

## July 2003

July started right in the middle of the Serengeti – there we were still camping out in the middle of nowhere but suddenly there were another couple of groups with us – Germans and Dutch who were very much as you would imagine but kept themselves to themselves pretty much.

This was our second night at this campsite and we had the usual “group” visit to the loos just as we were getting ready for bed – at the ultra-late time of 8.30pm (somehow despite the fact that we weren’t getting up all that early we were all still going to bed early) – so there we were – I woke the following morning and knew that I had heard a minor stampede of wildebeest but not much else .... Or so I thought – Jim and Anita had gotten up in the middle of the night and foolishly meandered over to the loos despite being told not to as it was close to the water where the lions come at night to drink.... On their way back they suddenly realized that there were lions in the site and very near to where they were – I can only imagine how fast and quietly they got back into their tents and how long it took them to get back to sleep.

We had another day in the Serengeti and then we headed off towards Oldavai Gorge - the birthplace of civilization, where all the skeletons and footprints of early man have been found – it was quite a place to go to thinking about how much history there has been there and just how far back it goes. After that we went into a Masai Village for about an hour to do a somewhat touristy meet and greet – they still live as they ever have – in small huts covered in cow dung living off the blood and milk of cows – yick. They were not exactly a handsome bunch of people but definitely striking !



Traditional Masai greeting – singing and jumping  
- the men did it first and then the women did it – it was funny to watch Niall try to jump as high as the Masai

We then went off to the Ngorongoro basin - the permit is only for 24 hr stretches and they are dead mean about it so we had to be extra clear on timings – we went to the campsite – which was at around 3000m and pitched tents – it was cold cold cold – very little staying up late that night – needless to say the site was packed but amazingly most groups were really quiet and sleep was not hard – although we did have zebras run through our tents at around 3am ! We woke at 5am to eat breakfast and get all packed up – tents and all, to be met by the Land Rovers at 6.15am. We drove up to the edge of the basin catching sunrise over the crater edge which was a lot washed out and pretty cloudy. The ride down into the crater was much longer than I thought it would be – it’s lower down than it looks ! We drove most of the morning trying to find some of the rarer animals that we hadn’t seen before – saw more of what we had seen – the really good spotting for us was the black Rhino (and baby) somewhat in the distance and we watched three lions stalking zebras for about half an hour (they eventually got bored) – I particularly liked the lake of flamingoes and there were even some white ones



– and the Hippo pit had some gorgeous storks and heron at the other end of it (they must have no sense of smell !) although I still can't get around to liking hippos – they lay about all day and poo in the water, occasionally trun over or their absolute favourite is to spin their tails wildy whilst pooing. Yeuck. Anyway we had lunch by a pretty lake and then hot-foot it out of the basin getting to the gate about 5 minutes before our 24 hours were up – as we were there with the paperwork the others who were about 10 minutes late were let off ! – So onwards and downwards to the campsite where we could lie about in relative luxury after a warm shower (and some clothes cleaning) and drink beer ! We had a couple and then I wrote postcards – Lucy wrote some of them so I have no idea who will be talking to me when I get home...

The following day was basically traveling back to Moshi including a stop in the Masai market where I couldn't find anything that really interested me to buy so I came back empty handed ... then we went to drop the others off to go on to the airport – needless to say their hotel was a whole lot fancier than the one that we ended up in ! Goodbyes were said and we all parted.



Serengeti Sunset

We ended up at our hotel early evening and caught up on getting ready – un-and re-packing stuff that we'd used on the safari but didn't need hiking up Kilimanjaro. In the evening we met the rest of the group who were joining us – a mother and daughter a doctor and a Canadian. As ever the weather was over cast and we were wondering whether we would ever get a view of the mountain. I started to get sick at this point and was struggling to keep food in me – but Niall agreed the best thing to do was to let all the bugs just go through me. We also heard about the previous group that had just made the attempt – less than half of them actually made it to the top – we were all starting to get worried at this point.

Early the next morning we got rid of our other bags and got onto the bus in the rain. At the bottom of the mountain we signed in – still in the pouring rain and we met our main guide (God Living – no kidding that's his name – he even signed my certificate) and the porters, about 20 of them to carry all our stuff and food ! So – there we were – we started on our hike up the mountain in the pouring rain – Niall had a couple of spare Ponchos so we spread them around the group

they were great but I had too many clothes on so get wet anyway. We walked up through the soggy, slightly muddy rainforest, which was almost like going through a hidden forest with the cloud so low. Lunch was packed sandwiches and fruit and then we hiked a whole bunch further – being lacking in food I was struggling quite a bit and was at the back the whole time – but still made it to the huts around 30 minutes behind the main group – we bagged our huts – I was sharing with Lucy and Jeremy and Fen – Jeremy had the top bunk and we stuck all our stuff at the bottom – it was hard to get everything in as we were trying to let some of our wetter clothes drip also. Food was in a large hut across the way – very slippery wood all around and I was glad to rest – the rest of the group went for a walk to see a volcanic crater – but with the dreadful weather the visibility was so bad that they saw absolutely nothing while I slept! Dinner very average and bed around 8pm. We climbed around 1000 m and walked about 8 miles today.

Early the next morning had breakfast and packed our stuff up and on our way again – once more in the pouring rain – we stomped past the rain forest into the savannah area where there had obviously been some large fires as there were so many bushes that were burnt badly. Eventually at around midday we stopped at a lunch stop just as we came out of the clouds – it was glorious and sunny and what's more we finally had a view of the mountain which looked a long way away still (oh yes – and pretty tall too !). The rest of the afternoon was walking on the track through the scrub and many of the others went ahead to grab decent huts – Jeremy and I meandered along enjoying the weather. We got to the huts around 3pm – it was difficult to dry anything as some of the people who had gotten there earlier took up all the available drying space, friendly eh ! We had climbed around 1100 m and 12 miles this day. We found a stream and lay by the stream in the sun reading, which was very civilized and pleasant. Dinner was pretty average again and I was in bed around 7.30pm. I had the worst night in a very long time – nothing would stay in and I got another attack of Giardia and was throwing up half of the night too – by the time I got to a point where I could go back to bed and sleep it was around 3am and I was totally exhausted.

The next day was an acclimatization day - everybody who wasn't suffering from altitude sickness went for a 600m climb to the saddle to look at Marangu peak – another crater nearby – I managed to crawl out of bed and to do a small stagger up about 150 m to the Zebra rocks – I started with Jill but she felt pretty ill as we went up so she dropped back and I struggled in the heat with the really sweet guide who was assigned the slow-pokes ! The afternoon was relaxing again and usual average food before crawling into bed. The following morning I bit the bullet and took a strong antibiotic as I wasn't going to make it up in the state that I was in ! Packed up and off at 8am – weather was a little overcast but perked up as we walked – I actually felt pretty good and stomped pretty well – it was not tough walking – we went up around 1000m again the terrain was pretty much just like a wild desert – sandy-ish with a lot of rocks. So we stomped around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way before lunchtime and then got to the huts around 1pm – I was even in the second group – not at the back for a change !



The last toilet and the peak of Kili in the background of the picture – it was already pretty cold at this point and although it was sunny we were in fleeces at midday !

So – a quick look at the peak and the almost vertical face up to it before we all piled into bed and tried to get some sleep. Back up around 5pm for 'dinner' which was basically tons and tons of potatoes in something that looked like a soup but there was very little of the sauce and it was mostly carbs that we were given. I stuffed as much as I could in as I was miles behind on the carb packing and then went back to bed at 6pm. It was still bright but the air was getting thin and

my heart rate was noticeably higher than before. A couple of people started to get worse headaches and nausea at this point.

We slept until 11pm (complete with water bottles, cameras and anything else that needed to be kept warm in our sleeping bags) got up and packed and then started on our way. Basically most of the first 6 hours were up a scree slope so were mostly zig-zagging through this – wasn't sure about the top – it just looked like a bunch of big rocks.... So there we were, in almost all of our clothes and it was pitch black – I stomped in behind the leader and just stomped one foot in front of the other. After the first 3 hours we had split into three groups – one guy had had to go back and there were two other groups further back that were just going very slowly – both groups had problems with breathing, headaches and dizziness. We stopped at 5150m at a small cave called Hans Meyer's cave (he was the first European to climb Kili) where we rested and realized that it was indeed very cold. Starting up again and a couple of the people in our group got pretty sick and we had to stop every 15 minutes or so from then on whilst one guy vomited. I looked directly up a couple of times and thought I saw the stars – only when I saw them move did I realize that they were people that were ahead of us on the slopes and they were quite a way almost directly above us – I didn't look up again as it was very dis-heartening to see just how much further UP we had to climb and just kept on stomping. About 150 m from the top the scree disappeared and it was basically rock scrambling up the top part – but boy was it good to scramble over the last bit and to see the sign 'Gilman's Point 5650m'.

We stopped there for an extremely civilized tea and biscuits waiting for the others and watching the sunrise over the clouds, by this time it was 6.30am – truly beautiful.



Sunrise



Gilman's with peak behind

Jeremy, Lucy and I were up at Gilman's at pretty much the same time so we walked to the peak together – there is not much air at this height so the walk around the crater edge to get to the real peak (200 m higher) was a real struggle scrambling over the rocks and just finding it tough. We walked past the glacier, the ash pit and through the snow to the peak.



Lucy and me at the top



Cloud walking

There were a lot of people at the peak and it was extremely cold so we snapped off a couple of very fast shots before fingers froze and we came back down. I put my leg brace on at this point as my knee was already starting to hurt – even though I had climbed all the time with poles (amazing things – worth every penny !) – the way back to Gilman's Point wasn't too bad but it was at Gilman's Point when I realized that the reason that we climbed at night was if we had attempted it during the day and actually seen what it was that we were attempting we would never have made it as it was sooooo steep.



### **This is the descent**

The rocks at the top were ok but the scree terrified me and I tried sliding down it for awhile with the guide holding my shoulder but I knocked my knee badly so went back to zig-zagging. About ½ hr later I got some confidence back and put him on my injured knee side and went for it – it was a lot easier and we managed to get down an awful lot quicker.... Lunch at the hut at around 1pm – soup and then we walked back into clouds to the Horombo huts.

I waited for the person at the back so she wouldn't have to walk on her own but she barely spoke to me and she stomped off when I stopped to put my waterproofs on so I wished I hadn't made the effort by the end of it. The weather closed in and was pretty miserable – thank goodness it was lovely on the peak. Back to the huts around 5pm had dinner and went to bed a little tired. Today we climbed 1100m, descended 2200 m and walked around 17 miles and were up for around 19 hours.

The following morning was just a steady walk back to the base – it was overcast but not raining and we walked all the way back through the different types of vegetation in reverse – lunch was at the first huts and we indulged ourselves and had a coke each (it is after all the “Coca-Cola” route) – so meandered the rest of the way down and got to the bottom around 3pm. We had certificates for those that made it – and a great song from the porters to wish us well – they had been an amazing group and everybody had their own great story to tell about the guide that was with them on the final ascent. So – into the bus and back to the hotel and showers and cleaning clothes and beers! Relaxed night and a dreamlike quality to it as I still couldn't believe that I'd made it up to the top – with the knee and being so ill and there being a 60% failure rate I was pretty shocked! The following day was a made-up tour of some great waterfalls including one which some of us climbed sort-of up into which was very cool and some ‘banana beer’ – foul-smelling fermented something-or-other. Lunch was really hard to find but eventually we had it in some tiny back-of-nowhere place where Niall went into the kitchen and pointed a lot to get us some food. We had cooked green bananas which were great. Back into Moshi to do some shopping and to try to get some money and stamps and then back to the hotel – there is a little shop just down from the hotel so most of us bought from there. We had called KLM and got our tickets changed to Saturday evening so winged it – packed up and left getting a ride to the airport – we were supposed to pay a change fee of \$35 but there was nobody at the ticket counter so we just marched up to the medallion desk and got seats – easy-peasy. Had a beer in the departure lounge and bought a couple of tee-shirts. Flight stopped in Dar-Es-Salaam.

Landed in Amsterdam Sunday morning early and decided to go into the town for a walk – so hopped a train and walked for an hour around the old town and then came back in. Said our goodbyes at Heathrow airport and Lucy and Jeremy went off to his parents and I went to mine. Suffice it to say that my second stay (without friends there) was far less pleasant and I got the very first train out the following morning to get to Gatwick. The flight home was uneventful and I was just so glad to be back – I stayed at work for a couple of hours and then went home to get cleared up.

Whilst I was away I had gotten somebody around to re-finish my floors and I was expecting it to be under 2 inches of dust but it looked great and I was mighty relieved that I didn't have to clean up as soon as I got home. The following day I went to work and around 3pm I picked up Suzy from the airport as she had come to stay for 10 days to supervise the re-building of my garden. We had a lazy evening chilling out and catching up. The next few days were spent getting Oscar to come around and do some work which was very frustrating because despite having told him 3 times he hadn't got anybody ready to work on the garden – eventually he got a small digger and got one of his guys to spend the whole day on Saturday digging the garden and flattening it so that it wasn't so mountainous – this was funny as he had totally no clue how to work the machine at first (he had to stand on the back to drive it) and then he got cocky and over-filled the bucket a couple of times landing head first down the precipice that is the back end of my garden



– Suzy and I went out and bought a whole bunch of garden furniture from Wal-Mart and felt loads better about it actually getting somewhere when we got back and it looked different ! Saturday night we went out with Sheena and a buddy of mine from work John and his friend Ryan – went to Moe's and Joe's drank pitchers of beer and then went to Blind Willie's to listen to House-Rocker Johnson who was awesome although I am still somewhat dubious about the whole "playing-the-guitar-with-his-teeth" routine that he did. We didn't manage to get home until 3am. Sunday we picked up Dick (my mad diving buddy) from the airport on his way to a conference in Athens and had lunch together and then took him to the Marta station to catch his bus and then we went Tubing down the river from Helen with John and Maxine – it was a complete blast and despite it being a little cool we had so much fun bouncing off the rocks and each other.

The rest of the week was mad as I drove with a co-worker to Ohio Tuesday evening back Wednesday – a mere 1025 miles round trip ..... Wednesday night was sat about until 2am with Suzy talking about the Instant Messenger proposal she had had from her boyfriend and the rest of the week was trying to work out how we could get Oscar to do some work for us – Thursday we went to see the Georgia Shakespeare Company's version of "Cymbeline" – it was amazingly well done and we were very impressed indeed. Sadly Suzy had to leave on Friday ☹ so I took her to the airport and waved her off – I'd had so much fun having her around and just chilling – it made me realize how much I missed my girlfriends back in England.

Friday Night I went for dinner with Ben and Stacey and somehow acquired an almost-new dryer from it – hoorah – I was looking for a second-hand one for ages. I picked up my friend Jon from the airport late and we went for a swift beer – Saturday we went for a walk, caught up with a couple of his friends (he used to live in Atlanta but now lives in Mass) and then had a BBQ in the garden where John and Kath (more mad Brits) came – I haven't seen them for a year since they

moved to Spain so I was thrilled to see them again and a couple of other guys came round and we had a great evening once we could get the BBQ going ! Sunday was spent pottering around – picking up the dryer from Stacey and Ben’s and installing it – dinner with the usual suspects at a Thai place (PHO #79) which was hard to find as there were PHO 1-90 all around us. Jon’s plane was very early on Monday so I had to get up at ungodly-o’clock to get him there.

And finally, my oldest friend from school (we’ve known each other since we were 10) was getting married on the 31<sup>st</sup> July in Birmingham (Alabama) – she was the physically closest friend that I had when I moved to Atlanta, and that is over 2 hours away. I hot-foot it from work, and helped by the time-zone change made it in time to go with her and her kids to the Botanical gardens where Eric’s father performed the ceremony.



It was a lovely wedding – the ‘boys’ (Eric and the boys ) were in white suits and Kate and Eric’s daughter were in bright colours. It was a small affair but full of fun and happiness – it was really nice to be there – I baby-sat Kate’s kids for the rest of the evening after an enormous wedding meal in the local Chinese and was up at pre sparrow-fart in the morning on Friday to get to work.

And **that** was my July !