

SUSAN WINCKWORTH (2000)

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The reality that I have been to the highest point in Africa at 5895m above sea level still seems completely surreal however the feeling of being at the top is something I won't forget easily, if ever. To look out over hills and valleys from the summit, knowing that you are standing at the highest point of your own continent is a feeling I cannot describe, an opportunity I know I am incredibly privileged to have received!

I must admit that Kilimanjaro was much harder than I had expected (in spite of the warnings people did give me) and I have a new respect for the Patricia Lewis' and Nataniels' of the world who have conquered this mountain as well. We did the Machame route, which is over 7 days (to give you time to acclimatize); it is a beautiful route and you walk around the mountain which allows you to experience numerous different landscapes from Rain Forest, to scrubland to a moonlike landscape. From day 2 onwards you are between layers of clouds with the town of Moshi generally covered in cloud below you and the top of Kili surrounded by cloud above, however the mornings and evenings are often clear and quite spectacular.

The challenge of Kilimanjaro is not so much the physical element, although being somewhat fit does make the trip more enjoyable; it is however more the mental strength and the stamina required on summit day. Summit day includes a total of 15hours of hiking, we took 8hrs 45min to reach the summit departing from camp at midnight, two hours back to camp for lunch and then a 4 hour hike to the final camp for the last night; so although the physical exertion is a reality the mental stamina required is really the significant challenge! I was fortunate enough not to get altitude sickness, feeling only slightly sick for the last four hours before the summit and at that point in time a little bit of determination (or stubbornness) was all that I required to get me through to the end and it was definitely worth every bit of pain and exhaustion; a truly fabulous experience.

As a team we had decided to climb Kilimanjaro for a charity in Sweetwaters Pietermaritzburg called iThemba projects; and I would like to thank each of you who have donated and supported this cause. We have managed to raise over R67 000 of which I am personally very proud and grateful, the impact you have had on that community will last for many years to come!

So what next, seems to be the question that most people ask? To be honest I am not sure, although there are rumours of Mount Kenya or perhaps even Mount Elbrus in Russia but I guess only time will tell...