

The Beginning - Northern Tanzania- Where it all started.

December 1993 – January 1994.

Preliminary information etc.

We were walking in the Alps and during a conversation the subject of “Kilimanjaro” came up.

And stayed there. Fred had had dreams of Africa since his youth but had not had the chance to go there so this was a catalyst for our first trip to Africa. A climb of the highest mountain in Africa and the highest freestanding mountain in the world. We made enquiries of one or two ‘specialist’ agents but they came to naught but the feeling just would not go away. Working for a living whilst providing the funds to travel did actually get in the way of the ability to travel.

It seemed impossible to square the circle until one day we saw a small advert in a walking magazine that seemed to work so a phone call was made. We were planning on some time ahead but a chance remark by the Agent to the effect that he had hoped we were enquiring for this December when he had a guaranteed departure for two clients and offered a discount if we wished to join. The trip included the climb and a few days in Tanzania’s wonderful wildlife parks. So we had ticked all the boxes, price, availability and activity IF we could book for two months hence. So we did. Dogs put into kennels, Christmas on the boat curtailed and we were committed. December 31st would see us airborne for Africa.

Tanzania is three hours ahead of GMT. The usual African twelve hours of daylight and twelve of night time and not much seasonal change. **Entry requirements:** - We would need a Visa AND a Yellow Fever vaccination that we obtained in double quick time.

Local currency is the Shilling (TzSh) Import/Export not allowed but £ & US\$ readily exchangeable.

Bugs, n Bowels. Peel it, boil it or forget it is the golden rule here. Hygiene standards appeared acceptable in the main Lodges but we needed Iodine tablets when on the mountain

Now to the trip itself: - 31st December 1993. Chorley to London Heathrow. Writing this many years later (2019) I have absolutely no idea how we got there. All I can remember is that we were booked on Ethiopian Airlines flight to Kilimanjaro via Addis Ababa and, we found out later, Entebbe. I can also remember that the flight took off fairly late in the day and somewhere over Europe the cabin lights were extinguished and when they came back on the Flight crew were assembled in Christmas costumes and wished us all a Happy New Year and the drinks were free.

En route. We landed in Addis Ababa on time where we were to change planes. Memorable event was the in and out visa and having to identify our luggage on the tarmac before they would load it on the plane. Then we took off for Kilimanjaro in Tanzania but first we were to land in Entebbe, Uganda. This was the scene of the famous Israeli raid to free hostages a few years earlier and as we taxied in we could see the hijacked Caravelle still sitting there AND the bullet pocked marked Terminal and Tower. Hmmm! Little did I know then that I would become a regular visitor to Entebbe in the years to come.

We landed at Kilimanjaro Airport on time and having had our papers stamped were met by our crew and put in a somewhat aged Land Rover for the transfer to “The Keys Hotel” in Moshi. But first we had to stop for water for the Land Rover which was overheating badly. And then we had to change a tyre but had difficulty getting the wheel off as the studs had been tack welded in place as they had lost a wheel nut. A great introduction into African mechanics that would stand me in good stead in the years to come.

An evening walk from “The Keys” gave us our first glimpse of Kilimanjaro which we were to climb in the next few days. Hmmm!

And so on the morrow we were piled back into the decrepit Land Rover and taken with our kit to the Marangu Gate of Kilimanjaro National Park where we paid our fees and signed



our lives away for the trek up the mountain. We had to hire a certain number of porters and watched as they all promptly re-organised their legal loads so that some did not have to bother to undertake the climb even though they had been paid for it.

We then set off through Montane Forest along a muddy trail watched by Sykes's Blue Monkeys until we gained altitude and left the forest for moorland landscape. And eventually we gained our first night stop at Marangu Hut. After a basic dinner we turned in for a restless sleep. Next morning we had breakfast at the table outside the hut.



L-R. Faustin (Guide) Jeremy Gane and son, Lyn and Don McLean and Elizabeth.

Breakfast consisted of Juice, eggs and bacon prepared communally down at a cookhouse which did not really bear close scrutiny.

After breakfast it was onwards and upwards at the basically slow pace required for a successful climb. A lunch stop at the 10,000 foot warning post was well received and eventually in the afternoon we arrived at Horombo Hut and the first glimpses of the mountain ahead of us. We spent two nights here to acclimatise to the altitude and took advantage of the 'rest' to explore



further onto the mountain including a picnic of sorts at Zebra rocks.

After our two nights we set off once more over the dry saddle area with better views of the summit and our destination for today, Kibo Hut at the foot of the scree slope to the summit.

This was a very cold place with a constant wind and sleep was hard to come. Then early next morning, well before dawn we were off up the slope going very slowly in the dark, pure madness, but ever so slowly we gained height to reach Gilman's point at the top where tradition has it we would love to watch the sun rise. Fat chance of that as we were in cloud. So on along the rim of the crater to Uhuru (Freedom) peak and the official summit at 5,895 metres above sea level and the highest place in Africa. Fine! Can we go now please?



And so we retraced our steps, down that bloody scree slope for a quick stop at Kibo Hut for breakfast and on down the mountain. Going down was obviously much easier and our poor legs did us proud. After one more night stop at Horombo we left the mountain behind us and collected our certificates at the gate. Our return to the Keys was delayed as, guess what, the bloody car had broken down again.

Eventually we got to The Keys and had a darn good clean up.

Tomorrow we leave on a sort safari to the Serengeti which is much more my cup of tea even though I was blissfully unaware of what it would lead to.

Part two. The Safari.

We were picked up by our driver Mohammed in his minibus next morning and after some shopping in Arusha we proceeded along the road west to Tarangire National Park and drove to what I now regard as one of my favourite lodges. Tarangire Safari Lodge. We had a light lunch and a rest during which I had a walk around the grounds and marvelled at the amount of wildlife that I encountered including some very habituated Dik Diks. This was my first encounter with this lovely creature which fascinated me. We then moved on to Lake Manyara NP for some memorable encounters with lion and elephant before a night in the recently privatised Wildlife Lodge on the rift valley rim.

From Manyara we drove to Ndutu Lodge, soon to become another favourite, passing our first giraffe and wildebeest on the way. I will squeeze a couple of those photos below.



Our, Elizabeth and I's, lasting memory of Ndutu was the fantastic food prepared in relatively basic kitchen, the chickens in the pen cowering from passing lions and the serenading lion all night outside our small cabin. Onwards to the Senerera area of Serengeti where I was delighted to find my first leopard. Indeed I beat the guide to the call. Along the riverine trees I noted something drop from a tall acacia and called a halt. There was a lovely leopard eating an impala high in the tree. We manoeuvred for a better position and were delighted with the resulting views which I record below. What a great introduction to this lovely cat which came down to afford even better views.



So as our trip grew to a close we headed for the famous Ngorongoro Crater where we stayed at the Wildlife Lodge with a fantastic view over the crater.

Next morning we entered the crater for our drive and were lucky to come upon lions again, many buffalo and good sightings of black rhino to conclude our visit.

The black rhino had a calf which was very nice.



And so it was back to Arusha after a safari that succeeded in re-awakening my long held ambition to see more of Africa and its wildlife.

Arnie could not have expressed it better. "I'll be back!" And I was. Many times!