to carry the medical bag that Isra carried. It was about 50 pounds, with the oxygen tanks, the HBO bag, and the first aid supplies.

It was also during this day's hike that I noticed Tobias and Gaudence talking almost constantly. They probably had been all along, but by this point I was using the sounds of their voices and their footsteps to zone out and set my own rhythm. I repeatedly heard "mama," "baba," and "dada," which mean Mama, Dad, and Sister, respectively. Later, when I figured out later than I was Mama. When we first told Gaudence that we figured out his code, he smiled and changed the subject. Then I pointed to myself and said "Mama" and he immediately started a fast conversation with Tobias in Swahili. We had them. In reality, it was comforting to know that they were watching us all the time looking for signs of problems, adjusting the pace, and further insuring we'd make it to the top.

Among the other commonalities within our group was the sense that we owed our guides, porters, and other camp crew a debt of gratitude. Yes, our trip fees were paying them a small salary and we would tip them per appropriate guidelines upon our return to civilization, but what they did for us was worth much more. We were having the experience of a lifetime, and they were making it possible for us to succeed.





Barafu Camp

This hike to Barafu Camp was also relatively short. The idea was to rest and acclimatize at 15,000 feet prior to two long, tough days. By this point, most of the other routes up the mountains merged. Barafu Camp was busy and crowded. There were people coming down the mountain having summited that morning. There were others making camp that would leave at midnight in hopes of summiting around dawn. During our orientation, we were told that

we would be awakened at about 4:30 a.m. and have breakfast right away. We were asked to pack most of our things that evening so that we'd be able to leave camp at about first light. Our medical checks were all quite good and we were all cleared to aim for the highest point.

Summit

I heard thunder again during the night. I heard many things. I didn't sleep much. I'm not sure I slept at all. It was probably mostly due to anxiety, partly due to altitude. I had a slight headache in the morning, but it wasn't bad, and the coffee helped. The morning was cool but beautiful. The view of Mwenzi Peak, the other main summit on Kili, was incredible. The hike seemed to take forever. I looked over my shoulder several times, and the camp never seemed to be very far below us.

During one bathroom and snack break, Tobias pointed out the edge of the southern icefield above us and Stella Point. The hike from our position at that point would be the steepest and toughest part of the trip, but it was within sight. I was feeling the effects of the altitude and moving quite slowly. The fact that previous climbers' toilet paper and other "leavings" were yet to decompose only added to my nausea. Martin took my pack for the last thousand feet or so, and there was no question that Tobias was watching me, but I pushed on, kept drinking water, and slowly made my way to Stella Point. We ate our lunch there. Tobias checked my oxygen saturation. Oops. It was down to 65. It was snowing lightly, but we could see Uhuru Peak, the highest point. Tobias administered oxygen while checking for any indications of pulmonary or cerebral edema. Had he told me I had to descend, I would have, but I wanted to make that peak. Fortunately, my oxygen saturation recovered very quickly and I had no other signs of problems. So, we slowly made our way the last 700 feet to the summit.

I admit having tears in my eyes as we made the final approach. Years of dreaming and months of preparation were about to pay off. Standing at 19,340 feet, Uhuru Peak, was incredible. It's the highest point in Africa, one of the seven summits, the highest freestanding mountain in the world, the roof of Africa. Uhuru means "freedom." Of course. It means even more to a Star Trek fan. Had this been peak season, we would have waited in line for our turn to take our allowed three photographs. It wasn't peak season. We were alone, and we could take as many pictures as we wanted. Martin did cartwheels. Jim soaked it in. Emily filmed a commercial for Luna Bars, her favorites. I took pictures and picked up a few of the discarded champagne corks.

We probably stayed there for 30-40 minutes. Tobias talked to me about my options. He wanted me to take the Dexamethazone, a strong steroid that would ease any cerebral edema. However, taking it meant being required to descend immediately. We had to choose between going just a few hundred feet down to Crater Camp and going all the way back to Barafu Camp. At 18,000+ feet, Crater Camp would be a bit of a risk, but we'd be on the summit for sunrise and still be able to descend within the required 24 hours. I was given the ok to stay, and that was exciting.







Crater Camp

Tobias and Gaudence used walkie-talkies to communicate with the porters. At Stella Point, the porters had been asked to get more water. We had followed instructions and polished off three liters each by that point, except Martin of course. He didn't seem to need as much. Additionally, only a few of the porters and staff would go to Crater Camp. We were to take a minimum of equipment and food, then pick up the rest of the team on our way back down through Barafu Camp.

We took a short cut down a snowfield to Crater Camp. It was bit of a tough hike physically, but it didn't require any aerobic exertion. Crater Camp looked like a moonscape. Perhaps they did film the moon landing there. There were no plants at all and only a few ravens. We did see a small mammal, perhaps a mouse or vole, but that was it.

At the camp, Martin took off immediately with Jim and Emily to take photos of the glaciers. I took two dex, one Phenergan, quite a bit of water, and a short nap until my headache went away. I didn't eat a lot at dinner time, but I got a little bit down. I was given oxygen after dinner. Tobias removed the kerosene lamp from the tent while the oxygen tank was in the room. So, we sat there by the light of a couple of flashlights. I started breathing to the rhythm of the oxygen tank. The others sat in silence listening and watching. I remember telling them that they could talk. Jim laughed, and said that he simply found the sounds of the oxygen tank relaxing.

When Tobias checked on me at 8:00, I felt much better. However, the headache and nausea came back at about midnight. Martin gave me one more dex tablet, then I waited until morning and a chance to check in with Tobias before taking any medications. I took another dex and Phenergan at dawn, packed up, and took a few spectacular photos of sunrise on the top of Kili.



Mweka Camp

Martin carried my day pack as far as Stella Point, but I carried it from that point all the way down the mountain. Descending was quick. The soil was soft and loose from the constant freeze-thaw cycle, and we nearly skied through it. I was glad I was wearing gaiters to keep the dirt out of my boots. That's when we realized how valuable our trips down the Gonda stairs were. Neither of us had any problems with the descent. Our quadriceps were strong, giving our knees a respite.

We stopped in Barafu camp briefly to rest, snack, and fill water bottles, but it was a bit too early for lunch, so our porters were instructed to continue on and have lunch ready for us at Millenium Camp, a bit further down the mountain. Shortly after Barafu camp, we split from the route we had taken up the mountain and headed directly down the hill. We could see the afternoon clouds rising from the valley below, and we started walking through the clouds at about the same time we descended back into the heather-moor, Scottish highlands zone.

It was raining lightly when we made Mweka Camp, but it was barely noticeable as we signed in at the ranger's hut, saw the Tusker flag, and found our tents. Mweka camp was very busy with groups that had taken all of the ascent routes finding their way to this final campsite. There was a hint of marijuana in the air. We didn't know and didn't care where it came from, but it made everyone smile just a little.

I hadn't put on any sun cream that day. I didn't think of it, and there wasn't much sun. However, I did have a bit of a sunburn on my face, neck, and hands. Lesson learned. We were only three degrees from the equator.

Our final dinner was chicken, rice, vegetables, and fresh mango and pineapple. I slept well and woke to the sounds of a busy cook tent and active porters. Bad news, however, there was no coffee. Martin had to bring me tea that morning. I think he was worried, but I really didn't mind. I felt on top of the world. Even though we were still at 10,000 feet, descending had solved all of the altitude problems, and I was still riding the thrill of the summit. The high point of the day, however, was the songs. The porters sang to us again. We did return the favor by singing a version of "This Land Is Your Land" with some words changed to reflect the geography of Africa. I hope they appreciated it. Gaudence did translate for us, and they smiled.

We hiked down a few thousand more feet, through rain forest and jungle, past incredible blooming flowers, ferns, and tall trees. There were more birds, although I could not see them. I was busy concentrating on stepping over the drainage ditches and steps. Jim and Emily were struggling with sore toes and knees. Martin carried Isra's medical pack part of the way. We could hear voices for what seemed like kilometers before reaching the Mweka Gate. We did finally make it, we signed out, and we loaded our gear into the waiting Tusker Land Cruiser. A 45-min drive found us back in Moshi at the Bristol Cottages, where we nearly raced to the showers. It had been 8 ½ days of washing with baby wipes. The shower felt great. The Kilimanjaro lager (or two) that we enjoyed afterward was even better.

We met with Tobias and Gaudence to review the trip and provide our evaluations. Stanford was also able to join us for the last meeting. Together, they made it possible for me to achieve my goal and a dream I had carried for many years. I am completely confident that I would not have made it had we chosen a different outfitter guide service. We took a few more pictures and said our goodbyes. I admit crying just a little. It was quite a trip.





Beyond Kilimanjaro to the Serengeti

We left Moshi the very next day. We left our new friends behind, but would catch up with them later in the day and then again when we reached the Serengeti. We stopped briefly in the City of Arusha for an orientation to our safari, and then headed west toward the open fields where the Maasai tend their goats and cattle. There we found some of the most spectacular natural areas in the world. We skirted the edge of Ngorongoro Crater, stopping briefly to look down, then continued to Lake Manyara National Park. We stayed in a beautiful tented lodge overlooking the lake and had about half a day to drive around the park. I was excited to learn that our driver, Ossy, knew most of the plant and animal names, including most of the birds. That proved to be extremely helpful as I accumulated 83 new species of birds over the next few days. Of course, they weren't all new species.

I had seen pink flamingos before. There were hornbills, herons, thrush, doves, and storks visible immediately, along with Baboons, Monkeys, Wildebeest, Gazelles, Zebras, Mongoose, and more. Having a Land Rover was helpful. It had a top that could be raised up a couple of feet, allowing us to stand, watch, take pictures, and generally enjoy the scenery. The park closes at 6:00 p.m. so we headed back to the hotel and enjoyed the sunset in the bar with a glass of wine. After breakfast the next morning, we were treated with a short hike of sorts led by some local Maasai. They shared local plants and animals as well as some of the traditional uses for the plants.

Heading west, our next stop was Olduvai Gorge. The stop was short, just enough time for a nice box lunch, a trip through the Leakey's museum, and a brief lecture. We didn't get to go into the gorge itself. Most of the dig sites are now covered and protected. However, being in Africa's Great Rift valley, where humanity probably originated, was an incredible feeling. We were working our way west and out onto the plains. The air was much warmer, drier, and dustier. Keeping the camera and binoculars relatively clean would be a challenge.



From Olduvai Gorge all the way to Lake Victoria sits the Serengeti, a vast savannah, most of which is a national park. Mid-March is the beginning of the rainy season, and the Wildebeest, lead by Zebras, were beginning their migration to the more abundant food supplies that could be found in the rain in the northern part of the park. Apparently, the Wildebeest, known more commonly as Gnu, have poor eyesight, and rely on the Zebra to show them the way. Over the next few days, stretching to the horizon in every direction, we would literally see millions of Wildebeest and Zebra, many with young, all moving their way toward food.



We stayed at another tented lodge in the middle of the Serengeti. We had a shower every day, although limited to 20 liters of water, it was still warm and pleasant. We had terrific food, good wine, coffee in the morning, and lots of fresh fruit. Hardly "roughing it," we used the term "glamping" more than once. That's glamorous camping. Still, it was wild land in the middle of the Serengeti and there are no fences. We were required to have an escort from the dining tent to our tent after dark. There were lots of eyes shining in our flashlights at night.

Ossy drove us out every morning after breakfast. We cruised around the Serengeti savannah until around 1:00

each day, and then returned for lunch. Since there was little animal activity in the middle of the day, taking a rest ourselves proved to be a good use of time, and a gourmet lunch with wine was quite pleasant. We headed back out around 4:00 p.m. and searched for wildlife until sunset.

Jim's wife/Emily's mom, Sara, had flown to Africa to share the safari experience with them. We caught up with them on our second day in the Serengeti and had a great time comparing notes and lists. But, the trip was nearing its end, and we had to say good bye. They flew back to Arusha. We drove back, stopping for photos along with way, ending up in Ngorongoro Crater. it was hard to say good bye to the new lifelong friends that we had met only two weeks previously.

The crater is approximately 30 Km across. The animals that live there do not have to migrate. Food and water are abundant and protected. It's an amazing place. We saw Rhinos immediately, along with Hippos, Elephants, Lions, Impala, Eland, Giraffe, Warthogs, Water buffalo, Gazelles, and Hyenas. We even saw an Egyptian cobra. Our lodging that night was at a more conventional hotel facing the setting sun and overlooking the crater. Needless to say, the food, wine, and scenery were excellent.

We drove to Arusha the next day, then on to the Kilimanjaro Airport. From there we flew to Dar es Salaam, Amsterdam, and Minneapolis. Now, we're home, still pouring through the nearly 1300 photos we took, finishing the journal, and capturing memories before they fade. We're still recovering in some ways. Finishing an adventure of this magnitude and saying goodbye to new friends leaves behind a sense of accomplishment as well as a sense of loss that needs to be mourned. Although I hesitate to use the cliché, this really was much more a journey than a destination. The summit of Kili was incredible, but the new friends that made it possible will part of our lives for a long time.

On a lighter note, if you haven't recently, watch *The Lion King*. The opening song shows Kili. The people of Tanzania really do say "hakuna matata," and the "Circle of Life" is real, no matter where you are.

