

## **Kilimanjaro Trek - 2007**

Rick, Don and I arrived at Kili airport with all our gear at 2000 local, having slept little for 31 hours. We met the remaining party members at the Keys Hotel in Moshi, and joined them for a late supper. My new roommate Don and I retired at 2300. I awoke refreshed and apparently free of jet lag at 0700. (The time difference from Boston is +7 hours.)

Our group consists of Rick and Celia Wilcox (the trip organizers) and their offspring Mariah and Jake; Jake's friend Ryan, whose father recently died; an MIT senior Stephanie Dudzic, who is finishing three months of teaching computer science in Nairobi; Dawson Winch, the only other former AMC Hutman, who is a Dupont chemist from Delaware; John Kascensca, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs at Lyndon State College in Lyndonville, VT, here for the third time; Dr. Peter Walker, a Vietnam era surgeon in the early 70s, now practicing anesthesiology in NYC; Frank Armstrong and his two look-alike sons Franny (15) and John (13) on another of their many family times together (Frank is a 20 year Boston cop); and my roommate Don Lloyd, an engineer and entrepreneur from PA. At 65, I am the eldest in the group.

Our first day is a rest day and Don and I walked into Moshi. It is a bustling town, but not a prosperous one. The traffic consists of aging vehicles that drive on the left and leave a choking blue haze. The streets are lined with primitive shops and white tourists are vulnerable to being accosted with persistent unsolicited purveyors of goods and services. At Rick's suggestion we avoid eye contact in order to prevent being overwhelmed, and do not respond to their invitations. Even to say NO is to engage.

Thus we erected a total social barrier to our hosts. I felt very self-conscious and elitist, separated by color, culture, and economic level most notably. By what right are we so much better off?

There is a heavy presence of Lutheran and RC missionaries running schools, churches and orphanages. They seem to be the strongest organizing force in Moshi. There was also a glistening white mosque with four minarets, two of which supported large loudspeakers. In the context of today's world politics I was struck by the potential for Islamic proselytizing among the many unemployed and under-employed youth. Our defensive behavior plays right into that potential. Except for the young missionaries from England and the US, the local folks see mostly well-heeled hikers and safarists roaring around the towns and countryside in buses and land cruisers.

### **Day One – Machame Gate to Machame camp**

We approach the mountain by way of Machame Gate, one of several access points for climbers. Separation, almost segregation, is prominent from the outset on the mountain. On the trail the clients or tourists are virtually all Caucasian, dressed in Goretex and down with small day-packs. Lunches and chairs are provided by our porters promptly at

noon. We have Camelback nipples at our lips and poles to make hiking easier. Our boots are well broken in, but never worn out. We have paid guides – one leading and two sweeping or leading subgroups. We are pampered.

On our trail, which is very gradually up, we are frequently overtaken by Tanzanian porters carrying 30 to 40 pounds of gear on their heads or shoulders in support of us, in addition to knapsacks to support their own comfort. Their footwear is cast-off, oft-repaired, ill-fitting, and looks uncomfortable. Clothing, knapsacks and personal gear of all kinds are usually donated and often tattered.

As we progress along the trail to 10,000 feet, some of the less fit porters begin to slow to our pace. While we sit on molded chairs eating our lunch, they plod past us. If they have water, it is because they acquired it for themselves; no one provides it for them; some have none. One particularly exhausted albino porter gestured to me for a sip of water as I passed him. I offered my Camelbak which he accepted. Later, I asked my guide to offer, in Swahili, my lunch carton of fruit juice to that porter. I have to say, though, that in spite of the differences between the porters and the tourists, the porters are a cheerful lot, by and large.

Just before we arrived at Machame Campsite after four hours or so of restful sauntering, the rain forest abruptly ended and the heath zone began. We were greeted by our first glimpse of the snow-covered summit far away. The few remaining clouds dissipated with sunset and our tent village exchanged looks with the mighty peak.

Not only was my 20 kg canoe bag full of “necessities” resting just outside Don’s and my fully pitched tent, a dining tent was waiting with digestives, hot beverages and popcorn to tide us over until dinner. The peaks looked down and we looked up. As dusk fell and Venus appeared close to the quarter moon, we all donned our winter clothing against an abrupt drop in temperature.

After the sun left even the peak, we sat down, clients only, to hot cream of mushroom soup, then spaghetti with meat and/or vegetarian sauce. Dessert was fresh pineapple and mango. After dinner, we all filled our nalgene bottles with hot water that would heat our sleeping bags tonight and provide drink tomorrow. We are encouraged to label one bottle for pee to save having to exit our tents and find a loo in the dark.

Intent on staying hydrated as the best defense against altitude sickness, I drank an electrolyte formula on the trail and continued with hot drinks right through dinner. As a consequence of drinking too much and contending with an old man’s plumbing woes, I spent more time peeing than sleeping. Between an 8:30 bedtime and 0200, I had filled my one-liter bottle. At about 0400 I gathered up my journal, pen, headlamp and warm clothing and left the tent. The sky was no longer brilliantly starlit; mist and drizzle had crept into camp. I peed yet again and retired to the dining tent to catch up on my journal.

The first day had begun at about 6000’ and ended just below 10,000’. The pace (called pole-pole, pronounced poli-poli) prescribed by our guides was more a saunter than a

walk, almost like a hesitation march at graduation. For the most part, the trail was not steep. It followed a lava ridge through the rain forest. At first, I felt like a colt in a horse race with my reins pulled tight. Pole-pole was not natural for me at all. I recognized, however, that the slow pace would give us more time to acclimate and that I had no real choice. I adjusted. When the rain forest ended abruptly and the heath zone began, there was camp.

Other groups are on the same route with us and occasionally we have a few minutes of conversation. During one such encounter, I spotted a tall man about my age and asked where he was from. He was Swiss and that's as far as we got before one of the groups stopped and we were on our own again.

During tea we all submitted to Rick's pulse oximeter to evaluate our oxygen saturation. Everyone was somewhat less oxygenated than at the hotel in Moshi. My reading was a gratifying 98% with a 66 pulse. I felt unaffected by the climb or the elevation. So far, so good. I am getting rest, but I've not slept for two nights. Last night it was bladder and pulse awareness. During the previous night in Moshi I may have experienced jet lag after all, even though I felt well adjusted to the time change in most other ways.

#### Day 2 Machame camp to Shira camp

I wrote in the dining tent until sounds of waking invited me back to my tent to stow gear for the day's hike. No one thought the drizzle would persist, so I planned to wear shorts and light winter layers that I could shed down to thermal Under Armour as the sun demanded. I packed extra layers in the day pack and put my raincoat, not used in the rain forest, in the portered bag for a later day. Mistake!

My knapsack had a rain cover that would protect my compacted down jacket, but the drizzle persisted and began to penetrate my wicking layers. I was losing heat (and berating myself) as we climbed. Our rest stops were in the open, so adding or shifting layers in exposed drizzle was as uninviting as staying wet. Eventually, I found an overhanging rock near the trail and stepped out of procession to reconfigure. One of the sweeper guides had to wait while I donned everything I had except the down jacket: gators, cross-country ski pants over the shorts I was wearing, a Polartec vest over my thermal UA and under my damp polypro jacket. With the extra layers and a slight push to regain lost ground, and with no increase in precipitation, I thought I could make it to Shira Camp warm, even if wet.

Joy of joys, the sun greeted us for the last hour – enough time for all the wet clothes to dry out. Plan A ultimately worked. I arrived with all outer layers dry and stowed, wearing just shorts and the thermal Under Armour.

The upward trek to Shira was the end of rain on our journey. During the precipitation our cameras for most part remained stowed. I have no photos from the wet section of trip. We also lost our perspective on the mountain. All we could see was a continuously upward

trail fading away within fifty yards or so. No mountain; no nearby ravines or ridges; no retrospect of progress.

A word about hygiene. Rather than having to squat in the dark over a 6" x 12" hole in the wood floor of a U-shaped enclosure, as we had experienced trailside on Day One, our group enjoyed sitting on a can with a seat within a three-walled zippered enclosure. If the zipper is up, wait your turn. If it is down, you're next! Our most cherished porter, the Potty Porter conscientiously maintained this facility and it was the envy of our every campsite. Since water is limited and showers are not feasible, a supply of alcohol-free wipes is a valuable adjunct to good hygiene. Since wash basins and hot water are provided each morning and before dinner, a large towel and a face cloth also come in handy. I never leave home without a roll of TP in a plastic bag, and Kili is certainly away from home. So I brought a roll of my own even though a supply is provided. I regret to report that Kilimanjaro, besides having some of the most awful latrines in the world, also offers an infinite number of unstructured opportunities for excretion. Virtually all of them have been tried, and the high desert environment does little to compost the results. I have read that the Chinese are building the largest public loo in the world for the Olympics. It can't compare in size with Kili.

#### Day Three Shira camp to Barranco camp

"Asani san, (thank you very much) John, for taking me up the lava tower and for getting me down." Those words to our guide as we hiked were so emotional that they brought a stream of tears that made it difficult for me to see the trail. (My eyes are wet again as I type them.) Lava tower will be the emotional high point of my Kili experience, even if we make the summit.

The tower is a 300' outcrop of lava rising out of a gently sloping plateau. The base of it is 14,600' above sea level, the same elevation as Mount Whitney, the highest I have climbed. In the movie *Kilimanjaro*, one of the participants ropes up and climbs the east face, thoughtlessly sending a rock cascading toward onlookers below. I learned from others who had been to Kili that there is a non-technical scramble route on the north side and I was privately intent on climbing it if my physical condition allowed it.

Day three is the longest day yet of hiking and Lava Tower is the halfway point. As we were approaching the tower, I was in company with Frank, the Boston cop. Now above 14,000', I continued to feel no ill effects. I was not short of breath; my head seemed clear. Partly in jest, I laid my poles end to end and mimicked a sobriety test for Frank to judge, and passed. As I continued to hike, I successfully counted backward from 200 by 13s to test my mental acuity. The vultures circling high above us seemed to pay me little heed. For those three reasons, I decided I should be able to climb the tower. Arriving at the base of it, I asked Jake if he knew of anyone planning to go up. "Moi," he said and I grinned. We prevailed on the other college students, Ryan, Mariah, and Stephanie, to join us. With our guide John leading, we left our six colleagues to rest while we scrambled up the trail to the top of the tower. Pushing the envelope with four college students: it doesn't get much better than that for a geezer!

Just after I passed my “sobriety test” with Frank, he and one of his sons had diverted with a guide, Rick, and John Kascensca on a shorter route down to Barranco camp because Frank and Franny were feeling the altitude. Of those remaining with us, neither Don nor John Armstrong was feeling well. When the five of us reached the overlook on the tower and greeted those below, we were told to return as quickly as possible. Flush with our accomplishment and expecting cheers from our mates, we were mystified by their unenthusiastic response.

It evolved that John Armstrong had begun to vomit soon after we left and his pulse was racing. Dr. Walker was intent on getting him down to Barranco camp. Celia wanted us to remain in a group. As soon as we got off the tower, we left for the next camp. Celia carried John’s pack for him and we hustled down, up, and then down some challenging terrain.

As we approached camp, the beauty of late afternoon sun casting a warm glow on exotic flora and the sudden presence of a river gorge distracted us from our physical weariness. Descending the rocky trail on automatic, I caught sight of a striking blue-green bird on my right. Turning to ask our guide about it, I lost track of my footing and nearly came a cropper. Frantically attempting to recover my balance, I was on the verge of falling among the rocks for about ten yards. I came to a stop, still on my feet, in the grasp of my roommate Don. Hike or watch the birds, Parker: take your choice. As perfectly as the trip was going for me so far, it could easily have come to disaster in that instant.

The bird, it turns out, was worth falling for. The next day we would see one up close: deep iridescent bluish green with an elegant tail feather projecting a foot or more beyond the normal tail. This malachite sunbird feeds on the nectar of a “pineapple cactus” found only on Kilimanjaro. The tail feather is apparently used for balance while perched on the cactus. Celia was able to close to within five feet of it with her camera firing.

Coming into Barranco camp at last, I spotted my tall Swiss friend and stopped to chat. He wondered why we were so late in arriving. His name is Walter and his wife is Susan. They were incredulous when I told them we were going into the crater tomorrow for an ascent to the summit the next day. They should have been incredulous. What I said was gibberish! When I learned of my misconception over tea in our dining tent, I returned to Walter’s campsite to assure them we would remain in company for the next two days to Karanga and Barafu camps, and that after they approached the summit from Barafu in darkness, we would follow them to the crater rim in daylight, camp that night in the crater, and climb to the summit the following day. It is easy to lose track of time on this trip.

On the trail out of Barranco he would invite me to visit them in Switzerland for some local climbing. We know each other by first names only and have exchanged no addresses, but the infeasibility doesn't seem to affect the sincerity of the invitation.

#### Day Four – Barranco camp to Karanga camp

I got up before six at Barranco camp. Dense fog from the night before had cleared and a brilliantly starlit sky silhouetted ridges and peaks on three sides. In the col to the north sat Cassiopeia; above Barranco Wall to the east was Orion's belt; and south over the lights of Moshi the Southern Cross was nestled into the Milky Way. It was a nippy morning for a pre-dawn constitutional on the glorious can in the open-topped enclosure. The frost was heavy; the temperature, probably 25 F. The miniature daisy plants, thistle-like purple clusters, and labilia were all wrapped up in themselves for survival. There's a metaphor!

I am using a down sleeping bag suitable for a light frost, and have a Dacron summer bag in reserve. During the frosty night, I slept in hiking socks, thermal Under Armour shirt, XC ski pants, knit hat, and the summer bag over the feathers. I have found that the best place for a hot Nalgene bottle is high up between my thighs where the femoral arteries can distribute the heat. Hot water in the foot of the bag doesn't work nearly as well.

The sun waited until after breakfast to rise over the wall. The crater cone above the wall looked deceptively close. It was massive and showed lots of ice and snow. The perspective on something that large is hard to grasp. It seems to be within arm's reach. In fact, it rises 6000' above us and remains miles away. The largest free-standing mountain on earth, the cone is perched atop an enormous gently sloping apron. We have not left the apron in three days of travel and won't be on the cone for another two days as we spiral in toward our goal.

The hike today is our shortest yet, only half a day. We scramble up and over the wall, where Lava Tower experience holds the five of us in excellent stead. I feel strong, confident and especially thankful for how well the ascent is going. From the high point on the wall we descend, then climb another ridge, then descend steeply into a valley where we spend a few minutes getting close to the malachite sunbird. From there, Karanga camp is up on a sloping plateau just beyond the steep switch-back leading up from the valley.

Our camp was all set up when we arrived and a warm lunch was ready in the dining tent. Dessert was banana fritters. What delicious food!

The afternoon was leisurely. I adjourned for some journaling in the dining tent where games of chess and gin rummy were underway. Many had retired to individual tents for a nap. The wind was causing the tent walls to flap. I was absently wondering how the flapping could cause my chair to move when it dawned on me that the **GROUND WAS**

MOVING. For about fifteen seconds, my chair oscillated horizontally. Don's wife would report later from home that a Richter 4.2 quake was recorded on Kilimanjaro, according to the BBC. Some of us heard a rumbling as the mountain groaned. Mister Jaro says welcome!

We have been hiking at about 14,000' for a couple days now and I still have suffered no altitude symptoms. Not yet. I am feeling (and smelling) strong. The batteries faded before the pulse oximeter got around to me at tea tonight, but I think I must still be in the mid-nineties.

Just before dinner Walter climbed a challenging quarter mile upslope to our campsite from his to say hello. I introduced him to Peter, who related having been aboard a Swiss train several years ago that was blown off the tracks in a storm and slid on its side thirty meters down slope. Walter remembered the incident. Walter, Peter and I are contemporaries.

It now appears that our group will proceed a mile beyond Barafu camp to a secondary campsite where we won't be kept awake by night hikers departing in the dark for the summit. Therefore, unless we happen to meet on the long climb upward to Barafu camp, this may be my last conversation with Walter. He mentioned again that I should visit them in Switzerland.

My tent mate Don remained in the tent during dinner, unable to eat. His headache has improved, but he is nauseous and has now developed diarrhea. For the last two days he has hiked with little or no food. He has started taking Diamox as the three Armstrongs have been doing for two days. They are feeling much improved.

Some say there was another quake in the evening, but I missed it. The sky, though, was brilliant with stars and the lights of some town (Is it still Moshi?) are visible below. The cone still looks close enough to touch, but it remains far away and a mile above us yet. By tomorrow afternoon we will be southeast of the crater, poised to climb the cone at last. Our old volcanic friend Mount Meru to our west will have moved out of sight behind the Kili cone.

Day Five – Karanga camp to High Barafu camp

The next camp has no water. Our erstwhile porters descend off the plateau to the Karanga water supply to load up enough for two days and then overtake us on the way to Barafu camp. (Half the camp will remain set up at Barafu to provide a warm lunch in our descent from the summit.) My, oh my!

I had several hours of good sleep. Don awoke feeling like a new man and ready for breakfast, though he only consumed a bowl of oatmeal, while most of us wolfed down, in addition, bacon and eggs, toast, short bananas, fruit juice and hot drinks.

We began again the pole – pole shuffle for the long haul up another volcanic plateau. Dipping down to cross a wide valley, we then climbed steeply to another ridge rising slowly upward toward the Kili cone. From this new ridge we had a whole new vista eastward that was dominated by Mount Mawenzi, the main feature on the east side of Kili. This striking volcano has multiple steep peaks that look like they were formed with wet sand raining down from a giant hand. In fact, the rock is so friable on the peaks that several climbers have died trying to climb them and they are now closed.

We made a turn to the north on his new ridge and proceeded straight through Barafu camp from which most climbers on this route make their final assault on the summit. From Barafu camp we continued for a mile steeply up the ridge to a small plateau where our camp had been set up.

Back at the first height of land out of Karanga Walter and Susan appeared again before we descended across the valley. There I learned that he and Susan had lived six years in Cameroon building a technical college. They became good friends with a tribal chief who presided over a tribe of 60,000. When it was time to return to Switzerland, the chief made them honorary tribal members and gifted them land for a holiday home. Walter has obtained permission from Tanzania to retrieve a stone from the highest point in Africa to present as a gift to the tribal chief.

I am experiencing an unusual degree of emotion on this journey. I am euphoric at remaining still free of any altitude sickness. I wept when thanking John for the Tower climb. And I found that I could not relate Walter's story to Peter without choking up. What's happening to my New England stoicism?

About an hour after most of us completed the difficult last pitch above Barafu, Don arrived, propelled only by one bowl of gruel and enormous heart. Another emotional moment was greeting him as he arrived and welcoming him to the most magnificent tent site in Africa. We look out our front entrance to Mt. Mawenzi. Now we can see the route we will follow from here to the crater rim. Tomorrow, we will crest the crater and descend into the caldera itself for the night. Our porters will travel light, but will still carry tents, some personal gear, and enough food to serve dinner and breakfast in the crater.

I am having an experience that was unimaginable. How will I possibly share this in my life at home with colleagues and family?

Our Barafu camp is perched on a moderately flat prominence projecting over a huge valley between two ridges, each leading up to the crater rim. Across the valley from our ridge is the one followed by the Coca Cola route, the shortest approach to the summit, now visible to Mount Mawenzi and beyond. The jagged Mawenzi dominates our eastward view. The mighty cone of Kilimanjaro looms more upward than in any cardinal direction, though it is now northwest of us.

The “step” from Barafu camp to ours is a significant first phase for those stalwarts who will start their summit climb at midnight. Potentially hiking in severe cold, they will arrive at our camp at about 0100 conversing like migrating geese. They’ll continue another four hours in darkness and cold to the rim next to Stella Point, then proceed clockwise around the rim to arrive at Uhuru, the summit, near the time of sunrise. That’s only the beginning. They will retrace their steps to Barafu camp, a rigorous test of one’s knees, have a hot meal, and then descend for six more hours to Mweka camp in the rain forest. In doing so, they will have traversed all five climate zones in a single day. That is a physical challenge I am glad not to be facing.

We, on the other hand, will be light-ported up the same route – less the distance from the main Barafu to our Barafu. At the eastern rim, instead of climbing around the crater, we will descend to the crater floor and traverse to Crater camp near the western breach. From there, a trail leads back up to the rim near the summit. We will spend the night at 19,000’ before ascending. Then, relatively fresh, we will nearly duplicate the descent of the night climbers. We will stop short of Mweka camp and stay at Millennia camp still in the heath zone adjacent to the rain forest. The extra day this route requires pays for itself in warmth and visibility, say nothing of sleeping the night at 19,000 feet.

#### Day Six – Barafu camp to Crater camp

We sent off our porters with little more than our sleeping bags, ground pads, and pee bottles in our personal duffel. They also loaded the tents, pads, food, cooking and eating utensils, half the usual table, chairs, the potty, and the cooking and dining tents for our dinner and breakfast. I opted to send my gaitors for the dusty descent and my down jacket for the cold night. I prepared for the potential cold enroute with a Goretex raincoat, polypro ski jacket, polartec vest, UA thermal jersey, shorts, XC pants and windproof pants. We were told to bring a balaclava, ski goggles and mittens in case we run into snow at altitude. Mine was an excellent arrangement. I was constantly adding and removing layers with changing conditions, but I was never uncomfortable and I took advantage of significant heat from the sun.

Even at 16,000’, our starting elevation, I remain wonderfully free of altitude symptoms, maintaining a pole-pole pace and staying well within my comfort range.

Our climb was up the eastern slope with the morning sun beating against the black volcanic gravel. I started in shorts and wicking jersey under a wicking T shirt [The bride wore a sequined gown of lace over a taffeta bodice.] and it was just right for the first half. As we approached the glacial neighborhood and the wind increased, I added layers, exchanged ski cap for ball cap, and mittens for gloves. My Maine winter experimentation in layering was fruitful beyond words.

The trail was almost entirely gravel and steep. Downhikers were supposed to be north of us on a one-way trail but we encountered several descending the up trail, either from turning back before reaching the rim, or being unaware of the traffic pattern. Squishing into the loose gravel they were raising the dust of a posse. One such tired-looking dog

was Walter. His eyes brightened when he saw us. He said convincingly that Susan had fared better than he, but that he had reached the summit and acquired his gift rock. We congratulated them, they wished us well, and we saw the last of each other. Walter fortified my resolve.

We rested frequently on the relentless upward trudge. In preference to following another's footsteps, I would often deviate from the procession to maintain my own cadence. I would not climb faster that way, but I would avoid the herky-jerky pace of serial ascent. The incline of the cone was about 45 degrees with many switchbacks to keep the climb manageable. I concentrated on staying within myself and felt comfortable with my physiologic response. I felt tolerable fatigue and continued to be free of altitude sickness all the way to the crater rim. What a gift that was!

Others were facing harsher demons. Frank and Franny Armstrong had responded to Diamox and were fatigued but free of nausea. Don, dehydrating and having eaten little in the past three days, remained doggedly determined. Peter was very tired. All of them were moving slower than pole – pole.

The Lava Tower crew plus John Armstrong arrived first, with great relief and celebration, at the crater rim. Though not the summit, this was a peak of emotion and relief. We had reached the high point of the day in two dimensions. The youngest and the oldest arrived together. For the Tower team it was another jewel in the crown. For John it was a celebration of recovery. At Lava Tower, he was suffering from the altitude. Now, nearly 6000' higher, he was in the van, where he would remain.

We waited a half hour for Rick, Celia, Peter, Dawson and Lazaro, the arrival of whom was documented with still and video cameras. Rick remained to greet the last contingent. The rest of us departed for Crater camp before they came into sight.

The caldera was notable for its snow cover and bright sunshine. Glaciers could be seen in most directions, but the crater floor – perhaps 2.5 miles across – was a snowfield two feet deep and firm. Skate skis would have provided rapid and exhilarating conveyance to camp. But alas, we had to walk.

We entered over the southeastern lip of the crater rim. Camp was near the western end where the rim had been breached by glacial erosion. The southern rim to our left included the peak, Uhuru. Our camp was ready for us at the foot of a steep amphitheater covered 60% in snow. The snowfield bordered our camp to the north; Furtwangler Glacier, what is left of it, was a buttress of green and white ice half a mile across the snowfield. It was a glorious camp and we were fed well. (Between Karanga and Barafu camps, a porter team had descended to retrieve extra fresh produce.)

Before dinner, I hiked back to greet Don and Frank, who arrived eventually with noble John (noble because he stayed with Frank day after day to keep his pace slow and manageable) and our third guide Reggie. They were tired but well. Peter, ahead of them, was also very tired and this would become a complication on summit day.

No one slept well at 19,000'. It was a frigid, clear night. Most of us panted in the morning from minimal exertions, such as putting on our boots. Still, I was having no real altitude symptoms, though I spent all night feeling a vague discomfort with breathing. Symptoms aside, the dry and often dusty conditions we encountered created cement-like accretions in my nostrils halfway to my ethmoid sinuses! On this day my morning blow caused a bleed in my right nostril so I had to take care of that before getting started. It was not an issue, but on the day after our dusty descent I blew a hole in my other nostril. Red cement.

Morning gruel, hot drinks, toast and bacon and eggs got most of us going. In spite of the initial cold, the equatorial sun was up and warming fast. I dressed again for heat with the same layers in reserve as yesterday and stayed perfectly comfortable, adjusting layers as needed.

Breakfast, the sun and the activity of breaking camp restored our energy at least to the preceding day's level. We set out to climb the bowl to the crater rim about 0900. The snow masked enough of the switchbacks to make navigation difficult for the guides and, I think, more dangerous than our leaders admitted. In essence, we climbed a 400 foot gravel pit with partial snow cover and considerable potential for dislodging rock or ice onto someone below.

We suffered no such catastrophe and reached the rim from which the summit was visible. As with yesterday's arrival on the crater rim, there was much celebration. All but Peter seemed to feel well. Peter was closer to exhaustion than I realized until later. Panning counterclockwise from the southern rim, we could see again our old friend Mount Meru to the southwest, a huge face of glacier on the cone to the south, Mount Mawenzi to the east beyond Stella Point where we entered the caldera, the huge crater rim and glaciation opposite us extending from E to NW, and the missing section of the rim called the Western Breach adjoining the portion of the rim we had just climbed. (A once popular access to the summit, this route was closed after three Americans from the Appalachian Mountain Club died there in a rock fall in 2006. Like Mawenzi, snow and ice have retreated and the rock is now friable and unstable on that route.)

The conditions on the rim were clear and sunny, shorts weather for sure. It stayed fair at the summit even though there were clouds near us that would follow us down. We were trekking on firm snow all the way to the summit and on down to Stella Point.

All fourteen of us were giddy on the summit from the paucity of oxygen and the sense of accomplishment. Lots of hugs and photos went on and on, but Peter was exhausted and needed attention. From the summit on down, he would require two escorts and oxygen. Jake would carry his pack.

After about an hour, with our guide John in the lead and our objective tucked safely in our back pocket, we began our descent. A warm meal awaited us at Barafu Camp after which we trudged numbly down to our last campsite, Millennium. There we paid farewell

next morning to our porters, the gentlemen who had made our success possible, and never saw them again. Our duffle was stashed on the bus when we reached Mweka Gate and our porters had dispersed, perhaps returning home or making their way back to Machame Gate for the start of another ascent. Our guides, John, Reggie and Lazaro stayed with us for one last meal together at the hotel in Moshi, where we reflected on our accomplishment and received summing certificates.

What's next? Life is short.



*Mike Parker came from Pittsfield, Maine, to work at Porky Gulch for Joe Dodge in 1957 and returned to run the storehouse in the succeeding two years. After graduating from Dartmouth on a Navy scholarship, he entered the Navy as an Ensign in '64. Following a year in Saigon on Vadm Zumwalt's staff, he left the Navy for Tufts Dental School in Boston. He then returned as a dentist with postings in Brunswick, ME; Edzell, Scotland; Bethesda, MD, and Bangor, WA, where he retired from the Navy as a Captain with 30 years of service. As a civilian, he practiced dentistry for a dozen years in South Portland, ME until he retired altogether in 2007, a month after climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. He now resides with his wife, Carolyn, in Gorham, ME, chasing skiable snow in winter, mountain peaks and whitewater in summer.*