

Africa

February 2009

The Trip of a Lifetime: The Realization of a Dream

So often we find reasons and excuses not to do something big. Not enough time, not enough money, not safe enough, etc. I am so thankful that only five months ago I decided to allow my dream of travelling to Africa float beyond the chasm of excuses and blossom into a reality. To both my surprise and delight, Brenda agreed to chase this dream with me. In fact, she expanded the scope of our adventure by requesting the addition of Victoria Falls to the ambitious schedule that already was to include climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and going on Safari. In November we were privileged to be invited to join a group of people that had been planning just such an excursion.

While it seemed like forever for the day to arrive, it also seemed to happen way to fast. Our days leading up to the start of the trip were consumed with planning, getting immunization shots, walking up numerous flights of stairs over and over, buying gear and stressing about all the details. Despite some very close flight times, we made all of our connections and arrived in Moshi, Tanzania tired but full of anticipation. We met up with our new travel companions from home and were brought up to speed on the next day's itinerary.



The tour company we used strongly encourages the use of a day in Moshi for altitude acclimatization.



opportunity to tour a “war cave.” In days gone by, the Chagga tribe (one of 120 known tribes in Tanzania) built extensive cave systems used to hide from attackers. As our group took turns inside the cave, we began to attract a small army of curious young onlookers. Some of these children decided to entertain us with some singing. The three dental hygienists in the group, Dorthe, Jen and Louise passes out toothbrushes and paste to help keep all those smiles bright!

The elevation in Moshi is very similar to that in Denver, so the “acclimatization” day was not necessary for us Coloradans. After 28 hours of travel however, we did not mind the idea of an easy day. The first stop of the day was at a blacksmith shop. We observed the production of spears and tools in the fashion that they would have been made historically. As with most “places of interest” we would be exposed to, this blacksmith operation exists primarily to sell things to overzealous tourists. (I now am the proud owner of a Maasi spear.)

Next on the docket was the



Dorthe and Jen, “cavewomen”

This hut disguised the entrance to the cave.





After breaking free of our new entourage, we choked down a boxed "Chrisburger" lunch. This lunch was complete with a meat and egg sandwich, hard-boiled egg and a banana. No such thing as a Big Mac out here...



Nice hat...



It was now time to do some walking. Our destination was the Ndoro waterfall. Our guide for the day, Aaron, pointed out many plants of interest. We saw scores of banana, eucalyptus and avocado trees.





After a refreshing swim below the waterfall, we made our way to a “museum” dedicated to displaying the way of life of the Chagga People.

dc



*Jeff making
friends as usual*



It was now time to head back to the hotel. As if out of nowhere, we were granted our first sighting of Kilimanjaro! Exciting, inspiring, intimidating...



After a dinner of Italian food, we all headed back to the hotel to begin re-organizing and packing for the next day's climb. We didn't quite know what to expect. Would we be able to handle the altitude, the cold, the mileage? Did we pack the right gear? Did we train hard enough? As if it were taunting us, Kilimanjaro presented itself from the windows of the hotel. It stands proudly; a stately, solitary, volcanic mass with a summit nearly a mile taller than any mountain in Colorado... And I'm going to climb that?



A feeble attempt at sleep was made as we enjoyed what would be the last bit of comfort we would have for the next seven days. The last real bed, the last running water, the last electricity and most importantly of all, the last real sit down toilet...