



CLIMBING MOUNT KILIMANJARO, TANZANIA.

August, 2009, by Lizzie Norman, 21, second from left.

As many of you know, I recently returned from climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Although knowing that Kilimanjaro is the world's highest free standing mountain, where upon approximately 2 people die monthly in their attempt to climb it, it is hard to tell exactly why I decided it would be a good idea to try it myself. But now that it's over and I no longer have to sleep in freezing conditions and climb for eight hours a day I can easily say it's the best thing that's ever happened to me. The climb was partly sponsored by DCI people and to help the work of Childreach International, a charity that funds both primary education and vocational training for children in various developing countries.

If you are in the UK you may have seen the TV and radio celebrities doing a Red Nose Day Kilimanjaro climb with a support team of 180 people. In fact they climbed a route often nick-named the "Coca Cola" route, mainly due to its easy nature and the fact at every rest point you can buy a Coke. We however climbed the Machame route, otherwise known as the whisky route, famed for being particularly difficult. The climb took six days, with us reaching the top at dawn on day five.

The first 4 days ranged from walking through thick rainforest to barren, dry deserts. We scrambled up near vertical walls and camped above the clouds. The days were long, starting at 6 a.m. every day and finishing as soon as it got dark around 8 p.m. Altitude sickness affects everyone differently and whilst some felt sick or suffered from severe headaches I just seemed to develop insomnia, which apparently is very common at high altitude. The nights were cold and usually when it got light in the mornings you could see that the inside of the tent had a decent layer of ice on it.

Though the first 4 days seemed hard at the time they were nothing in comparison to final day for which we climbed through the night at minus 19 degrees with little oxygen for eight and half hours. I can easily say that this was both the hardest thing I have ever done and the lowest I have ever felt. That last night seemed never ending.

Altitude sickness is very common on the last night, so whilst walking through strong winds at freezing temperatures you also feel very nauseous, weak, light headed, full of aches and it is hard to breathe, something like the worst flu you've ever had only 150 times worse. There is no possibility of stopping to rest because it was too cold, your water is frozen, and if you eat anything you vomit, and if you blow your nose you get a nosebleed at once. Nevertheless finally reaching the top is an amazing feeling, and knowing that you've managed to make a difference to people's lives through the £2,200 that you raised makes it even better.

The 9 hour walk, making it a seventeen and a half hour walk in total without sleep, back to a camp near the bottom did bring us all back to reality pretty quickly. Out of 27 in our group, 26 made it. We had one case of bad frostbite and one very severe case of altitude sickness which caused one group member to lose his mind, albeit not permanently, and he was sent back to the UK with all speed.

The porters and guides, all Tanzanian, were incredible and without their cooking, carrying our bags and at one point dragging me up the mountain we would not have made it. I was the first girl to the top. I would like to thank absolutely everyone that supported me with very generous donations and prayers because without you none of this would have happened! I have been to the schools and training centres where your money has gone and it was definitely well spent. The children look unbelievably happy, they are healthy now and they will be well educated. The children that Childreach supports are apparently some of the first in Tanzania that know how to work computers!

Looking back, I can't believe the expedition actually happened. It was without a doubt the hardest, most painful experience of my life yet but it was certainly worth it so thank you again!

Lizzie

www.dci.org.uk