

Africa: Day Four



There is something special about waking up at 12,600ft, even if it is to the sound of banging pots and a chorus of many boisterous, Swahili speaking voices. The view of the upper slopes was both breathtaking and sobering. We would be *on the summit* in a few days, but we still had to climb *for a few days!* Kilimanjaro is one **large** mountain!

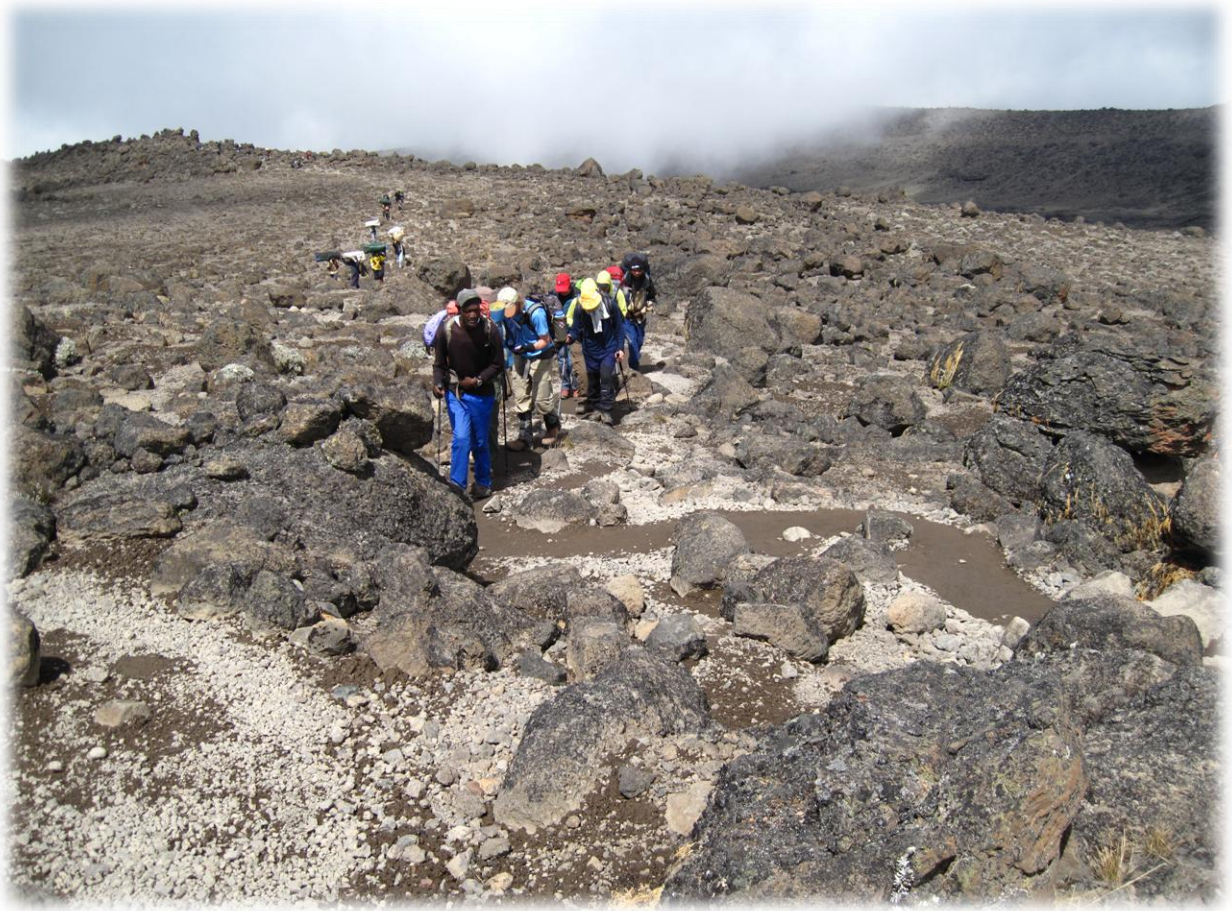
Today's hike would be longer than yesterday's and would soon bring us to the end of the vegetation. I have been above timberline many times in my life, but this was different. In the Rocky Mountains, tundra is the only thing that can survive at elevations above the point at which the trees give up. On this mountain, the plant life is still quite interesting in the zone between the jungle and the rocks...Ah, the rocks - Kilimanjaro is comprised of three large volcanoes, so there is abundance of lava rock and, to my surprise, obsidian. I found many chunks of obsidian as large as 9 inches in diameter. Walking through the lava boulders as the clouds



rolled in and out sometimes seemed as though we could have been walking on the moon. The elevation



this day was a highpoint for Jennifer, Brenda and I – literally. It was exciting to reach 14,434ft, higher than any mountain in Colorado! Every step we took beyond this point was a new personal record. The other four climbers in our group have all been much higher, but they were gracious enough to celebrate our milestone with us.



Lava

Tower

To aid in acclimatization, a side-trip to the Lava Tower was planned. It was here that we stopped for lunch (some groups camp here) and enjoyed intermittent views of the tower as it was sometimes shrouded by a passing cloud. Our guide Frederick offered to take us up to the top of the tower. Ian, Jeff, Jennifer and I accepted. A 25 minute scramble awarded us the summit of Lava Tower at 15,400ft. Unfortunately the view we received for our effort

was that of the inside of a cloud. Although we could not see our companions down below, we were able to holler down to them. The fun climbing made the extra jaunt worthwhile.





Summit of Lava Tower – great view...



A touch of class 3 climbing

Our hike to the Lava Tower brought us 2,600ft above the previous night's Shira camp; it was now time to descend 2,300ft to this night's abode, the Barranco camp. Persistent clouds/light rain encouraged us to make quick work of the descent to camp. The giant senico trees cowered behind a dense veil of fog which added an eerie yet enchanting element to their beauty.



The first peek at the Great Barranco wall compensated us for the toils of the 6.5 miles we had just trekked. The ocean of clouds below us was sufficient consolation for the fact that we had labored all day for a net gain of only 300 vertical feet. If only there was a lens for my camera that could capture the images recorded by the mind through the filter of a hard day's work...



