

Mount Kilimanjaro

by Ben A. Macaskill 2001

Oliver M. Barry '97 is founder and president of the Kucetekela Foundation, a non-profit whose vision is to provide scholarships to Zambian boys and girls who are academically promising but financially disadvantaged, enabling them to attend excellent secondary schools. In an attempt to raise funds for this endeavor Ben Macaskill 2001, Mike Barry 2001, Henry Delouvrier 2001, and Nicholas Manice 2001, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

On the eighth of August, a group of thirteen Americans, outnumbered by our wonderful African porters and guides, entered the cloud forest at the bottom of the Shira Route. We spent the first day climbing through thick rich forest and camped the first night under a large canopy of trees, at 8,000 vertical feet above sea level. The next day we hiked out of the Montane Forest and onto the Shira plateau. The vegetation went from rich, colorful jungle to dusty desert. That night we spent the night at 11,000 feet. Up to this point, we had still not seen the summit of

Kilimanjaro. Day six is when things got really serious, the day we attempted to reach the summit. Getting up in the freezing cold darkness at 4:45 a.m. was the first challenge. We started walking uphill at 5:30. It is one of the steepest parts of the trail, not made any easier by the lack of oxygen or the fact that it is freezing because the sun does not rise until 6:30. We then stopped for lunch at about 12:30 and finally reached the summit of 19,340 feet at 3:30 p.m.

One might imagine that after reaching the summit, everything would be downhill, literally and figuratively. But the next night was harder than actually reaching the sum-

mit. We "slept" in tents at 18,500 feet, although none of us felt as if we had actually slept at all. Everyone's stomach was in knots, and our heads were pounding. I was one of the lucky few who did not have to stagger out of their tents to throw up. Despite wearing every piece of clothing I

had with me, it was freezing. I remember opening my eyes in the middle of the night, after maybe thirty seconds asleep, and seeing that the inside of my tent had two inches of ice on it.

The real reward came the next morning, when we all hiked back up to 19,000 feet to see

the sunrise. It was unbelievably cold, but seeing the sunrise over all of Africa was unique and special experience. We then had two wonderful days spent running down 12,000 vertical feet, enjoying the relief of returning to sea level.

The trip was amazing. Not only was it the most physically and mentally demanding thing I have ever done, but it was the first time I have really undertaken a challenge for a good reason. It would have been a great climb to do under any circumstance, but it was ten times more rewarding knowing that tens of Tanzanian school children would benefit from our efforts. 🐾



Old Boys showing off the St. Bernard's banner at the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro