

## HIGHEST AFRICA

*Trekking and climbing in the mountains of East Africa, 1990-91*

*by Grant Dixon*



My introduction to the mountains of East Africa took place more than 8000 metres above the ground, from an international flight into Nairobi. Dawn had just broken and the plains below were covered by haze or cloud, typical of the June dry season. Floating ethereally to the south was the snow-capped dome of Kilimanjaro - the only visible land in any direction. Several weeks later I glimpsed the mountain from below, this time through the haze from Amboseli whilst watching the elephants and other wildlife that live in sight of this massive mountain. Trekking was not a major part of the agenda for that particular trip, although a visit to Mt Kenya was planned, however those views of Kilimanjaro and the subsequent trek on the slopes of Mt Kenya confirmed my intention to return and spend time in the mountains.

The preparations for our forays into the East African mountains were greatly assisted by one member of the party having friends' resident in Nairobi - their house and garden proved a very useful base from which to mount shopping expeditions. My knowledge of overland transport from experiences the previous year also proved useful.

The first phase of our plans, several weeks in the Rwenzori Mountains of Uganda, involved travelling across Kenya and Uganda. We caught the overnight train from Nairobi to Kisumu, on Lake Victoria, an experience reminiscent of colonial days. In Kisumu we negotiated a deal with a *matatu* driver for

transport to the border, before he realised how much gear and people he had agreed to carry. It was



a slow trip to the border, a pleasant change from some *matatu* rides I had previously experienced. The border formalities went well, until Ron affirmed that he had a first aid kit buried in his pack. Unpacking and inspection of the various pills ensued. In contrast to our Kenyan driver, the *matatu* pilot who transported us to Kampala seemed to be practising for the inaugural Ugandan grand prix!

Kampala is built on a series of hills north of Lake Victoria. It is a small and green city, easy to get around and full of friendly people, but it still bears the scars of the civil war- missing windows and bullet holes in many of its buildings. *The New Vision*, the national newspaper, is for sale on almost every street corner.

After setting up camp in Kampala, in the grounds of the YMCA, we ambled down to the bank to change money. Having visited Uganda the previous year I knew to take a daypack. Uganda had no large denomination bills and, at the prevailing exchange rate, sufficient funds for a 3 week trip to the Rwenzori would have required a very large wallet. A visit to the station confirmed there was a departure to Kasese planned the next day. The rolling stock was gutted during the civil war and remains in a state of disrepair however the train attempts to make the journey several times per week. Even in first class sleeping mats are a useful accessory, covering the exposed springs and gaps in the boards of what's left of the seats.

The train crawled out of Kampala station next day - on time - and soon left the city behind. We made slow progress across the hot Ugandan lowlands, with lengthy stops at every village, at which point the train was besieged by food vendors. Still more vendors staffed stalls adjacent to the train stops, so it was easy to pass the time sampling a variety of local foodstuffs. Armed guards patrolled every carriage, there still being some concern due to rebel activity in the north. The journey took 28 hours, twice as long as timetabled (as if that means anything) and was punctuated by the midnight derailment of several of the carriages!

We arrived in Kasese, the nearest town to the Rwenzori, hot and tired late in the day. Whilst we intended to do some climbing, we were walking in and out of the mountains with a larger trekking group. Several members of the group had arrived in Kasese earlier and had already contacted Rwenzori Mountaineering Services who organise most treks. Having nothing else to do we dumped our gear at the hotel and went looking for a cold beer. Many east African hotels, including ours, are

Muslim-owned and so do not sell alcohol. However Coke and other soft drinks are widely available - I wondered at the annual per capita consumption of soft drinks.

Next morning two utes collected the expanded party and gear from the hotel and, after a few circuits of town looking for petrol, transported us to Nyakalengija village. Here the paperwork was completed, money handed over, porters chosen, loads weighed and distributed and then we were free to actually start walking towards the mountains.

The first hour or so after leaving the fields beyond the village were pleasantly undulating beside the Mubuku River, however part way up the 1000 metre climb to Nyabitaba Hut I was wondering at the sense in carrying most of my own gear (something about doing it myself, getting fit and saving a few dollars I seem to recall).

The Rwenzori have a deserved reputation for wet weather; in fact the name is derived from local words meaning "Hill of Rain". Hence I wasn't surprised when it started raining heavily, however the altitude was still fairly low and the temperature quite mild so I got comfortably soaked to the skin rather than wear a steamy parka.

It gets dark rapidly in the tropics, particularly when one is also in the clouds. Darkness found several members of our expanded party still some distance from camp, however an excursion with torches and much cooeing eventually had everyone together.

The following day involved a steady climb to about 3200 metres, through bamboo and moss forest - where every branch and twig was clothed in moss and epiphytes - with occasional glimpses of the steep green walls of the Bujuku valley through gaps in the canopy. There was plenty of the infamous Rwenzori mud also, however anyone experienced in Tasmanian bogs wouldn't be too surprised.

The new John Matte hut, built for trekkers, has localised their impact. However, whilst most trekkers use stoves for cooking their porters do not, and the area of mud and clear-felled vegetation around the hut is already expanding alarmingly.

Bujuku Lake, lying at almost 4000 metres in a steep sided glacial valley surrounded by Mts Stanley, Speke and Baker, was our destination





next day and our base for forays into the surrounding mountains. Bigo Bog, with its occasional mud traps, contained several of the weird giant Afro-alpine plant species - lobelias and cypripediums of giant groundsel. They certainly looked foreign, like nothing I'd seen anywhere else. From Bigo Bog we climbed up beside a waterfall, through an extensive grove of tree groundsel and past Bujuku Lake - with knee-deep mud below and rain and hail showers above. Camp was established beside a somewhat dilapidated shelter hut above and beyond the lake. Most of the remaining porters now returned to the village. Our communal guide Zebadiah, who has been guiding parties into the Rwenzori since the early 1960s, and mission-educated John, who spoke the best English, remained with us.

Several ascents were undertaken during the next few days, interspersed with eating, reading and resting in camp when the weather looked more dubious. However, as we discovered several days later when camped on Mt Stanley, it can be clear and pleasant on the summits whilst wet and cloudy in the valley 1000 metres below.

Mt Speke is the easiest of the high Rwenzori peaks to ascend, the normal route being non-technical although a glacier must be crossed. Vittorio Emanuele (4890m) is its highest point. The route leads up through giant groundsel forest to a saddle then up steep, wet and slippery rock slabs to a series of shelves. Here we elected to sidle around to the snout of the Speke Glacier; a more interesting route we thought. Reaching the ice, after some exciting moments on glaciated rock slabs, crampons were donned. Some rudimentary instruction in self-arrest techniques was imparted to those who hadn't done this before, and we plodded up into the mist. The glacier steepened, then eased, a prospective gully was chosen and soon there was no more up - we stood on the corniced and rime-encrusted summit. The view was non-existent. We descended the same route, with entertainment being provided by Doug, who elected to practice his self-arrest instruction, fortunately successfully, during a 200 metre slide towards a crevasse.



The climb to Irene Lakes is one of the most scenic routes in the area, ascending steeply through groundsel forest and above cliffs to a tarn-studded shelf below the Margherita Glacier on Mt Stanley. We intended to go further, attempting a more technical route to Margherita via its east ridge, while the non-

climbers explored nearby valleys. Margherita (5109m) is the highest peak of Mt Stanley and the third

highest summit in Africa. The attempt proved successful, climbing in mist most of the time but with a clearing whilst on the summit revealing nearby rime-covered Alexandra (5091m). During the descent Andrew almost succeeded in examining the lower reaches of the east ridge's northern aspect under the direct influence of gravity. Fortunately his aerial acrobatics deposited him on a solid snow ledge. He was uncharacteristically subdued for some time thereafter.

A recently built shelter hut is situated on rock slabs at 4500 metres near the Elena Glacier, on the southeastern side of Mt Stanley. This is reached via a steep climb up the aptly named Groundsel Gully, or direct from Scott-Elliot Pass, above Bujuku Lake. Our heavy packs made the climb quite a grind, and the smooth snow-slickened slabs to the hut were a particularly delicate and unexpected finale. The Elena Glacier, lying a few minutes across the sloping slabs from the hut, is the easiest access route to the Stanley Plateau and peaks of Alexandra and Margherita beyond.

Our first morning at Elena dawned misty but, with indications of clear skies above, we set off for Alexandra peak. By the time the Stanley Plateau was reached we were above the cloud. The peaks of Alexandra, Moebius and Elena shone in the sun around us, and Mt Speke floated above the cloud across the Bujuku valley - a perfect African alpine day. The Stanley Plateau glacier, at 4800m and about 1 square kilometre in area, lies atop Mt Stanley, astride the Nile - Zaire continental watershed and the Uganda - Zaire border. Glaciers drain from it in three directions - it is truly the roof and centre of Africa, and an incredibly beautiful area. The climb to Alexandra (5091m) was straightforward, up a steep snowslope and along a rock and rime-encrusted ridge to the summit. We spent a long time on the summit admiring the extensive view of the Stanley Plateau, to nearby Margherita and west across the hazy foothills of Zaire.

The next day we decided to visit Zaire. Another traverse of the Stanley Plateau, again in clear fine weather, preceded a steep descent of the West Stanley Glacier to the head of the Kamusoso valley, with the aptly named Lakes Blanc, Gris and Vert below. The Zaire side of the Rwenzori is much drier than the Ugandan slopes, and this valley is typical - barren and rocky with the odd groundsel sheltering behind boulders. We spent a lazy afternoon in the sun, until disturbed by a strong hot wind, gazing at the steep glaciers and ramparts of Mt Stanley. We returned to Uganda the next day, via the Stanley Plateau and Moebius peak, in warm still conditions again. The Rwenzori weren't supposed to be like this.

A snowfall overnight and a grey dawn were more than enough to dampen the enthusiasm for another



outing, given the perfect previous days. We packed up and descended to Scott-Elliot Pass, then passed beneath the huge cliffs of Mt Baker to Kitandara Lakes. These lakes lie in a particularly scenic valley on the western slopes of the Rwenzori, a fine place to spend a few days. However the following afternoon we moved to a camp high on Mt Baker. Next morning I arose early and scrambled to Edward (4843m), the mountain's highest peak, for a solitary view of the colourful sunrise, soon snuffed out, on the peaks of Mt Stanley across the valley.

Our descent from Mt Baker followed an unconventional route, but provided an unsurpassed opportunity to view the gardens of moss-carpeted rock which lie just below the zone of bare rock and snow. We crossed the continental divide again at Freshfield Pass, the head of the Mubuku valley - surely from here it was all downhill? Shelves dotted with groundsel separated descents of steep, rock steps. A huge overhanging rock bluff, Bujongolo, provides an extensive dry area and was used as a base camp by the Duke of Abruzzi's 1906 expedition, which climbed most of the Rwenzori's high peaks. It was a tempting place to stop but we pushed on, entering again the zone of mud and steep, root-laced descents.

The descent continued next day, now down and beside waterfalls - excessively exciting in the wet I suspect - through more mud, a river crossing and a ridge traverse through thick bamboo. The rapid descent from Mt Baker graphically displayed the distinct altitudinal zonation of the Rwenzori vegetation, with a lighter pack facilitating its appreciation! We halted early at Nyabitaba hut, not wanting it all to end too quickly, then descended back to the fields of Nyakalengija next morning.

We bumped back down road to Kasese in the back of a ute. The mountains were unusually clear for so late in the day and the glaciers of Mts Speke and Stanley glistened in the distance.

A high speed blowout in one of the double rear wheels of a bus, which subsequently showed no slackening of speed, and another selection of high speed *matatu* rides provided excitement during the return to Kenya and Nairobi



Mt Kenya is the easiest to access and most straightforward to organise of any of the East African mountain treks. Its lower slopes are easily reached by bus from Nairobi and roads approach the treeline, and become trekking routes, on three sides of the mountain. The road network largely services



forestry areas. Mt Kenya National park lies largely above the treeline and the lower mountain forest is at the continual mercy of political susceptible forest policies. Significant areas of the lower slopes of Mt Kenya have been converted to pine plantations.

We spent a night at Naro Moru village, on the main road north from Nairobi, at the foot of Mt Kenya. The previous year we ate a voluminous post-trek dinner in the bar here, the ancient juke box blaring in a corner and the room pulsating with happy, dancing, inebriated villagers.

We drove up to the park gate and “Met Station” beyond, the start of the Naro Moru route which is the easiest and most direct trekking route to Mt Kenya. It is now traversed by an increasing number of organised and independant trekkers and, particularly in the wetter areas, is showing the impact. The Naro Moru route soon emerges from the treeline and enters the “vertical bog”, in reality merely a series of poorly drained shelves. However attempts to find the driest option have resulted in extensive track braiding. The route eventually leaves the tussock-covered ridge crest and sidles through open giant groundsel forest, with the occasional strange “Ostrich-plume” lobelia, reminiscent of the Addams Family’s cousin It! This lobelia comprises a spike up to a metre tall which at first glance appears to be sheathed in feathers. In the upper Naro Moru valley the route passes a large stone hut for trekkers and a Rangers post. We climbed further, to a terrace above the track and below Mt Kenya’s impressive south face, where we set up camp sufficiently out of sight not to be disturbed.



The previous year we had plodded slowly up the eastern slopes of the mountain from Chogoria. The slow pace allowed acclimatisation and time to explore the surrounds to the route - strange rock outcrops formed by differential erosion of lava and ash deposits, copses of giant tree groundsel growing beneath rock bluffs, themselves alive with bounding, squeaking hyrax. The hyrax is a large, rodent-like creature actually related to the elephant, although there is certainly no superficial resemblance! One hyrax, braver than its mates and obviously aware that the two-legged intruders carried food, crept closer until it was eating from our hands. The following year a hyrax tried out its teeth on one of my plastic climbing boots, so they obviously aren’t too fussy.

Near the highest point of our trek from Chogoria we traversed a scree slope, thick mist limiting visibility to 50 metres, the altitude noticeable if one pushed too hard. Cresting a rise, there was a

lighter and brighter area ahead, across an icy pool - the Lewis Glacier. We camped near the pool; the squalid Austrian Hut nearby not being particularly inviting. From here it is a short scramble to Point Lenana (4985m), the highest point which can be reached by non-climbers. A frigid pre-dawn ascent provided a spectacular view of Nelion, the east peak of Mt Kenya, lit brilliant orange at dawn whilst all below was still in darkness.

The following year I watched the full moon set; Hut Tarn shimmered across the valley and the first light of a pink dawn flushed the crags above. I was again scrambling up beside the Lewis Glacier, this time intent on the peak of Mt Kenya itself. The normal route is a rock climb up the southeast ridge of Nelion. We moved at a leisurely pace, weighed down by too much gear and climbing as two pairs, enjoying the situations and the view, until the ubiquitous cloud rose to envelope us. Greg and I spent the night on the summit, as planned, whilst Ron and Andrew slept on narrow ledges below. At sunset the afternoon clouds fell away and the temperature plummeted. We felt on top of the world, the extensive view being clear (albeit hazy) and there being no other mountains anywhere in sight.



A trekking route circumnavigates the peak, remaining above 4400 metres most of the way and visiting a number of the clear, green tarns perched in basins below the crags. After a night's rest at our camp, Greg and I set off up the Lewis Glacier again. Having crampons we could take a short cut across the saddle

between Nelion and Point Lenana, then down the steeper Gregory Glacier. The more usual route passes below and to the east of Lenana.

Sliding down snow tongues and bounding down scree slopes took us into the head of Mackinder valley and below the spectacular northern face of Mt Kenya. At this time of year (late January) the northern face of the mountain was experiencing Winter, as evidenced by the ice filling cracks and gullies, whilst the southern faces were in Summer - a peculiar facet of the mountain's equatorial location.

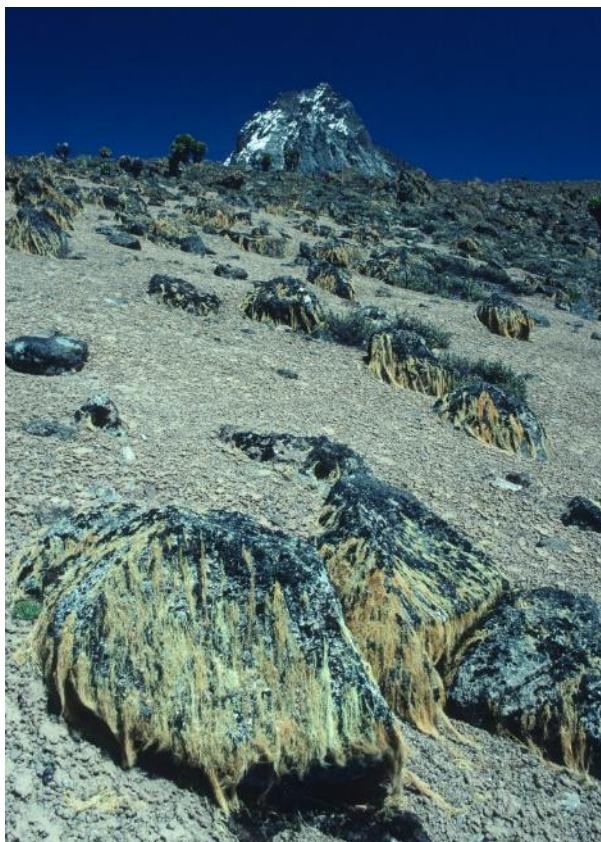
We lunched in the sun accompanied by a curious hyrax at Kami Tarn, perched in a particularly scenic position on a shelf with a groundsel and lobelia rock garden, the barren ramparts of the mountain towering above. From the Tarn the series of ascents and descents, crossing the ridges radiating from the mountain, continues - barren ridgetops alternating with more green tarns and rock gardens - around the western slopes of the mountain back to camp.



Ron and I had decided to descend the mountain via the little-used Burguret route, on the western slopes. Apart from the attraction of the little-known, the western slopes were also used to approach the mountain by Felice Benuzzi in 1943. Benuzzi, an Italian mountaineer, was interned in a POW camp below Mt Kenya in 1943. To counteract the boredom of camp routine he planned and, with another prisoner, carried out an amazing attempted ascent of the mountain. They made or stole their equipment in the camp, broke out and spent 15 days on the mountain. A successful attempt was foiled by bad weather and lack of food.

We climbed past Hut Tarn and crossed the barren ridge crest, littered with boulders festooned with beard-like lichen. We descended into the Burguret valley and tussock-hopped down to the distinctive Highland Castle, a series of towers and bluffs of volcanic rock atop the ridge crest, honeycombed with overhangs and grottoes. We spent the night in one of the overhangs, surrounded by buffalo droppings and footprints.

Buffalo trails proved quite useful in the thicker vegetation on the lower slopes. However we followed them with some trepidation in the bamboo zone; the thickness of the vegetation precluded rapid exits from the trail and the possibility of meeting an angry buffalo around a blind bend was real; some of the footprints did not look that old.



We emerged from the bamboo, with relief, and stumbled onto an old logging road. Despite the past logging there remained some huge old trees in the tangled forest beside the road - too big perhaps? We reached a small village after several hours of downhill travel, my heavy pack bouncing uncomfortably on my back. We managed to get a ride out to the main road on a logging truck. The workers, who like us clung to the load as we jolted further downhill, were keen to hear about our route as it is apparently very little traversed these days, and certainly not by unaccompanied *mzungus*.

A high speed Peugeot taxi ride to the Tanzanian border followed by a somewhat slower, lumbering Tanzanian bus saw us in Moshi by late afternoon, in time to watch the setting sun light Kilimanjaro's glaciers, the mountain rising immediately north of the town. We hoped that, in a few days, we would be somewhere up on those glaciers.

The first phase of organising the trip, finding a guide, was solved the first time we stepped onto the street. Kennedy asked if we intended to attempt Kilimanjaro, offered himself as a guide and proudly

showed us his “licence”. His price was good so we accepted. Ron and I knew exactly where we wanted to go, how to go about getting there and what the price should be. If one lacks any of this information then this method of obtaining a guide, whilst relatively cheap, is not necessarily recommended.

We drove up to Kilimanjaro National Park’s Marangu gate in a ute belonging to one of Kennedy’s many relatives. We registered, made our booking for the trek, to commence the next day, and (after some second thoughts) handed over the expensive park and camping fees. Back in Moshi we toured the market with Kennedy, although I doubt we received any better deals in the bargaining because of his presence. Like most markets towns of any size, the Moshi market is largely covered and full of smells and colour. The marketeers, largely woman, sold a wide range of utensils, tropical fruits and vegetables and dried fish



Next morning Kennedy turned out to be suspiciously unavailable, however his “cousin” Joachim and “Uncle” Eric announced that they were coming instead. Joachim was apparently the guide and Eric the porter, the distinction being that Eric carried their sack of gear more often. Most Tanzanian porters carry gear in sacks which they balance on their heads, and Eric and Joachim were no exception. This was an impressive achievement over the steep,

uneven terrain of the Umbwe route, which ascends the southern slopes of Kilimanjaro - directly and spectacularly.

We bounced up a rutted track on Kilimanjaro’s southern slopes in a dilapidated Landrover, driven by yet another member of the family. The Landrover left us in a grassy clearing where the track narrowed, steepened and entered the forest. Joachim and Eric announced they were off for a few minutes to visit friends, and strolled off in the same direction the vehicle had just gone. Ron and I sat down for a quick lunch in the sun, before a leisurely climb to a rock overhang at 2800 metres where we planned to spend the night, or so we thought. After 3 hours Joachim and Eric still hadn’t returned. We discussed the prospect of shouldering all our gear and leaving without them (we were planning on carrying most of it anyway, being fitter and more acclimatised), however the penalties for being caught in the park without the compulsory guide are severe.

Eventually Joachim and Eric came into view, well lubricated with beer and carrying a supply of sweet banana wine as it turned out. We were not amused, and raced off uphill, hoping there was still sufficient daylight to reach the rock shelter with Joachim and Eric in pursuit.

We were all soon sweat-soaked in the hot and humid conditions, and the head-down pace gave no opportunity to appreciate the tangled forest through which we charged. The rock shelter was reached on dark. I was not as hungry as I had expected after the afternoon's exertions and so shared my meal with an appreciative Joachim and Eric, supplementing their dried fish and banana wine.

Above the shelter the ridge narrowed and steepened, initially winding through twisted, moss-covered trees, then open heath with scattered giant groundsels. The view was spectacular. It was still early in the morning and the clouds had not yet obscured the mountain above. The summit of Kilimanjaro was still 2500 metres above us, its southwestern face consisting of the awesome Breach Wall with the glaciers tumbling 1000 metres down beside it. More than 500 metres below waterfalls could be heard in the shaded depths of the Umbwe gorge.

We crossed the Great Barranco, a broad, deep valley above the Umbwe gorge and climbed steeply up to 4300 metres on its eastern flank. Joachim and Eric left us, hoping a sprint around the southern flanks of the mountain would see them to Horombo Huts, and two comfortable, leisurely and social days with their many relatives and friends amongst fellow guides and porters. They undoubtedly had cause to question our sanity as we plodded further upwards into the grey afternoon cloud. We planned to ascend the Heim Glacier, traverse the summit and meet Joachim and Eric again by descending the Marangu (normal) route.

Visibility was soon reduced to less than 50 metres. The mist was cold and damp, the surrounding scree and rock totally barren. We were hoping to find a bivi rock rumoured to exist just below the Heim Glacier, at about 4600 metres. In the mist, with no frame of reference, the climb seemed endless. Somehow, we walked



straight up to what turned out to be the only bivi rock in the area. Water then became the issue, the porous ground and lack of snow precluded a local source. From out of the mist a waterfall could be heard, and I followed the sound. It turned out to be much farther than I expected, almost 30 minutes across loose, steep scree.

By dawn we were at the snout of the Heim Glacier, the cone of Mt Meru, some 50 kilometres away, orange above the hazy plains far below. We donned crampons and headed off up the hard, old and brittle ice. We were soon climbing in mist again with occasional steep sections, falling rocks and a rock band so loose it was hard to see how it could remain so steep. We reached a flat-topped rock



buttress at nightfall, and settled down for a still, cold night in bivi bags. Tanzanian national park fees are such that we had paid \$50 for this night (compared to \$20 if we had stayed in one of the huts on the other side of the mountain). Nevertheless the situation was fantastic, above the Heim icefall and opposite the huge Breach Wall, with its icicles climbed by Messner in 1978. Unfortunately, arriving at nightfall and leaving before dawn, we could not fully appreciate the setting.



The following day consisted of a progressively more breathless plod up the upper Heim Glacier, with two short steep sections, ice crunching and tinkling underfoot. As morning became afternoon the clouds, which had formed far below, boiled upward. The scree-covered ice

above the glacier gave new meaning to the two steps up - one step back progress one expects in such situations.

We reached the 5895 metre summit by mid-afternoon - in reality merely a slightly higher spot on an extensive gravelly dome. A freezing breeze was blowing which, together with the late hour, discouraged lingering. Clouds more than 1500 metres below enveloped the world - like the view from the airplane the previous year - and there was no sign of other people (any other trekkers would have vacated the summit that morning). A plaque, inscribed with a quote from ex-President Julius Nyerere, marks the summit; *"We, the people of Tanganyika (Tanzania), would like to light a candle and put it on top of Mt Kilimanjaro which would shine beyond our borders giving hope where there was despair, love where there was hate, and dignity where before there was only humiliation"*. Rubbish pollutes the immediate area and the plaque has unfortunately been covered with stickers and graffitied by inconsiderate trekking groups.

We trotted around the crater rim towards a long scree slope, the normal ascent/descent route, past looming ice pillars and glacier remnants and through a few late snow drifts. I was aware of a mild headache - probably promoted by dehydration, the altitude and my jogging gait. Bounding down the scree slope we lost altitude rapidly, and it started snowing. We reached Kibo Hut on dusk, walking out of the snow-filled gloom with several faces peering questioningly from dark doorways. The evening meal was brief and sleep came rapidly.

Next morning we crossed the barren, eerie terrain of The Saddle, an alpine desert at 4400 metres on the Marangu (normal) route up Kilimanjaro. We soon encountered the first of many porters carrying firewood and water up to Kibo Hut for that evening's group of trekkers. Both must be carried from the last area of vegetation more than 300 metres below the hut, and it is no doubt having a considerable local impact on the slow-growing alpine vegetation.

We raced down toward Horombo Huts, to meet Joachim and Eric and then exit the park that afternoon, it being the last day of our permit. The now near-empty packs, downhill route and thicker air facilitated rapid travel, in contrast to the trekkers we passed heading upward. Most were noticing the altitude, having ascended in less than 3 days. The rapid altitude gain, expense tending to bias the aspiring ascensionists towards older and richer tourists and the fact that, for many, an attempt on Kilimanjaro is the only trek they undertake in Africa are possibly reasons for this.

Horombo Huts, a cluster of A-frame huts with a larger communal shelter, can accomodate more than 100 people. Trekkers, guides and porters milled everywhere - or so it seemed to me. It was far more than 20 kilometres and 2 days from our experiences on the Umbwe route, and I was not sorry to be descending so rapidly.

We entered the forest again, at about 3000 metres, rested briefly at the crowded Mandara huts and reached Marangu gate, rather footsore, by mid-afternoon. John and his cousin's ute awaited us.

Ron and I treated ourselves to dinner in Moshi's Chinese restuarant (not bad, at least after our mountain fare), then spent a day of sloth, drinking Cokes and watching Kilimanjaro float amongst the clouds.

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