

Call of the Mountain

Journey to Kilimanjaro



There is something about the outdoors that draws me to it like nothing else I know. I simply can't wait to return to the serenity and beauty that the wilderness holds. Recently I was fortunate enough to lead a trek in East Africa. Our ultimate goal was to climb Africa's highest peak – Mount Kilimanjaro. At 4895m above sea level this free standing volcano is both impressive and daunting at the same time.

Our party of 10 was well supported on the trek with a local climbing team consisting of 40 well trained guides and porters. In no time at all any fear or trepidation that we may have had was put to rest as the camaraderie and obvious experience of our support team came into play.

Our trek was over 8 days – 6 ½ up and 1 ½ down in its most simple terms. The terrain itself was moderate in terms of difficulty however it was not without 3 extreme elements that made it one of the most challenging treks I have experienced to date.

The first of these – Altitude, plays a key role in determining those that do and those that don't make summit. The effects of altitude can kick in from as low as 3000m and symptoms include nausea, headaches, shortness of breath and loss of appetite. The key to giving yourself the best chance to summit is to follow the advice of your local team – "Polé Polé" or "Slowly Slowly" is regular cry from the Trek Master. The one sure thing is that it isn't a race.

The weather is another of those extremes - Night time temperatures were sub zero and during the day we were fortunate to experience clear skies for the most part, followed up with some cold winds and ultimately snow.

The 3rd element is simply the terrain – despite a good quality bedroll and a thick minus 10 sleeping bag your ability to get a good night's sleep was limited. It would be fair to say that 5-6 hours per night was the norm.

Despite all of this – the lure of the summit remained strong and that kept the team motivated and in good spirits. There was a true sense of mateship and the bond formed with our fellow trekkers as we work together toward the common goal remains fresh in my mind today. The summit of Kili would present itself from behind a cloud every now and then – as if drawing us in when we were a little flat or overwhelmed with it all. It is a truly amazing place.

Summit day consist of a 12.30am departure – heading into the darkness we set out for the summit. There is no denying the challenge – it's a difficult non technical climb. For 6 hours we inched our way up a well worn path listening to the gentle singing and constant prayers of our guide Julius. On that still January morning we stood as one on the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro with the temperature at 8 degrees below zero as the sun crept up over the horizon to warm our faces.

For a short while we were the highest people in Africa and in Australia for that matter and we agreed that with it came a great sense of satisfaction and perhaps relief. We all experience that sense of not wanting the adventure to end and we wonder at when we can do it all again.

For me – that time has arrived again as we prepare a group from Free Spirit Adventures here in Adelaide for another January trek to the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro – Africa. The call of the mountain has never been stronger – the outdoors and adventure travel can have such a positive impact on each and every one us. You should certainly give it a go one day soon.

Craig is a representative of and Trek Leader for Free Spirit Adventures. Visit the website to read more about the adventure travel experiences on offer. www.freespiritadventures.com.au

Free Spirit Adventures and Snowys have had a long term relationships since 2004 when we first started taking clients to the Kokoda Trail and more recently destinations as varied as Kilimanjaro, Peru, Tasmania and the Kimberley. Snowys have looked after all of our clients, helping them to get the best quality gear at a great price and with friendly service that makes preparing for an adventure a pleasure.

