

Africa: Day Five



It is one thing to have your head in the clouds, it is quite another to wake up above the clouds. Many people in Tanzania would wake up to a cloudy, overcast day; not us. Our perch above this white puffy blanket granted us another stunning panorama, the Great Barranco Wall. Our primary challenge of the day was looking us right in the face. We were to start the morning off by scaling the 800 vertical feet of rocky switchbacks that lead to the top of what is also known as the “Kissing



Wall.” The Kissing Wall? Sounds like it must be a romantic place until you learn that the name comes from the necessity to hug the rock as if you were kissing it while you tiptoe along a narrow ledge. This wall is also nicknamed the “Breakfast Wall,” as many people lose their breakfast as a result of the perceived danger. In reality, this spectacular wall posed no reason for concern to our group, just plenty of photo ops. For once I was happy to be stuck in the endless conga line of people, I had plenty of opportunity to soak it all in.

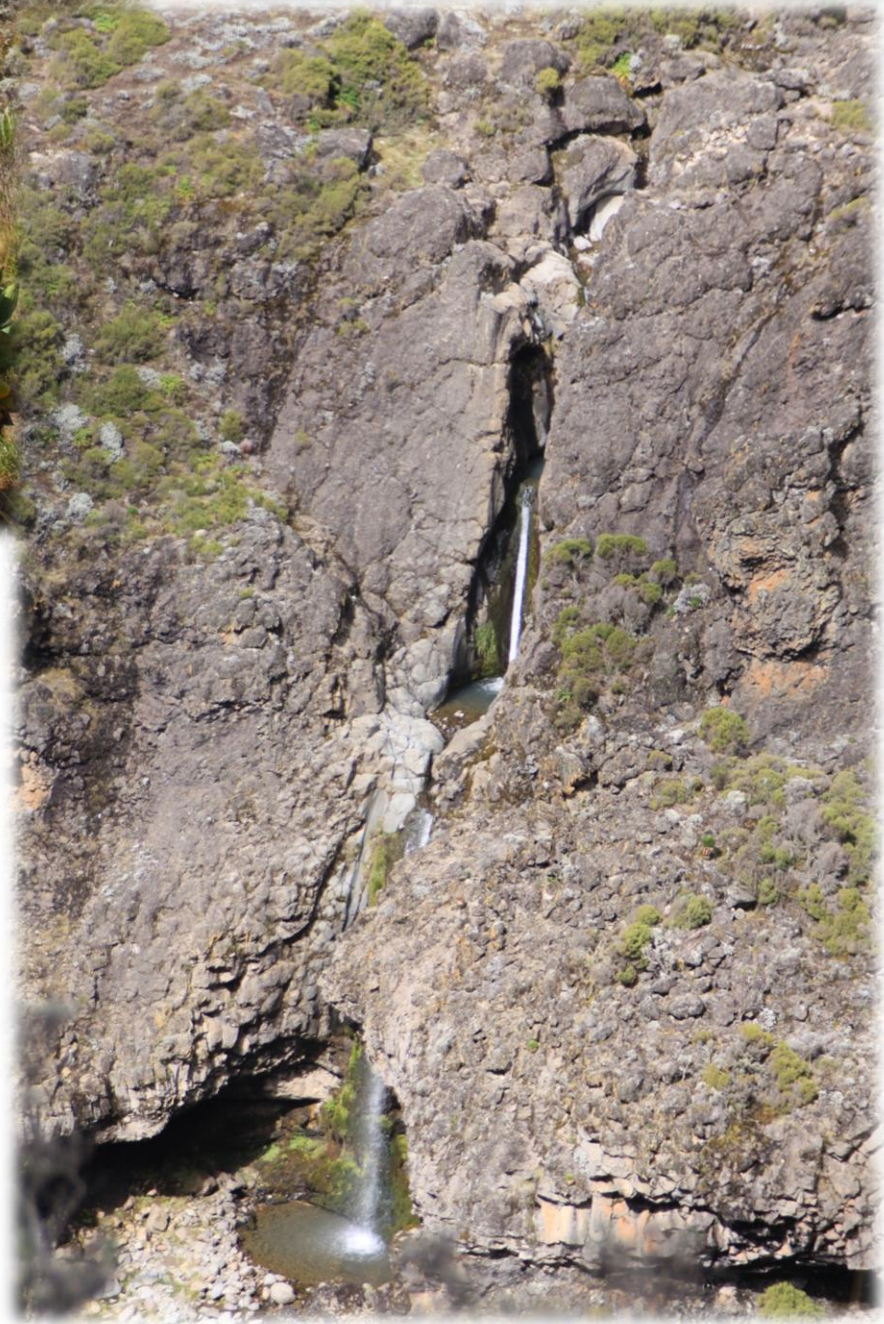








On previous days, the guides had worked hard at keeping us walking “pole pole” which meant “slowly, slowly.” Today, there was no need to remind us as the single-file nature of the narrow ledges attenuated any speedy notions. As we neared the last quarter of the wall, our team came upon a porter from another group who had fallen and injured his hand. He was just a little fella and was obviously in a good deal of pain. We had no doctors in our group, only three dental hygienists. Alas! Clean teeth were not this boy’s priority. Louise found a



stick to use as a splint and we did the best wrapping job we could muster. With an injured hand, the porter would have a very difficult time handling his load. I split his burden with the guide that he worked for and we went back to the business of hiking! About 20 minutes later I decided that carrying a propane bottle, stove and various other goodies on my head was simply for the birds. I proceeded to tie the extra load to the back of my pack. As I lifted the pack to put it on, one of the straps ripped. I managed some creative knots to fix the pack, but it was back onto my head with the remainder of the load. Other climbers stepped aside to let me pass now that I was a “porter,” albeit a white one. I



decided to keep pace with the rest of the porters as they marched tirelessly on to the next camp. I was already impressed with these hard working men, and now I have a genuine appreciation for what they put themselves through on a daily basis. I also now understand why they have such good posture!



We followed the trail up the Great Barranco Wall, in and out of small valleys and finally to the far side of the Karanga Valley to the next camp at 13,451ft. Three and a half more miles worth of rubber had been worn off of our boots and we were only 525 vertical feet above last night's camp. To add more insult, as the crow flies, we were now actually farther from the summit than we were last night. In reality, these numbers represent a significant portion of a successful summit bid recipe. The exercise at elevation was assisting acclimation, and our lengthy traverse was bringing us to the drier, less formidable terrain of Kilimanjaro's southeastern slopes. With only one short day remaining before summit day, I was feeling healthy and increasingly more confident. More importantly, our entire team seemed to be strong, determined and very able!

I climbed out of the tent and sat alone on a rock to gaze into the heavens. I was torn between two emotions: angry that I did not bring a camera tripod to record this view, and awestruck at just how many stars I was seeing. The city of Moshi was doing its best to contribute to the moment by presenting its collection of lights, and God was providing a lightning storm in the distance just to top off

the experience! Shortly thereafter, the starlight conceded to the imposing glow of the full moon. What a night!

