

A KILIMANJARO ADVENTURE

Neal Johns, a former Wakefield resident, has recently returned from a climb of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, East Africa, and will be contributing a series of three articles to the Wakefield News pertaining to that experience.

PLANS AND PREPARATION

The idea of a climb on one of the more exotic mountains of the world had been on my mind for the last few years as my interest in more serious and strenuous mountain hiking developed. The planning became more serious in the last year.

Kilimanjaro, often called the "Roof of Africa", is located in northern Tanzania near the Kenyan border in East Africa, 3 degrees south of the equator. It is a volcano formed mountain with three main peaks and craters; Mawenzi, Kibo, and Shira, from east to west. Of these Kibo is the largest, highest and most frequently climbed. Uhuru Peak at Kibo is the highest individual peak and the highest point on the African continent at an elevation of 5896 meters (19,340 feet). Six main routes approach the mountain from the cultivated farm lands at the lower elevations through the lush rain forest on to the Alpine meadow across the barren lunar landscape to the snow and ice packed summit. These main routes consolidate near the summit with only a few options to the true summit of Uhuru Peak. At the present time the northern routes from Kenya are closed due to bandits, robberies, and murders of climbers on those routes. The shortest route and most traveled is the Marangu Route from the southeast side of the peak referred to by the locals as the "Tourist" or "Coca-Cola" route. Other routes approach from the south and west of the peak, generally rounding the southern half of the peak and approaching the final ascent from the southeast.

I began to contact several companies that specialize in adventure travel, quickly zeroing in on Journeys of Ann Arbor, Michigan. I had previously trekked with Journeys in the Himalayas of Nepal and knew that they would make arrangements for even a group of one in the event I wasn't able to find travel partners. After discussing the trip with several people that I climb with in California and Wisconsin, I come up with only one other person who actually commits to the trip.

My partner for the trip will be Dave Sachs, a 37 year old fellow engineer at Oscar J. Boldt Construction Company in Appleton, Wisconsin. Dave has experience in Alpine climbing and camping in the Cascades of Washington, as well as the Canadian Rockies and other locations in North America.

We discussed the route with knowledgeable people at Journeys and their counterpart in Tanzania and decide on the Shira-Lemosho Route, a longer but more scenic route. This route enters the area from the west and traverses through the rain forest, heather, and

moorlands to the Alpine desert of the Shira Plateau, continues to the east and loops around the south edge of the glaciers and ice fields before turning north and west on the final ascent to the summit. This route will cover approximately 125 kilometers (75 miles) and require 6 nights of tenting on the mountain.

Although I have done a significant amount of technical rock climbing and strenuous day hiking, I must say that I am really not a camper. In fact I am kind of a wimp about getting home to a hot shower and bed in the evening. My tenting experience, limited as it is, goes back to my days as a Boy Scout and the Army. So again, I'm anything but an experienced camper, although I did have to tent on my trekking in Nepal.

Primary concerns about successfully reaching the summit are altitude sickness, weather, and being physically ready. Altitude sickness is caused by lack of oxygen in the bloodstream, which causes severe headaches, dizziness, disorientation and nausea in most people and can become serious in advanced stages with fluid buildup in the lungs and swelling of the brain. The only cure is to immediately return to lower elevations. We will not carry or have access to oxygen. We will be making the trip in late January, early February, which should provide the best possible weather, although it can rain and snow at any time of the year on Kilimanjaro. Dave and I are working extremely hard to assure that we are in good physical condition to enhance our chances of summiting. Dave has trained and run in 3 major marathons in the last few months. I have been fortunate to be able to spend a significant amount of time hiking and climbing in the mountains from 8,000 to 11,000 feet. The route that we will be taking on Kilimanjaro should also allow enough time to properly acclimate for the summit.

TRAVEL

January 26, 2000, Wednesday -- Today I take a 3-1/2 hour Northwest Airline flight from Palm Springs, California to Minneapolis where I will overnight near the airport. Dave will be coming from Wisconsin and we will meet at the Northwest check-in counter at noon tomorrow. Palm Springs to Minneapolis, 2 hour time change.

January 27, Thursday -- Dave and I meet at Northwest ticket counter, check our bags through to Kilimanjaro airport in Tanzania, and catch the 3:05 P.M. 7-1/2 hour flight to Amsterdam. Another 8 hour time change, and arrive at approximately 6:30 A.M. local time on the 28th in Amsterdam.

January 28, Friday -- After a four hour layover in Amsterdam, board a direct 8-1/2 hour KLM flight to Kilimanjaro airport and another 2 hour time change. Total time change from California to Tanzania, 12 hours. Arrive at 9:30 P.M., locate our driver Samuel (Sammy) of Shades of Africa and travel to the Moivaro Coffee Plantation and Lodge, arriving at 11:00 P.M. for a two night stay. The lodge is only 3 months old and located in

a beautiful setting on a coffee and banana plantation at 4500 foot elevation. The staff is new, eager to serve, and the food is very good. The mosquito netting around the beds reminds us to take our anti-malarial oral vaccine.

January 29, Saturday -- Today is to be a rest day to acclimatize for the climb. We have arranged for a one day safari to Arusha National Park for game viewing and photos. This is a small park and the first chance for Dave to see African game in the wild. Sammy will again be our Land Rover driver and meets us at the lodge at 8:30 A.M. This is a very nice park with great views of Mount Meru. Game seen includes cape buffalo, giraffe, warthog, dik-dik, waterbuck, bushbuck, baboons, blue monkeys, colobus monkeys, hippos, and countless exotic birds. This evening we meet with Mia Favro, the owner of Shades of Africa, to review final plans for the climb.

January 30, Sunday -- We leave the lodge at 8:30 A.M. Now under the direction of the mountain guide company, Africa Walking, who we will remain with until we have completed the climb and return to the next lodge.

Our driver is Ngaya, who will transport us to the Lemosho gate at the west end of the park to sign in and on to the trail head to begin the climb. The road is very rough and dusty, but with our excitement and enthusiasm the 2-1/2 hour trip goes by quickly. En route we pass small farms and also get our first distant views of Kilimanjaro, which dominates the horizon above the African plains. At the park gate we register with the ranger station and also meet our guide, Boniface Minga, an experienced guide who speaks excellent English. He was previously a university librarian in Dar es Salaam, the capitol of Tanzania. Years ago when his father passed away, he, as the youngest son, was obligated to return to his village and small farm to care for his mother. Hence he and his family moved back to the mountain area. Guides that speak English are in demand in Kilimanjaro, so he worked himself into shape, began as Porter, and quickly worked into the position of Assistant Guide, and later Guide. We should note that as a guide, Boniface earns significantly more than he would as a university professor or librarian. Over the next seven days we will come to know and admire this man. Some years ago he was the guide for Jimmy and Rosalind Carter on their Kilimanjaro expedition to some lower peaks. With the large entourage of secret service, aides, and news media, Boniface had little opportunity for direct contact with the Carters. Most communication was through aides.

After our "sign in" at the ranger station we drive to the trail head to begin the climb. On this rough and hilly drive we pass through an interesting area and concept for tree harvesting, agriculture and reforestation. This plan begins with the clear cutting of the wild tropical hardwoods. Village families are then given a plot of one to three acres of this barren land to plant crops by hand on the steep hillsides for three years. They are then given pine seedlings to plant and upon completion are given a new plot to work. This seemed like a good idea to me, and it is apparently used in many third world tropical

areas. However, on my return flight from Africa to Amsterdam, I sat with an Englishman who travels the world as a U.N. Agricultural/Environmental director. He pointed out that one of the problems with this approach is that since the family only has the land for three years there is little incentive to waste labor and effort on long term solutions to problems like erosion control. "There is no perfect world."

We arrive at the trail head at an elevation of 7800 feet as the assistant guide and porters are consolidating their loads for the climb. It is surprising how much gear is required for this one week trip. We will have two tents -- one two man tent for Dave and me, and a larger mess tent for cooking and eating in foul weather. The mess tent will also serve for sleeping quarters for the staff of guide, assistant guide/cook, and 6 porters. Everything required must be carried -- tents, gear, food, stoves, fuel (no wood can be used from the park), personal equipment, etc. Dave and I will each carry a day pack with water, spare clothing, rain gear, cameras, and anything else we may need since we will not have access to the porters during the day. Our individual packs will weigh about 25 pounds. We are expected to limit our total personal gear for the climb to 15 kilos (33 pounds), so we have left all nonessential clothing and gear at the lodge.

THE CLIMB

January 30, Monday, continued -- Climb, Day 1 -- After the assistant guide, Winford Mboya, and the porters leave, Dave and I follow Boniface into the dense rain forest to begin our climb. As if to test us, we immediately begin with a steep narrow trail. Are we really ready for this??? The trail is narrow with very thick brush and trees on the sides. There is an amazing amount of elephant dung on the trail, but it would be almost impossible to see them in the brush and they probably travel the trail at night.

About 1-1/2 hours into the hike we come across a group of 12 Americans that had signed in some time ahead of us at the ranger station. They are enjoying a fancy fruit and snack buffet right there in the jungle. I notice at the "sign in" that they are with Wilderness Travel, one of the companies that I had investigated as a possible agent for us. However, they were more expensive and were not set up to accommodate a very small group. This group has a support staff of 40 and includes a Park Ranger with an automatic weapon traveling with them. Do they know something we don't?? While they are already enjoying their buffet we continue to climb and never see them again. I am happy that we are not with such a large group, although the buffet looks good. Boniface explains that on a Millennium climb a month earlier he had a group of 19 clients and 60 support staff, and this was very hard to organize and coordinate daily activities.

This first day we only hike for about 3 hours before reaching our first campsite at Shira Forest, with an elevation of 9250 feet. When we arrive our tent and the mess tent are already set up, and the cook and helpers are beginning to prepare dinner. Dave and I

unpack sleeping bags and other gear to prepare for the night. We are furnished with basins of hot wash water prior to dinner being served. Dinner consists of thin but tasty soup, chicken, rice, cooked fresh vegetables, and a vegetable sauce for the rice, along with bread, tea or hot chocolate with a fruit pudding of fresh papaya and pineapple.

As is done each evening, our drinking water is prepared for the next day by Boniface. This water is collected from a small stream, boiled and pumped through my 200 micron filter, and put into our personal containers. Being extra cautious, Dave and I additionally treat our supply with iodine followed by neutralizing tablets. This probably doesn't make much sense since we always drink their tea and hot water for chocolate without our iodine treatment. In any case it appears that we never did have stomach problems because of the water. Neal normally carries and consumes 3 liters on the trail each day while Dave (at 6'4", 217 lbs.) carries and consumes about 4 liters.

We are still in the rain forest and darkness comes quickly, so we are off to our tent for the first night on the trail.

January 31st, Monday -- Climb Day 2 -- Boniface awakens us at 6:00 A.M. with a cup of hot tea each morning on the climb. We have slept reasonably well for our first night, and it is still quite warm at this elevation with a wake up temperature of 45 degrees F. We pack, dress, wash and are ready for breakfast. As will become typical, breakfast includes fresh fruit (papaya, orange, mango, and pineapple), hot tea, a dry cereal of grains, nuts, and dried berries which we mix with hot milk. In the second course we are always served fresh scrambled eggs, small cuts of pressed meat, cucumbers and tomatoes.

Today we begin hiking at 8:10 A.M. en route to our next campsite at Simba Cave. We will carry a bag lunch of a sandwich, tiny banana, an orange, and a carrot type cake since we will not be to this next campsite until mid-afternoon. Within a couple of hours we are getting out of the rain forest and into the moorlands and by early afternoon are on to the Shira Plateau. As we leave the rain forest we have several high ridges and valleys to cross before leveling out on the high Shira Plateau. From the plateau we see the Shira ridge to the south and our first good looks at Kibo to the east at the center of Kilimanjaro. As is usual at midday the peaks are clouded in. It is a beautiful sunny day, comfortable temperatures and no altitude problems as we arrive at Simba Cave, elevation 11,780 feet at approximately 3:00 P.M. Boniface seems to be happy with our pace and progress so far.

When we arrive we find that again the tents are set up and dinner preparations are under way. We are immediately furnished warm water basins to clean up from our trail dust and have time to set up our bedding and prepare our gear for the next day. Even though we have washed upon arriving at the site, Boniface insists we wash again in a disinfectant water solution prior to eating, reflecting his guide training and attention to detail. He is always striving to assure that the clients are not going to get sick.

After dinner the ridge lines to the west present an opportunity for some nice sunset photos, and to the east Kilimanjaro is now clear of the clouds and with the evening sun reflecting on its snow and ice fields is an awesome sight. As the sun begins to set the temperature drops rapidly, and we are happy to climb into our sleeping bags. By the way, my sleeping bag has a rating for 20 degrees F. which is probably not low enough for this trip. However, I have a liner and have resigned myself to sleep in whatever clothes I need to stay comfortable.

Tonight I take my first Diamox, a prescription diuretic taken to assist in lessening the severity of altitude sickness. I will take one time release capsule for the next four days leading to our summit attempt. Dave had started taking his Diamox a few days earlier. I have not used Diamox before and have had no altitude problems, where others I have hiked with to Whitney, for example, have had some headache and nausea. I don't expect to have any significant reaction other than as a diuretic the Diamox acts to remove body fluids and therefore requires a large intake of fluids. So now, in addition to the problems of getting good a sleep at higher elevations, several trips out of the tent each night are required. Not fun. I must have slept some this second night, because I understand from the guides that a pack of wild dogs chasing some game went right through our campsite unnoticed by me.

February 1st, Tuesday -- Climb Day 3 -- Today will be a short day on the trail. We will travel to Shira Cave Camp at elevation 12,530 feet for only 2-1/2 hours. On this route we continue across the Shira Plateau, which is Alpine desert with intense radiation, high evaporation and huge daily temperature fluctuations from day to night. Sun block and sunglasses are required.

We arrive at camp about 11:30 A.M. A short rest, unpack, and get our tent organized for the evening. After lunch we take a climb for additional acclimatization to 13,250 feet elevation and return to camp for dinner, which consists of hot mushroom soup, pasta with a vegetable sauce, fish, vegetable with cucumbers and tomatoes, along with a fried French toast type bread, and fresh pineapple for dessert. As usual hot tea and chocolate are available. Of course, each night we continue to go through the water preparation ritual of boiling, filtering and treating our next day's supply. Dave, with his Alpine camping experience, continues to teach me the tricks that make tent life more bearable. However, his attempts to get me, my duffel bag and pack more organized are a solid failure.

In October of 1997 Dave had a severe appendicitis attack which already had gangrene set in before he arrived at the hospital. At first, doctors had a hard time analyzing the problem in Green Bay, but a doctor by the name of Dr. John Boardman took over and operated on Dave immediately. While we are at Shira Camp Dave recognizes a fellow American climber as Dr. Boardman and immediately greets him, and Dr. Boardman's

response is "Yes, I remember you. Operating Room No. 2 at St. Mary's". It's a small, small world. We see John a few more times during the climb.

The plan for tomorrow was to take us to Baranco, the next logical campsite. However, Boniface has discussed the option of continuing for another two hours of hard climbing to reach Karanga with both us and the porters. We all agree that we would rather get more of the climb out of the way as early as possible while we are still a couple of days from the summit attempt.

February 2nd, Wednesday -- Climb Day 4 -- Today will be a long, hard day with major ascents and descents even though the net elevation gain for the day will be minimal. We are up early with our traditional wake up tea, packed, and ready to go after wash up and breakfast. Early in the day we hit the Baranco Wall, which is basically a high cliff climb requiring hand holds and scrambling. The wall takes us up 800 feet, and we almost immediately start down the other side of the ridge. Although the wall is a bit of a surprise, it is more fun and breaks up the drudgery of the continuous steep hike.

Throughout the day we are walking in and out of the clouds with some sprinkles of rain and sleet. In the late afternoon the precipitation picks up suddenly, and we are soaked before we have a chance to get into our rain gear. We are wet and cold and pretty happy to see the campsite with the tents already set up. The cook and porters have set up their kitchen in a cave, so the mess tent is available for Dave and I to change into dry clothes and we begin to feel much better, although I remain chilly for a long time. Eventually the rain stops and we have a chance for things to dry a little before evening. Although the elevation at Karanga is 12,830 feet, our high point for Climb Day 4 is almost 14,500 feet.

February 3rd, Thursday -- Climb Day 5 -- Today we will have a relatively short, but steep, climb to Barafo Camp at 15,000 feet. This will be our highest elevation camp and only Dave, I, Boniface and Winford will go on from here. We arrive at Barafo at about noon, have a nice lunch, and begin to get our gear organized for our summit attempt. This evening we have our best dinner of the trip which our guide calls goulash, but to me is a beef stew with plenty of meat, potatoes and other vegetables in a tasty combination. Although the food to this point has been very nice, it has been quite bland with very little spice. This stew is a real treat.

Boniface continues to give us information each day on what to expect in terms of terrain, temperature, length of hike, etc. For the summit attempt he has recommended that we wear the warmest clothes that we can possibly put on. Being from the U.P. and Wisconsin we feel we understand cold conditions, and Boniface, living on the equator, doesn't understand how smart we are about cold weather protection. However, we decide to take no chances and we do as he says. Tonight we will sleep in most of the clothes that we will wear to the summit -- two pair of polypropylene long underwear along with

winter jogging type pants and shirt, liner socks, and wool socks. In the morning we will add our Gortex pants and lined Gortex jackets with chin protection and hoods.

We will keep our water containers in the tent, covered, and next to our sleeping bags to prevent freezing. I put new batteries in my headlamp and check to see that an extra set is in my pack. I also carry a spare bulb. Although we have been using headlamps in the tent each night this will be the first time that they will be required on the trail. I will wear my leather choppers with wool liners that I have always used for snow shoeing and skiing. The extreme cold, because of the altitude and lack of oxygen in the air, is something we continue to hear about.

THE FINAL ASCENT

"Close to the western summit there is a dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude."

The Snows of Kilimanjaro, Ernest Hemingway, 1937

In the above quotation Hemingway refers to a 1920 climbing party's discovery of a frozen and mummified body of this leopard at over 18,000 foot elevation and are unable to assess what the leopard is doing at that altitude. Like the leopard we also cannot always explain the reason we do things.

February 4th, Friday -- Climb Day 6 -- This, of course, will be the longest and hardest day of the climb. We are awake at 11:30 P.M. Thursday night, dress quickly, have a light breakfast of biscuits and tea, and are on the trail by 12:25 A.M. We don't have to wait for the trail to get steep. It takes place immediately. At first I am too warm and climb with my coat open for the first hour or two. The winds pick up as we get higher, and before long the coat is closed, the hood is up, and my hands are cold. I now realize that when it comes to the mountain the equator guy is smarter than the Yooper.

Within an hour after leaving we have caught up to and passed one small group, but is not long before we come to a large group that will be difficult to pass. This group is moving very slowly and it is hard to get a rhythm into our climbing. After about a half hour of this uncomfortable travel, the group takes a break, and we continue and are pretty much alone from there on.

At about 17,000 feet the breathing is difficult because of the thin air and cold, and Dave is beginning to have a significant headache and some nausea. We do begin to take short breaks to catch our breath, but a break of any length is out of the question because of the cold. Throughout the climb, and especially the high altitudes, it is very important to maintain a high energy level without having a stomach full of heavy hard to digest foods, so we use high energy supplements with the trade names Gu and Power Gel. These are

small tubes of high calorie, low fat, easy to digest supplements which also contain caffeine. For water we all have containers that consist of a plastic refillable bag, or bladder, with a tube and bite valve, which allows you easy access to your water without stopping to fish out jars or bottles to drink from. The bladder is in my pack in it's own insulated pack, but the bite valve and tube, of course, are exposed and continually start to freeze. At first I can break up the freezing by biting on the valve and tube to break the ice loose. However, at about 18,000 feet the water is frozen too solid to break it loose, so no more water until we are back at a lower elevation. At about this same elevation my headlamp batteries give out, and a short time later we lose another. It is just too cold for the batteries to last. Rather than to try to change the batteries in the cold and dark we continue to climb with the remaining two lamps.

Dave is continuing to struggle with his headache and more nausea and lightheadedness, but with the tenacity of a marathoner he continues on. He later explains that he was thinking of turning around on several occasions. Although I am breathing hard and quite tired, I have no other affects of high altitude in terms of headache, dizziness or stomach problems. We reach Stella Point on the rim of the volcanic crater at 18,600 feet at about 5:45 A.M. At this point I understand many climbers consider this the summit and go no further. We make a brief stop, hiding from the wind behind a rock outcropping, and have a cup of hot tea from the thermoses that Boniface and Winford have carried. Because of the cold the break is short and we resume our climb to the true summit of Uhuru Peak at 5896 meters, or 19,340 feet.

There is one party already at the summit when we arrive at 6:30 A.M. The idea is always to arrive at the summit to see the sun rise over East Africa. However, we are a little early and it is just getting light. Reaching the summit is very exhilarating as I thought it would be, but it is also more emotional with the feeling of accomplishment. In talking with other climbers later, they expressed that same feeling.

In spite of the cold we proceed to take photographs around the summit. After about ten minutes I notice that Dave is being ushered down the trail by the assistant guide. His altitude sickness appears to be quite severe with headache, vomiting and disorientation. Boniface and I remain at the summit for another ten minutes of photos and then begin our descent. As we descend we meet several climbing parties. All appear to be extremely exhausted, somewhat disoriented, and many are vomiting. There is no place for dignity on the summit.

Boniface suggests we stay well behind Dave and Winford so that we are available if Dave's problems increase and also to allow Dave's confidence to build. We are now descending back to our campsite at Barafu at 15,000 feet. My legs are tired and the muscles above my knees take a beating on the steep descent. Upon reaching camp at about 9:15 A.M. we find Dave napping in the tent. We have only time for repacking and lunch prior to continuing our descent on the direct but steep Mweka Route. This will take

us to our last overnight camp at 10,100 feet. So we drop another 5000 feet before this day is over. In summary from midnight to 4:00 P.M. we have climbed 4340 feet and descended over 9000 feet, dropping from the snow and ice fields of the summit to camp again in the lower rain forest. As we make the final descent to Mweka Camp my legs are extremely tired and the old knees are aching, but we feel great! Dave has recovered quickly at the lower elevations and is now hurting less than I am. The warm temperatures at this rain forest camp feel good after our long day of extremes. We have our usual dinner and are in our tent and sleeping bags early.

February 5th, Saturday -- Climb Day 7 -- This is a relatively short day as we descend through the rain forest to the Mweka Gate to check out and meet our Land Rover and African Walking company driver for our transport to the Mt. Meru Game Lodge. This is an old hunting lodge in a tropical garden setting, which includes a small animal sanctuary. Again the accommodations, service and meals are very good. The hot shower and clean up feels great as our feet see water for the first time in seven days. The balance of the evening is spent relaxing on the veranda of the main lodge enjoying a fine dinner. Tomorrow we will be picked up at 7:00 A.M. so we make arrangements to have a light breakfast in our room since the dining room will not be open until after we leave.

February 6th, Sunday -- Although we flew into Kilimanjaro airport, there are no flights out today, so we will travel from the lodge to Arusha and catch a shuttle service bus for the 5-1/2 hour ride to Nairobi, Kenya for our KLM flight out at 11:00 P.M. The shuttle ride to Nairobi is interesting and we see some game en route including giraffe, bushbuck and Thomson's gazelle. We pass through several small villages and over the plains see children from the Masai tribe tending their herds of cattle and goats.

We have heard that the border crossing between Tanzania and Kenya can be a real hassle and we do see other vehicles unloading luggage for custom's inspection. However, our driver, Samuel apparently is well known and we pass through immigration only on both sides and are not required to remove bags from the top of the bus for customs. The shuttle drops us off at the airport where we check our duffel bags and continue to carry our packs with important papers. With time on our hands we decide to take a taxi to Nairobi's famous Carnivore restaurant, renowned for its broad range of barbecued meats including exotic wild African game such as impala, zebra, crocodile, as well as beef, lamb, pork and fowl. We probably ate more meat at this meal than the total for all days on the trail.

At about 10:00 P.M. we begin boarding our KLM flight to Amsterdam with transfer to Minneapolis and on to Palm Springs. From the time I left the lodge until I land in Palm Springs I will have been traveling for over 36 hours. I settle back in my seat as I leave Africa and realize that by local time it is February 7th and my 65th birthday. With the 12 hour difference I will have the longest possible day for a birthday, for whatever that's worth. It does feel good to be on the way home.