



“Hakuna Matata”
“pole pole”



Stephen Tillery
Lauren Tillery
Alexis Libra
John Libra
Jerry Brown
Len Evans
Joseph Simbee
Ayoub Mhina (Job)
Joshua Yonah
Gudilacki Mmari (Good Luck)



KILIMANJARO

Jerry Brown and I started our journey from St. Louis, Missouri on Sunday, September 14, 2008. We met my daughters Alexis and Lauren and my son-in-law, John Libra, in New York City. After one night in New York (sushi at the Waldorf), we traveled to Amsterdam and continued on to Kilimanjaro airport in Tanzania, arriving on



Kilimanjaro International Airport

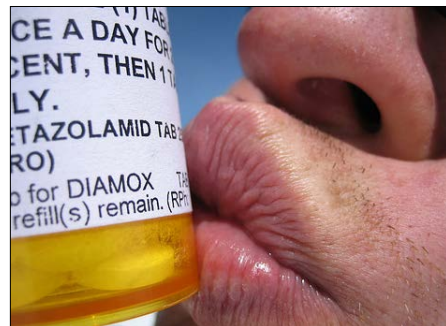


Serena Mountain Lodge

Tuesday, September 16. At the Serena Mountain Lodge in Arusha, Tanzania, we met my friend Len Evans. He had joined us from South Africa and was to be our “white” guide and companion on the climb. I met Len four years ago on a safari in Southern Africa and though we have had only limited contact in the interim, we have remained close friends. Len hired our guides and made all arrangements for our climb of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

All of us but Lauren took our first Diamox tablets, a medication prescribed to even out our breathing patterns and to allow us to acclimatize faster. Lauren is opposed to any kind of medication and refused to use it. By the end of the trip we would all believe it was incredibly helpful. Unfortunately, the notorious side effects started soon after our first pills. An unusual “face off” symptom hit Len and me first, with the unmistakable feeling that that our faces had lifted off (or were torn off) our heads. Extreme tingling of the fingers and feet routinely affected all of us who used it. What was interesting and almost humorous was how the symptoms seemed to strike all of us at almost exactly the same time as we had our breakfast each morning.



Diamox Love

At mid-morning we traveled two hours to the Protea Hotel in Moshi. Though still unable to see Kilimanjaro, we were told that the Protea lies at its base and is the closest hotel to the Machame gate. Our chosen route to the summit is popularly known as the Machame Route. It is not the easiest nor the fastest climb, but it was selected because it affords climbers a little more time to acclimatize to the thin air at the top.

In the afternoon we all gathered together in the “lounge” of the Protea to meet our chief guide, Joseph Simbee. He is a tall, slender man in his mid-thirties — good looking

in a strange way, with a round scar on the left side of the bridge of his nose. He spoke to us in a deliberate but halting pattern. Long breaks in mid-sentence, even mid-thought, caused us all to speculate whether Joseph had perhaps made too many Kilimanjaro summits.



Joseph Simbee

Joseph took the time to teach us our very first Swahili words, Pole Pole, meaning “very slowly.” Our climb was not to be a race or a competition. We were not trying to beat anyone up the mountain. We were to climb as a team and support one another. In the process of describing our climb and reviewing our equipment needs, Joseph told us that he had made over 300 summits. We were mildly relieved.

Joseph explained how eyes are so revealing on a climb to the summit. To achieve a baseline, he asked each of us to stare into his eyes for a moment. We would eventually learn that he wasn’t joking or being overly dramatic.

From the bar of the Protea there is a good view of Kilimanjaro. However, cloud cover prevented us from seeing it until

late in the evening. It seemed enormous and the excitement from seeing it caused Lexie to lose her first night’s sleep on the trip.



Our First Glimpse

Thursday, September 18, 2008



Machame Gate

Joseph and his assistant guides arrived to pick us up at the hotel about one hour late. This was our first exposure to “African” time. We soon learned that being 30 minutes to an hour late in Africa is considered on time. Time in Africa is a relative thing, lacking the importance it occupies in our lives in the States.

We took our bus to the Machame gate, a portal to Kilimanjaro at about 5000 feet altitude. The whole area is a bee-

hive of activity with dozens of optimistic climbers assembling with their guides and porters. We learn that at every stage of the climbing process there is a “sign in book” for every climber. The book entry requires basic information about the climber, his country of origin, age, passport number, and signature. Signing the first one caused me to reflect on the need for such information and actually seemed a bit eerie.



Machame Madness

At Machame literally hundreds of prospective porters wait in anticipation of being selected by a guide for one of the many climbing parties. Porters were an incredibly hearty lot, ranging in age from teenagers to over thirty. They carried their own survival gear, plus up to thirty



five pounds of additional weight – mess tents, individual sleeping tents, food, chairs, and every other thing you can imagine that is necessary to sustain life at the top of Kilimanjaro. The first time I saw one of my heavy bags pass me on the trail on the back of a young porter, I felt an overwhelming sense of guilt. As the days went by, the guilt never really subsided but intense fatigue allowed me to rationalize virtually anything.

“Steve, you are a bad guide.”

the six of us. After we had signed in, assembled our team, and handed over all of our baggage to the porters, we started on the first leg of our climb – the lower level rainforest. As we began the hike, we were almost gleeful: “This isn’t bad.” “Anybody can do this.” “What’s the big deal?”

John started as our first leader but was quickly replaced by Joseph because he walked too fast for the rest of us. I led next, taking us through the very first stages of the rainforest past a large group of German hikers. I was also walking too fast. Joseph approached me

Our group consisted of sixteen porters, three assistant guides, Joseph, and



A Break for Lunch

and said, “Steve, you are a very bad leader and you are going to kill us.” He immediately replaced me with Lauren, who served as our leader for the remainder of the trip until Joseph took over on the night of our climb to the summit.

Through the rainforest we followed a gentle sloping path which seemed not only beautiful but far too easy. I began to believe that the whole climb had been built up too much in my mind. We hiked for several hours and took a break alongside the trail for lunch. We finished the day an hour or so before sunset, just past the rainforest in the very pleasant Machame Camp. The camp was grassy with views of the rainforest below and the mountain above. Every night we saw a sky which seemed more brilliant than any I had ever seen in the North America. Stars really seemed much closer.

This first night I became exposed to Kilimanjaro bathrooms. While Jerry, John, Lexie, and Lauren could deal with the outhouses, Len Evans and I were simply incapable of using these facilities. They consisted of outhouse structures, generally without doors (or with doors separated from and leaning against the outhouse), with a hole in the floor over a pit. The conditions inside the structure and the smell within 10 meters made them simply unusable for Len and me. That left us to the great outdoors. As the climb endured, modesty waned and all of us took on bathroom behaviors which would seem immodest and appalling in the States.



“Hellish” Lauren’s Description



Plenty of Food

Though we had met our assistant guides on the trail when they gathered around Joseph, we came to know them better the first night. Good Luck was the youngest of the group and served as our cook. I never learned whether his quiet manner was due to his lack of English skills or was simply a personality trait. Good Luck was married and had two children.

Job delivered the food to our mess tent and stood behind us to confirm that we ate it.

Underpaid and

overworked, these men take their jobs extremely seriously. Job simply wanted to confirm that each of us was taking in enough food to successfully climb the mountain. It wasn’t until the second day of climbing that I realized that Job had been assigned to stay at my side throughout the trip. For seven days he was no more than three feet behind me, pointing out dangerous spots along the trail and helping when he thought I might fall. Needless to say, we developed a strong bond of friendship.



Joshua Yonah

Joshua was pensive and reserved. As the days passed we all learned the depth of the man – he was a kind, gentle soul who took time to teach us about plants, birds and a little bit about his personal philosophy. He was slender and seemed a bit frail, making him appear almost out of place. I never once saw him without a big, genuine smile across his entire face.

Dinner consisted of soup, toast and pasta. Hot water was provided for cocoa, tea, or coffee. Lauren fell in love with the powdered milk. Dinner was served at 7:00 every night. The mess tent was the only place where a chair could be found and it was our only place to assemble. There are no level places on Kilimanjaro.

John and Lexie shared a tent and each of the rest of us had a single, very small sleeping tent. As the altitude increased and the nights became colder, the small size of the tent became beneficial. Each morning Joseph would unzip the flaps of our tent and offer us chai tea or coffee. He would not leave until he stared into the eyes of each of us.



Joseph and Conguru

On the very first night, Lauren started her “magic” and befriended many of the guides of the trip. They genuinely loved her and would later nickname her “Conguru,” a Swahili term which was the name for the huge white-headed crows which seemed to follow us all the way to the summit.

Friday, September 19, 2008

The second day of the climb was to Shira Camp, by far the most peaceful and light-hearted day of our entire climb. We got to know our assistant guides and they became our friends. Our only problem occurred early in the day when Lauren developed a large blister on her right heel. She had forgotten her hiking boots and she had to buy new ones in New York. By the time she acknowledged the trouble, the skin on the back of her heel



Shira Camp

was rubbed off. We had some bandages and she was able to protect the wound from further rubbing. She also altered her hiking step to what we all affectionately referred to as the “crab walk.” She never complained again, though I know she had to be suffering.

The hike did not seem at all difficult for Alexis, John, Lauren or Len. Jerry and I personally confided that the climb had become far more difficult than we had each anticipated. At camp, we slept at an altitude higher than either of us had previously experienced. We arrived early at our camp, around 3 p.m. Joseph insisted that none of us rest or run the risk of taking a nap. He would never allow us to close our eyes for even the briefest moment until we were ready to sleep at night. After we arranged our gear in our tents (the porters would walk past us on the paths and assemble our camp before we arrived), Joseph took us on an additional hike. This was the first of a few so-called “acclimatization” hikes designed to expose us to thinner air. After dinner, we went to bed at eight p.m.

Unfortunately, I soon developed an intestinal bug and was up all night vomiting and with diarrhea. The next morning Len, Joseph and I met to discuss options. If I left now, an ambulance could get most of the way to Shira and take me off of the mountain. If I went on, the next stop would be Barranco Camp. In his painfully deliberate way, Joseph explained how a sick or injured climber was evacuated at Barranco and beyond. The patient is strapped to a flat, wire mesh table which is suspended by a single bicycle wheel. From two handles on one end the attendants push the contraption with patient down the trail and off Kilimanjaro. Joseph warned that most people are unable to tolerate more than twenty minutes of such bashing on rocks and boulders unless they are unconscious. After Joseph confirmed in his own mind that my illness was intestinal and not altitude-related, the decision was left to me. I opted to go on. Lauren and Lexie were helpful and supportive over the next several days. I had help putting my sleeping gear and tent in order each night. Unfortunately, I remained sick for most of the trip.



Emergency Evacuation Vehicle

Saturday, September 20, 2008

We started our third day very early. Beginning at over 12,000 feet, we hiked for over ten hours. My slow pace caused us to be passed along the trail by all other hiking groups. Some of the Germans were not at all sporting – in fact, they were downright arrogant. Lauren kept a steady pace, geared entirely to my very audible breathing patterns. If I started to gasp for air, she slowed slightly until my breathing evened out. After several hours my slow pace started to bother her. At one point she suddenly broke

with our group and marched on far ahead of us at a very brisk speed. Joseph patiently watched her, maintained our cadence and eventually she resumed as our leader without a word ever being spoken. The landscape gradually changed throughout the day from an alpine grove to a high desert. Some vegetative change occurred hourly. We could look up or down the trail and see the different vegetative patterns.

Lauren climbed in silence. Likewise, I never spoke. But every few hours, probably from boredom, Lexie would start talking to John or Jerry about something which had jumped into her brain. Occasionally Lauren would shout at Lexie to be quiet.

Len also hiked in silence. He was cheerful and self-sacrificing to a fault and always there to give moral and very practical support to all of us every step of the way. Before we arrived in Africa, I had told the rest of the group what a wonderful person Len is. Each one of them independently confirmed to me that exact sentiment at one time or another on the climb.

Our assistant guides broke silence every now and then and engaged in animated discussions in Swahili. At first I tried to guess what they were saying, but later the banter seemed almost comforting. At night the camp buzzed with the same chatter. It helped me drift off to sleep every night.

Joseph was a member of the “Bushman” tribe, taking great pride in that ancestry. He told Jerry that Bushman guides were the best on the mountain. He wore a large red scarf which was uniquely Bushman. Sometime later, as we passed another Bushman guide on the trail, Joseph shared with him an elaborate greeting which included hometown, family names and other information.



Joseph the “Bushman”

During our climb we took the “high” route to Barranco Camp. This route not only provided more intense acclimatization but it took us to the Lava Tower, an absolutely amazing geological phenomenon. Rising hundreds of feet straight up from the surrounding terrain, it is a sheer vertical lava structure with a surreal appearance. Over the ages, huge pieces of it have cracked and fallen hundreds of feet to the moonscape below. All of us were mindful that such falling pieces had claimed the lives of climbers and guides just two years before. Lauren had lunch with the guides and it was here that they named her Conguru.

One of the most poignant moments of the trip for Jerry and me occurred just as we hiked over a rise and the Lava Tower first came into view. Joseph had hiked far



ahead of us and suddenly appeared on a boulder high above the trail with his bright red shawl flowing over his head and draping half of his body, all silhouetted against the Lava Tower as a backdrop. It was an unforgettable moment.

As we left the Lava Tower Jerry asked Joseph what the word “Kilimanjaro” means. Joseph suddenly became very serious and explained that the term comes from two words and roughly translated from Swahili means “mountain that cannot be climbed.”

Climbing on to Barranco Camp we passed a beautiful waterfall and a small stream flowing from the melting summit glacier. Barranco Camp came into view over an hour before we arrived. I was totally exhausted and each time I saw the camp it seemed slightly further away. In just three days a tiny little tent had become my home.

Sunday, September 21, 2008

Rising over one thousand feet above Barranco Camp is the Barranco Wall, an almost sheer wall of rock that is imposing to the young and fearless and flat out frightening to old guys like me. As I got my first clear look at it after daybreak, I was standing next to Joseph alongside my tent. I asked him if others had fallen and died trying to climb it and he simply scoffed and muttered something which sounded like “it’s a piece of cake.”

Nevertheless, Joseph let all other climbers leave before us to minimize passing while we scaled the wall. Jerry and I decided that the best approach was to limit our gaze to the area immediately in front of us and try to avoid looking down or to our side. About one third of the way up we briefly chatted at a break and agreed that, if one of us made it home alive, our first order of business would be to track down the bastards who authored the Kilimanjaro books we had so carefully studied before our trip. The Barranco Wall chapter had somehow been omitted. If this is what a “non-technical hike” means, Mt. Everest is out of the question.



The Great “Barranco Wall”



Scrambling “The Wall”

Job stayed very closely to me on Barranco Wall. At one point at about the half way mark, we came to a particularly bad spot where a boulder jutted out in our way, causing us to inch around it over a path that was reduced to just a few foot holds over the sky below. Job insisted on removing and carrying my pack. He helped Jerry and me get around the

boulder before he came over himself. As he took his last step towards us he caught his foot and fell. Jerry instinctively lunged for Job and caught his arm before he went over the side, saving the young man's life as he has done for me on two separate occasions in my life. Nervous laughter prevailed. Jerry and I simply looked at each other and never spoke.

At the top of the Wall is a vast lava flow which has created huge, oddly shaped, smooth sloping rock formations. The view to the trail ahead is simply amazing. Porters were so far away that they looked like ants slowly ascending a meandering path. The feeling of total desolation was interrupted when Joseph received a call on his cell phone. We *were* on planet Earth. It *was* the 21st century. The conflict was apparent.

Situated at the top of a very steep hill, Karanga Camp was our next stop. Long after you can first see it in the distance, you must descend a terribly steep path to a deep ravine and climb back up a wall to Karanga. At the bottom of the ravine I broke into a very loud rendition of the "Halleluiah" refrain of Handel's "Messiah." All but Lauren were amused. Her reaction was to march off alone and scale the wall to Karanga in near record speed, arriving at the top as I was just getting underway at the bottom.

It was at the bottom of the ravine when I first learned that Joseph's answers to identical questions changed depending on the stage of the climb. Congratulating all of us on having safely conquered the route, he told me that during peak climbing periods it is rare to go even one day without a fairly serious fall and fracture (arm, leg, or back) on some part of Barranco. Thereafter, I simply couldn't get the "piece of cake" comment out of my head.

Karanga Camp is a volcanic moonscape with a great view of Kilimanjaro. There is very limited plant life and the dark colored volcanic harshness is oppressive. It is the last camp enroute to the summit with access to water. Thereafter, all water must be carried by porters. Though the climb to Karanga was eight difficult hours, all of us were relaxed at dinner. There were very few people at Karanga. A very sick climber coughed all night long. I thought it was Jerry or Len, and Len thought it might be Jerry or me.



Karangu Camp – 13,000 ft.

Monday, September 22, 2008

This morning Lexie began her first episode of morning sickness. When I jokingly speculated about possible causes of such illnesses in the mess tent, Lauren became angry.

I explained that it is part of my job as a father to be crass. Unfortunately, Lexie remained sick each remaining morning of our climb. Despite her illness she remained an incredible trooper. She never complained and encouraged all of us at every step of the trip. She and I both worried about Lauren's decision to forgo Diamox. I developed a very deep respect for the physical reserve of both Lauren and Lexie. I also learned a very healthy respect for John. Trying and exhaustive events typically bring out well-hidden bad traits. However, the more difficult the climb became, the more easygoing and funny John became. He made it all look incredibly simple. Jerry and I agreed later that a climb of any mountain would not be complete without him.

As we made our climb to Barafu Camp, we passed a neatly stacked pile of stones on the right side of the path. Joseph explained that it was on this spot last year that a young porter died of exhaustion. An unanticipated rain had caught him without rain gear and he simply weakened and died. Other porters carried his body to Moshi. We paused in silence for a long moment. Len laid another stone on the pile in his memory.

Len's backpack was like something out of the Twilight Zone. No matter what you needed, Len could reach deep within the pack and retrieve it. Medical supplies, dried fruit, power bars and "deep heat" liniments were all there. It was very much like he accessed another dimension of space when he unzipped one of the backpack compartments. Jerry and I jokingly asked if he could pull out a nice bedroom set or a hot tub.

Len hiked at the end of our group and kept his eye on all of us in front of him and all activities behind us. Len's warning "porters passing" meant that we were about to be passed on the trail by the porters from our last camp. All Kili climbers that I saw respectfully gave porters the right of way – as they approached from the rear we would



Barafu

all move to one side of the trail, stop, and wait until their group had passed us. After several exhausting days I began to look forward to these brief pauses and Len's words "porters passing" became more and more welcome.

Barafu Camp is over 15,000 feet in elevation and is situated on the approach to the summit, high atop the most desolate landscape I have ever witnessed. Sharp, flat rocks of all types and descriptions make walking just a few feet somewhat risky. Piled on top of each other in unusual patterns, they are simultaneously beautiful and depressing. Our moon must be more hospitable.

We arrived at Barafu about 2:00 in the afternoon. We had not been there more than a few minutes when we saw considerable commotion on the route from the summit. Several guides were bringing someone off the mountain on a blanket. About eight men were positioned at equidistant intervals around the blanket carrying the hiker who was lying in the middle. Joseph did his best to ameliorate the situation, telling Len and me that it was one of the German hikers who had badly broken his leg by not following instructions on the descent from the summit. All of us could see by the way the hiker's body was being bounced on the rocks that he was dead, but we all gladly accepted Joseph's false explanation for the time being. We simply did not want to hear the truth at that moment.

We all knew that our summit climb would start at 11:00 p.m. when the air was cold and heavy. Joseph told us that we must be at Stella Point by daybreak. Soon thereafter, it would get warm and the air would thin much further. Jerry and I were desperate for sleep before the final climb. At lunch Joseph announced that we all needed to eat as much as possible at around 6:00 p.m. At this point Jerry and I told Joseph that we disagreed and did not want dinner. We asked not to be awakened so that we could sleep as much as possible before 11:00.

Joseph insisted on waking everyone else mid-afternoon for dinner. This turned out to be a mistake for Lauren because she could never get back to sleep. Jerry and I slept all afternoon and evening. By this time on the trip I was able to sleep anytime and anywhere.

At some time after dark a wild, booming electrical storm hit the entire mountain top. Lightening lighted our tents with spectacular flashes and sleet and ice covered our tents. By the time I got up at around 9:30 p.m. the sky was clear and it was very cold.



Kili Electrical Storm

We started the summit climb at exactly 11:00 p.m. This one night Joseph was our leader, with Lauren directly behind. I followed Lauren and my protector Job was on my

heels. Lexie, John and Jerry climbed after Job, and Len climbed last with Good Luck and Joshua. The moon offered little help so we climbed in almost pitch darkness. All of us wore lights on our foreheads and at a distance groups of climbers looked like fireflies. The lights of Moshi were bright to our left and it seemed a contradiction that we could be where we were, doing what we were doing and simultaneously see where other people were living and sleeping normally.

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

By midnight we had climbed over terrain I didn't know existed on the planet. Single massive rock formations went on for hundreds of feet at angles that were extreme for me. My walking sticks became essential. At our first break I told Jerry it was a good thing we were doing this in the dark because sane people wouldn't try it if they could see what the hell they were doing. It was cold – very, very cold. All of the water bottles we carried, even those inside our coats, froze by the summit. As we climbed Joseph told us over and over that our rest stops could only be for a very short time or we would cool down and be unable to reheat our bodies.

Each of us had read about scree, a fine volcanic material all hikers on this route encounter. We knew that it could cause you to slide backwards and lose momentum. However, the ice storm and intense cold had literally frozen the scree, making it crunch under our weight.

Joseph told us that the angle of ascent would start at 25 degrees for the first hour and then become 35 degrees. The last segment, where the angle of ascent would be 45 degrees, would require us to “move into four wheel drive.” Not knowing exactly where you are in the climb is both beneficial and detrimental. Joseph used this confusion to his advantage as the climb to the summit became more and more difficult. He told me more than once that we were close to the top even though I could see the lights of other climbers above us at what seemed like an enormous distance. It was simply easier to believe him at that time than to voice objection. We all seemed to walk in cadence and soon settled on a tolerable pace. Simply watching the boots of the person in front of me focused my attention on one single thing and caused me to distance myself from any stress. I am sure several of us were doing this.

As the climb went on and we approached Stella Point, Lauren suddenly developed a racing heartbeat. We stopped to let her rest and I encouraged her to go down, but she insisted on going forward. When the same symptoms occurred just minutes later even more forcefully I asked her to take a Diamox tablet if she had any intention of going forward. After considerable pressure she reluctantly took one of the pills and asked Joseph whether he or I was in charge of the climb. Joseph then made the “ruling” that she was safe to go forward. We were still climbing in darkness but the first glow of the sun could be seen on the right. Suddenly Lauren was stricken again much more severely and, at that point, she asked to be taken down from the mountain. Good Luck left our group and took her down in the darkness. Speaking later, Lexie and I both felt guilty for not having gone with her.



Sunrise at Stella Point

As we resumed the climb we could see that we were not far below Stella Point. Daylight came shortly before we reached Stella. By this time Len and Joshua had fallen behind our group. One of the German hikers was also struggling. His group stayed together on the trail above him for several minutes until they decided to leave one of the guides with their friend and go on to the summit.

Despite our earlier promises to stay together, we did the same with Len. He yelled that he was fine and that he would proceed with Joshua at his own pace. About 200 feet below Stella Point, I completely ran out of gas. By that time Joseph was almost jumping with joy that we had made it to within a rocks throw of Stella Point. I could see the overwhelming disappointment on his face. We paused for a moment and I decided to go forward. One step at a time we made our way to Stella Point where everyone was rejoicing.

As I tried to gather my breath and my thoughts on Stella, several guides came by and spoke in Swahili to Joseph as they were smiling and staring at me. This had happened on several prior occasions during our trip and I knew that Joseph had never been totally forthright when he told me what they had said. This time I asked him to tell me the truth. He slowly and somberly told me that they were not making fun of me but they were simply asking, “What is he doing up here?” Joseph explained that “heavy” people never make it to Stella and that the guides were simply commenting that they had never seen a big, heavy person at the top.



“God, I’m Tired.”

Jerry, John and Lexie decided to go to the summit at Uhuru Point. It was clearly visible on the crater rim and I saw no need to go further. I told Joseph that I would wait for them at Stella and he said waiting was not possible because I might fall asleep. I was to either go down with Job or continue to Uhuru Point. Not certain in my own mind that I would make it to Uhuru, I gave a wooden box to Lexie to bury at the summit. After they left, Job and I made a slow trek after them. It seemed like an eternity to get to the summit but eventually I made it. I had the presence of mind to know that I didn’t have my full presence of mind – a very scary thing. After the obligatory picture in front of the Uhuru Point sign, Joseph decided that I needed to come off the mountain, pronto.

The most emotional part of the entire climbing experience occurred as I walked away from the point. I was met by many of the guides who gathered around me and

started jumping up and down in celebration as they sang their Kilimanjaro song. They were genuinely delighted that I made the summit and were celebrating with me.



Descent from the summit proved nearly as difficult as the climb. A totally different route is used which is part of the famous “Coca Cola Route” one can see in the distance from the summit. The scree here is at least a foot or more deep and the path is extremely steep. Joseph went first and literally skipped in front of us by kicking out his legs in front of him and allowing his forward momentum to literally skid him down the mountain in a modified form of skiing. Try as I might, this would not work for me. The pressure on my knees was absolutely amazing and after two hours new parts of my body started hurting I hadn’t previously heard from. By 12:30 we were back at Barafu Camp. Lauren was well and more rested. Len had reached Stella Point with Joshua but, unfortunately, either fell asleep or passed out after he sat down to rest. Joshua literally grabbed him from Stella and took him off the mountain. Len told me more than once that Joshua saved his life.

The plan was for us to take a nap and then begin our descent to Millennium Camp. I remember making it into my tent but I did not even zipper it closed before I fell asleep. I awoke two hours later when the porters called my name from both ends of my tent.

Rather than hike all the way to Mweka Gate, we decided to go to Millennium Camp about four miles down the path. The topography provided yet one more variation and the plant life eventually became thick, bushy trees covering the entire landscape. The descent was extremely steep and forward momentum caused toes to be crushed into the hiking boot with such force that I lost three entire toenails. Millennium Camp is over 6,000 feet below the summit. At that camp we bought some cold beer and had our first real celebration of the climb. Everyone seemed relieved to be on the descent.

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

At breakfast we asked Joseph, Joshua, Job and Good Luck to join us in the mess tent. We thanked them for their wonderful service and I gave them their tips. When Joseph received his, he looked at it and obviously believed it to be the tip for all of the guides, the 16 porters and himself. I then told him it was his tip and gave each of the



other three guides a slightly smaller amount. I then gave him an envelope of money for the porters. He took a minute or two to compose himself and then asked if he could speak to all of us. It seemed very clear to me that he was assembling his thoughts as he hesitated. He made a very solemn and touching speech, thanking us for the money and telling us what it meant to the lives of the families of the guides and porters. In his case, he told us,

his sister would now be able to go to the university and pursue her education. His words and thanks were heartfelt and very moving to all of us. A few minutes after he left the tent we could hear a buzz from the direction of the porters as he handed out their money. Shortly thereafter, all twenty of them approached us and asked if they could sing us a song. They sang their Mount Kilimanjaro song while several of their group danced.



Maybe because we were exhausted, or perhaps because of Joseph's comments, watching this performance was a very emotional thing for the two "old guys."

The hike to Mweka Gate, a descent of approximately 8,500 feet, took about seven hours. Descending at much higher speed than our ascent, we traveled through changing ecosystems in remarkable time, passing finally through the rainforest and on to Mweka Gate. A van took us from the Gate to our hotel at Serena Mountain Lodge in Arusha. After much needed showers, the celebration began.

Personal Comments of Len Evans

Not a day has passed since the climb that I still don't reflect on the adventure we shared. That pile of rocks is so much more than a mountain. In the seven days we were on her, we all experienced a range of intense emotions.

That cold and dangerous mountain encouraged us all to go far beyond our comfort levels. I saw how powerful the human mind and spirit really is. I saw the power of love, be it parent, child or friend or even a stranger. I saw laughter, tears and compassion. I was privileged to be in the company of people who truly do not see racial colour and enjoyed the guides for the people they are. That alone has made me do a lot of soul searching.

I was the recipient of incredible kindness from a relative stranger, a man who went way beyond his job description, a man who made me proud to be African. The adventure of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro taught me more about myself in 7 days than I have learned in 10 years. I was able to confront my weaknesses empowered by the emotional support surrounding me for which I will always be grateful.

Steve, it was truly a life changing experience for which I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Len

Personal Comments of Jerry Brown

Protea Hotel – Kilimanjaro

The showers at the hotel had a mind of their own. The water took forever to warm up. But when it did, it was scalding. I ended up sitting on the floor of the shower pouring water over me after mixing it to a tolerable temperature in a plastic water bottle.

Fear of Heights

I have a bit of a fear of heights. So, I was apprehensive about any trails that had sheer drop-offs. The second day my fears were realized. Shortly before arriving at Shira Camp, the path led up through a series of huge boulders that required us to climb up the steep sides. In other spots we had to walk along a ledge with nothing but air on the other side. At one of these I estimated I'd fall at least 200 feet before smashing into the rocks below. I managed past this and hoped there wouldn't be any more of those. That seemed silly later since there were plenty of other times on subsequent days when I would have fallen 1000 feet before hitting bottom.

The Summit

On the final night we left for the summit at 11 pm. It was pitch black and very cold. The only light came from our headlamps and the millions of stars overhead. Ahead of us you could see the lights of other groups making their way up the mountain. Our first hour was spent scaling steep lava flows that were slick with snow and loose gravel. John was in front of me so I kept my light shining right on his boots. As I let my mind slip into instinct mode I concentrated on matching John's pace step-for-step. There was not much chatter as we moved forward ever so pole pole. We occasionally stopped to rest, but only for a minute or two. This we kept up for what seemed like hours and hours and hours. I had been sneaking peeks toward the east for any signs of daylight knowing that would mean we were close to the top. Eventually I allowed myself to check the time – I was shocked to see it was only 3 am. Nothing to do but put the head down and go up, up, up...

I began to notice that Len was having some difficulty breathing. During breaks he would sit on a rock with his head down in what appeared to be complete exhaustion. He then started falling further and further behind. Soon Lauren began having breathing problems as well. We stopped for several minutes until it was decided that she would turn back and I think this gave Len just enough time to get rested. As Lauren started the trip back to Baranca Camp I remember thinking how brave she was for recognizing the danger she was in; and, for having the courage to go back down the way we had come up. (We didn't find out until after our trip, but an ex-CIA agent died from altitude sickness near this same spot just two days earlier.) At some point Len said he couldn't go at our pace and told us to go ahead. We did.

As the first rays of sun began to light up the sky the remainder of our group, Joseph, Steve, Lex, John and I continued up. When it finally got light enough to see we were within a few meters of Stella Point. Once there, it was clear that the last bit had taken its toll on my friend Steve. He sat down on a rock, loosened his coat and looked as tired as anyone I've ever seen. He told the rest of us to go to the summit without him – so we did. The last few hundred meters to Uhuru Summit were fun. We stopped once or twice and enjoyed views of the glaciers and the crater. At the top we laughed, hugged, had our pictures taken and toasted with a slug from John's flask. As we prepared to head back down from the summit we spotted a familiar figure slowly marching his way towards us. It was Steve. I'll always remember that image as the essence of determination.

Jerry