

Climb Kili for Tumaini - Success!

Written by Administrator

Monday, 16 January 2012 10:30 - Last Updated Monday, 16 January 2012 15:43



(Michael & Mark before the climb)

So, what has changed in 12 months in our village and at the orphanage?

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Our little village, Usa River, has grown incredibly since I was last here. Previously there were two small shops and roughly 15 houses between the orphanage and the Nairobi-Arusha Highway.

Now, there are over a dozen stores, including a barber store, a small pharmacy and possibly 50 houses with more still being built. The rapid increase the number of people living in the

area has put a strain on water supplies, with the frequency and duration of shortages increasing since last year. The electricity situation is still poor; however we now have a generator

to use during outages, although with the ever increasing price of fuel here, even use of the generator is becoming even more costly.

It was heart-warming to be recognised by locals from last year, often speaking to me with such excitement that their native Swahili became a language made of one 2 minute word, told through an ear to ear smile.

For our children it has been a huge year, everyone is a bit taller, baby teeth becoming wobblier and the hand-me-down clothes have made another cycle. 8 of the children commenced private school for the first time and one student, Gerehad (6) even being moved to a class above his age, such is his improvement. We have two at university in Dar Es Salaam now, with Raymond also preparing to sit his finals for high school this year.

Liadi (3) arrived at Tumaini last year, not speaking Swahili or English at all. He now has fluency in both that would rival kids far older than him in any part of the world. All of the children are reading with ever increasing complexity and maths books have moved from simple addition

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toward measurement, area and algebra. For our three children who are HIV+, all are in great health, with Mary no longer taking any medication because her CD4 counts have improved out of sight.

Unfortunately for Daniel (6) we had to inform him that his mother had died of complications from HIV/AIDS early in December, it was a pretty tough few days, particularly with the Christmas in sight for many of the kids.

With preparations for Christmas in full swing by mid December, we were busy with renovations to a new classroom and the epic task of sorting and wrapping gifts for over 40 children that had been donated from North America, Europe and Australia.

After the children had all been put to bed on Christmas Eve, we began to cart the hundreds of gifts over from the guest house and placed them beneath our Christmas tree, which had been beautifully decorated by the children. It was a surreal feeling standing there after we had arranged the presents, the anticipation, knowing that within a few hours, there would be mass excitement and joy as the kids came downstairs.

As Christmas morning arrived, mayhem erupted, the kids couldn't believe that the presents had appeared during the night, with a Christmas stocking for each child hanging from the wall. My host father, Oddo, played Santa as the presents were distributed to everyone. If you imagine a Christmas morning in Australia, kids receiving PlayStations, the latest bikes and electronic toys, you'd be amazed when you see the sheer joy expressed on the faces of the children when they found new pencils, plastic jewellery, footballs and new clothes. For the local staff who work at Tumaini, it was also a treat with new clothes for their own kids, beautifully coloured fabrics and packets of Tim Tam's. Although far from home, it was definitely one of my best Christmas

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experiences yet.

Mark and I left for Moshi on Boxing Day, where we would start our Kilimanjaro climb the following day. Views of the mountain as we drove away from the village filled us with nervous excitement and we joked about what celebrations at the summit would be most suitable. The pros and cons of everything from streaking, to setting off illegal fireworks was explored. We left the following morning in a group of 5, with 2 girls from Melbourne and an American guy joining us. The start of the climb was very busy and by the end of the third hour it had started to rain already. The lower part of the mountain is lush jungle, not what you expect for a mountain climb, however the terrain began thin out markedly by the time we reached our first camp, some 6 hours later.

We were told to expect some rain, however the word some seemed to be used loosely, as it rained everyday for the next 5 days. Our gear was constantly damp and cold, tents often pooled water with our sleeping bags happy to soak up any extra water during the middle of the night. Anything that became wet, would stay wet for the rest of the climb. After making camp on Day 3 at Barranco (3950m) I became extremely unwell, relentless vomiting, nausea, headaches, shivers, sweats....I was certain I would not be able to climb the following morning. Thanks to some nausea medication that dissolves under your tongue (courtesy of Melbourne climber Catherine) I managed to take on some water and rest. Our group remained in good spirits, as we ascended to the formidable 400m high Barranco Wall on Day 4. We reached our final camp Barafu (4600m) on New Year's Eve and thanks to an impromptu party held by our guide and our porters after we went to bed, nobody in our group or the entire camp got much sleep. We got up at 10pm to begin our final 7hr ascent to Uhuru Peak, buoyed by the singing of our guides and their gin fuelled laughter. I wasn't sure if having guides that had been drinking was a good idea, but after 250 climbs, I trusted Gilbert, our head guide completely.

The first hour of the ascent was pleasant, just above 0°C with a slight breeze. Summit, easy, I

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thought. Then came the wind, then the rain, then the ice. Even with 4 layers of clothing and thermals, I've never felt so cold before. Pins and needles ran up my arms, my hands numb and a walk slowly turned into a shuffle. The higher we climbed, the more unforgiving the storm became, with the wind chill moving past -15

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C. I don't really remember trying to walk, I simply leant forward and hoped that each leg would faithfully obey.

At each break, we would collapse behind rocks and try to shield ourselves from the wind, which grew even colder as we continued to climb. I don't remember much of the final hours of the climb, my altitude sickness had worsened and I was feeling utterly exhausted. As we approached the sign at the Summit, the biggest rush of relief set in. I'd had this idyllic view of how peaceful the summit would be and how I would reflect on the climb while sitting there, however I was so unwell I couldn't even take my own camera from its bag, nor turn it on when the guides had it out. Like friends at home in Perth, hours earlier, I'd managed to start the New Year by vomiting on myself.

Our group of 5 was the first to summit in 2012, at 5.45am on January 1st. We reached Uhuru Peak with the very first streak of red streaming from the horizon. Our guides had made a cloth sign with everyone's names on it and had tied it to the official summit sign, meaning our names would be in every single photo taken by climbers that day, provided nobody climbed up to cut it off. As we finished our photos and began walking down, the curve of the sun began to appear, although some 15 degrees below zero, we seemed instantly warmer by the sight of it alone. The descent provided no relief, with my altitude sickness progressing to almost full blown paraplegia. I (embarrassingly) needed two guides to help me walk down, one arm around each. It was an awful position to be in, I needed to get to lower altitudes to rest, however with frequent stops to drink or vomit, the latter following the former, it seemed to take an eternity to walk down our first camp. After taking some water and a little rest, we continued on a steep 8hr descent to the Mweka Gate, where we would finish our climb.

I was extremely lucky to have the group that I did, Brian, May, Catherine, Mark and of course our guide Gilbert and his team. Without them, I doubt whether I would've made it through my first bout of sickness, let alone the treacherous 7hr climb to Uhuru Peak on the final day. I'm extremely proud of myself for finishing the climb, however, if given those conditions again, I'd politely decline a return to Kilimanjaro. It is by far, the most difficult thing I've ever done and at

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the same time, the best thing I've ever done.

To our sponsors of the climb, who generously donated for the wonderful children of Tumaini, thank you. The fruits of your generosity will continue to grow every day within our children as they progress through school and hopefully enter university, not only for their own betterment, but for the good of the millions of people who live in poverty within Tanzania. At last count, we've raised almost \$8400 for the orphanage, so again, thank you.

Michael McCann.

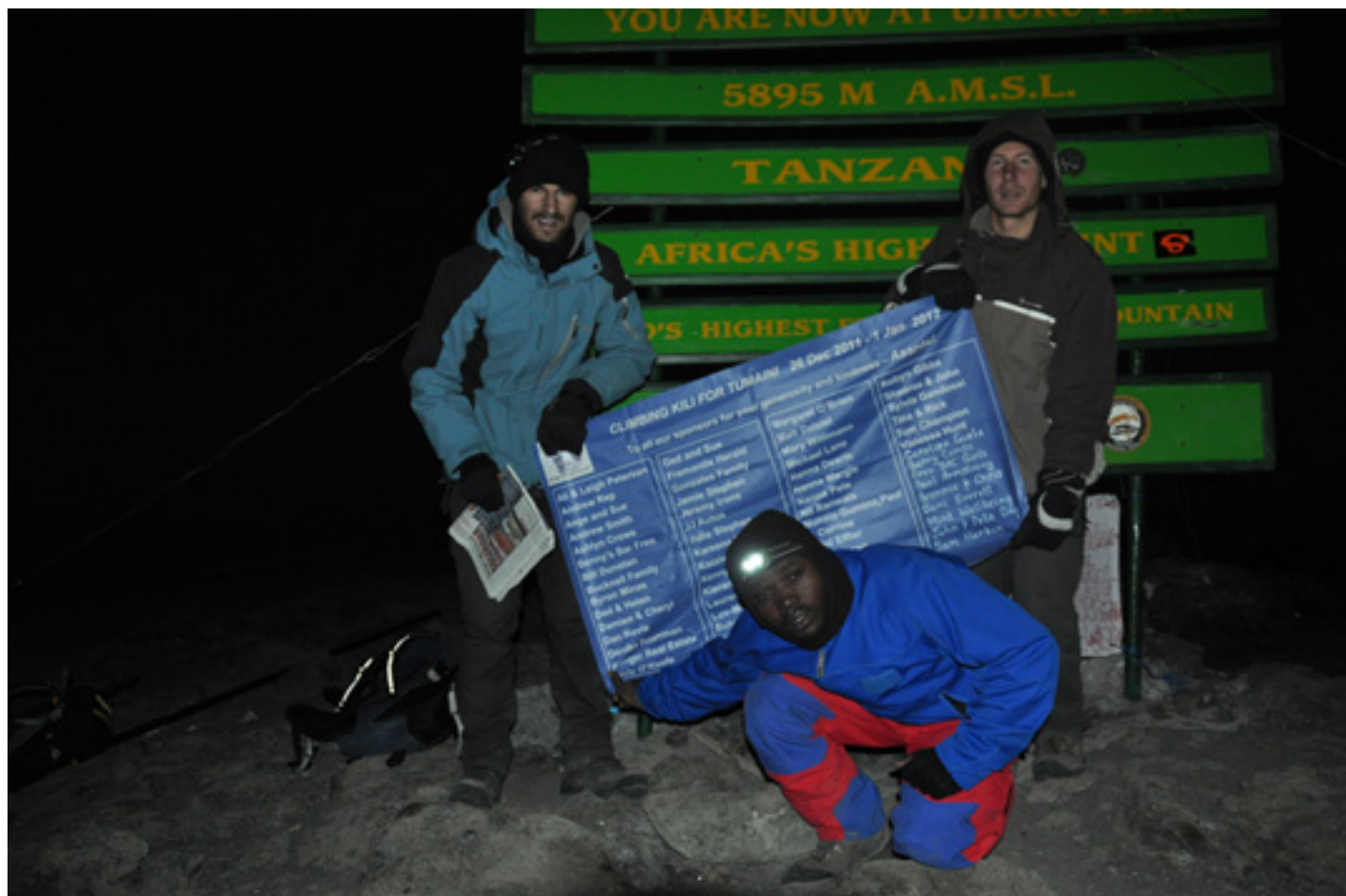


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Taken from Barranco Camp (3950m)



Made it to the roof of Africa! (Michael (left) Mark (right) Gilbert (Center)

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A big "Thank you!" to all those that supported the children through the climb.