

Africa: Day Eight



Frederick, our competent head guide, had prescribed an early start for our last day on the mountain. – Such an injustice! Had it not been for the safari we had scheduled for the next day, it would have taken every one of our porters to drag me out of the tent. I so desired my hard earned night of baby-like sleep to last for another, say, two days. The reason for the early start was to arrive ahead of throng of trekkers at the exit point of the trail, the Mweka Gate.

After enjoying yet another meal that I didn't have to cook, we prepared to embark on the final descent. Our crew of guides and porters assembled to present us with a song about Kilimanjaro. This song, heard by most climbing teams at journey's end, is offered as a sort of farewell gift by the men



who so admirably strained their bodies on behalf of their clients. To the porters, the song has surely lost its luster, but to us it was a welcomed treat. A round of warm handshakes ensued as each porter received an envelope containing a monetary gesture of appreciation. All that they had done for us was far more valuable than anything we could offer them.

We savored another beautiful day as we clamored through the dense foliage of the rainforest canopy. We applied 5100 vertical feet worth of knee pounding torture to our tired bodies while pressing towards the final stop, the Mweka Gate. A brief rest was allowed while we were entertained by our first exotic wildlife sighting, monkeys! Both blue monkeys and colobus monkeys darted from branch to branch and sprung from tree to tree in a lively display of “monkeying around.” After snapping a few photos, it was back to traipsing down the trail.



The last mile of this great excursion was dotted with native children asking us for our boots, hiking poles or anything else we might part with. So many people in this underprivileged nation viewed us with wide open eyes; most, with open hearts, and all, with open hands...



As directed, we had signed the official logbook at each camp. We stood in line to sign for the last time, thus fulfilling the requirement to receive the certificate we had earned. Hikers that stopped at Stella Point were given a green certificate. Climbers that accomplished the true summit, Uhuru Peak, were granted a gold certificate. Through grit and grimace, despite the grease and grime, our entire team – by the Grace of God, gained the gold! The experience of Kili was over all too soon. We came, we saw and we conquered! – And now, there were plenty of people trying to sell us t-shirts to state as much.





While driving back to Moshi, my mind hit neutral for a bit as it tried to switch gears from the great climb now behind me, to the safari on tap for tomorrow. Upon reaching Moshi, our group meandered about the town selecting souvenirs and trying to break free from the swarm of people (or as one person put it, mosquitoes) attempting to peddle their wares.

After sharing dinner in the hotel restaurant, our group retreated to our respective rooms to begin re-packing for the next leg of our adventure. Not ready for the day to end I walked alone to a small pizzeria to top off my stomach. The hour and fifteen minutes it took for me to be served allowed plenty time for reflection. How privileged and blessed I was to be alive, to be healthy, and to be on the *Trip of a Lifetime!!*



