

Kilimanjaro

by Kerry Scott '76



Under the leadership of James Dick, Director of Campus Recreation and the Outing Club, a group of eleven intrepid adventurers flew to Tanzania in June of 2007. The goal for this group of current students and alumnae was the Roof of Africa, the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. As organizer and co-leader, I met the group when they arrived at Kilimanjaro International Airport outside Arusha, Tanzania.

For the next six and a half days, the group tackled the Shira Plateau Route up Kilimanjaro which winds its way gradually from the western edge of the mountain to the summit at Uhuru Peak, 19,340 feet above sea level. Our party was equally divided among men and women and was supported by a team of 35 porters and guides. Though no technical climbing is required, the climb up Kili is arduous, especially as you enter the thin air near the summit, where the slope also becomes steeper.

We slept in two-person tents and ate our meals in a mess tent just barely big enough for the 12 of us. This was also the setting for evening card games and story-telling.

Ten of the 12 of us were to eventually make it to the summit. The other two had to turn around near the crater rim at approximately 17,700 feet. One fell victim to acute mountain sickness. The other suffered a pre-existing condition called Renaud's Syndrome, where the body overreacts to the cold by shutting down circulation to the extremities. They were guided back to the last

camp where they quickly recovered.

The rest of us reached the crater rim at Stella Point just as the sun cleared the distant horizon. From there we slogged another hour over the snow which wasn't supposed to be there to triumphantly reach Uhuru Peak, the highest point in Africa.

We quickly descended to mitigate the effects of altitude, spent one more night on the mountain and the next night back at the Marangu Hotel basking in our glory.

Part two of our visit was a week in the northern circuit of national parks in Tanzania. We spent a night or two each in the Tarangire, Serengeti and Lake Manyara National Parks and a night in the Ngorongoro Crater National Conservation Area. Our timing could not have been better. The herds of wildebeest and zebra were massing for their annual migration across the Serengeti Plain. A week earlier or later and we would not have seen nearly the same numbers of game.

In addition to these species, we had the opportunity to see and interact with lions, cheetahs, elephants, hyenas, jackals, hippos, etc. I don't think there were any large species we did not see. Birdlife is also plentiful, and the flora, such as the giant Baobab tree, is nearly as interesting as the animal life.

Here we also camped two to a tent, though the weather was mild enough that we were able to take our meals (and play our cards) largely under the stars. Two safari-equipped Land Cruisers took us across the countryside.

This was my 14th visit to Africa since my wife and I first went on a hunting safari in Namibia in 1996. We now make a business of taking or sending individuals and groups for adventure travel in four countries in Africa. Our specialty is equestrian safaris. As an army reservist, my last four tours of duty were in sub-Saharan Africa as well. Though I've come to know Africa pretty well, the trek of Kilimanjaro and into the Serengeti is certainly the greatest of many adventures, and I'm proud of the students

and recent alums who were brave enough to make this trek with me and appreciative of James Dick's efforts in making it happen. With luck, this will become a regular adventure, giving future W&L students the opportunity to make the Roof of Africa part of their college experiences as well.

Kerry Scott is a 1976 graduate of Washington and Lee and lives with his wife, Marlies, on the family farm near Sweet Briar College in Amherst, Virginia. Look at www.narrowgatetrekking.com for more information about their African adventures.