

20TH SEPTEMBER - SUMMIT DAY

I got ready fairly quickly and we were all ready to go by 12.30pm. It was pretty cold outside but the hail had gone and it was a clear starry night as we started following the trail through the volcanic rocks and out of the camp. We all trapsed in a line after Arnold who having been pacing us nice and slowly up to barrafu hut suddenly headed off at quite a clip. Its never really a good idea to break into a sweat when ur in these frigid temperatures as inevitably once you have cooled down you become really cold and wet too. I was just starting to break into a slight sweat when Guy told him to slow it down a little (thank god) i didnt want to say anything!! It was absalutely freezing cold and suddenly i developed a searing pain in the right hand side of my stomach. It was so painful walking and i have no idea what could have caused it but my mind was thinking the worst, appendasitus or something like that. I kept going and tried not to think about the pain as we continued upwards into the frigid night.. Kilimanjaro has been way colder than i had imagined, that is the one thing that will stick out in my mind about this mountain.

The pains continued but i was focused right now on getting to the top and i clenched my stomach muscles to try and dull the pain. The fact that my sister lucy had climbed kilimanjaro 3 years previously was enough incentive to keep me going, i could just imagine if i didnt do this, her constantly reminding me she had done it and that she is only one of the seven summits behind me!! albeit a rather big summit behind me!!! good old healthy sisterly competition!

We pushed on upwards, its a lot of vertical on summit day 1,200metres but everyone was in good shape and spirits and we continued climbing through the night. At around 5.15am we arrived on the summit of kili having overtaken most of the other groups on the way up. The summit was pretty dark and only a faint streak of dawn on the horizon - this was not the plan to arrive in darkness i hasten to add, i wanted the panoramic views behind my sponsors flags! A bit of a screw up on our departure time i think! You could see the impressive Haim Glacier to the right, it looked almost majestic in the early light of dawn. I took my summit photos with my sponsors flags, it was so unbelievably cold and i could feel my hands go completely numb as were my feet by now too. After taking the photos and shooting some film footage with Guy by which time the camera froze we started to head down. My camera which was meant to capture the summit moment for my sponsors completely froze which caused me to be severely irriatated as it was a brand new camera. My pains had subsided by now thank goodness and as daybreak came we were headed back down the mountain passing people walking painfully slowly towards the summit. The altitude on this mountain is hard to deal with as you are going pretty high very quickly so it can be a tough climb to deal with this.

We descended very fast and i was back in camp just over an hour later with some very sore toenails which i had forgotten to trim back. My pedicured toenails with my summer pink nailvarnish were now a bit of a mess! Since competing in the Machlehose Trail in Hong Kong, a 63mile mountain marathan with some 23,000ft of vertical, i have had problems wtih my toenails due to the constant pounding they endure on the downhill sections. After one race i was missing 7 toenails (really attractive!) so it was no surprise that they were starting to hurt me now and i was cursing myself for my ignorance in forgetting to cut them.

Once we were all back at camp we had a big breakfast and then we all took an hours nap before starting to walk down to our camp for the night - our last campsite before walking out. We were about 20 minutes out of camp when we made a universal decision, well guy encouraged my idea to try and spend the night back at the hotel!!, to try and walk the whole way out which would take us about 5 hours. The thought of sleeping on a flat surface in a bed, as opposed to half way down a sloping tent was getting me fired up to walk out!! The hot shower was prevalent in all our minds as we started run/walking down the mountain leaving the amazingly accomodating Arnold frantically changing logistics on his cell phone - the wonders of modern technology! We had lunch at our intended overnight spot and then continued down into the jungle for the final 2 hours to the gates. It was now boiling hot and my feet were almost crippled, each step was like having knives

stabbed in all ur toes simulataneously. I hobbled downwards as fast as i could gritting my teeth and thinking about washing my hair. The ground was a rich red soil and the jungle was a little busier this time than when we trekked in and there were monkeys swinging above us in the trees. wouldnt have minded swinging down myself at this point i have to say!

Finally at about 4.30pm we arrived at the gate. Apart from our one hour siesta we had pretty much been on the move now for 16 hours and not only ascended nearly 4,000ft of vertical but we had descended 14,500ft so it had really been quite a day all told!! At the gate we signed the register and then i found out that we had to walk another 25 minutes as the bus could not make it up the hill to where we were currently located. psycologically that 25 minutes was worse to me than the 14,000ft i had just come down and my feet were intensley painful. I hobbled down into the town and finally we came to where we were going to wait for the bus. I ordered a coca cola and we all sat down to wait. 2 hours later still no bus.. I had talked my cell phone out of battery at this point and my mood was getting progressively worse, however given that i had instigated this idea of getting to our hotel room tonight i thought i would keep upbeat about it all! Finally the land rover showed up with a trailer to take all our duffell bags and kat and i jumped in and waited to leave!! We arrived back at the hotel at 9.30pm, we were all exhausted and smelly but decided to have dinner prior to the shower! We had a quiet dinner and all went to our rooms where i fuffed around until about 1.00am sorting out my climbing gear and finally having a well earned shower.. one of my friends is starting to call me soap dodger so i thought id better not keep that name!! It was blissfull lying in a flat bed, but my toes were in such bad shape that even the sheets hurt my feet! I could feel this overwhelming stiffness enveloping my whole body and i just knew it would be impossible to walk properly tomorrow having descended that much vertical in one day! Putting aches and pains aside i fell into a deep deep sleep so happy that i had made the summit of one more mountain, one step closer to my goal!