

How do you tackle one of the greatest challenges on Earth? As the highest peak in Africa rising 5895m above sea level and standing alone in the Tanzanian Savannah, Mt Kilimanjaro is technically not as challenging as when climbing the high peaks of the Himalayas or Andes, but the altitude, low temperature, and occasional high winds make this a difficult and dangerous trek.

So, how do you tackle a mountain the magnitude of Kilimanjaro? Well, if you ask Noelene Evans, a local Albany business woman and fund raiser for the Grey Man, its one step at a time, one slow step at a time! here is her story...

I decided to take on the challenge of the mountain after successfully swimming in Albany Harbour Swim in 2010 and managed to convince three friends, my brother and his girlfriend to join me on an expedition that for me would be one of the hardest challenges of my life.



Clean and happy at the start with our Grey Man shirts

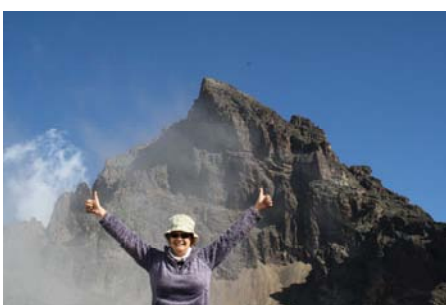
The first objective was to raise funds and awareness for The Grey Man, an Australian based charity which rescues children who are being or have been trafficked into child prostitution in South East Asia. Having raised over \$22,000, the second objective was for the entire team to make it to the top of Africa's largest mountain!

I started with six months training with Body Care Health club and physio support from Terri at Body Care Physiotherapy which culminated in a seven day trek commencing on 23 August 2011 with the aim to reach the Uhuru Peak within five days. Supported by porters and three sensational super guides, each of us carried our daily water requirements, usually 4 litres, and whatever we needed for the day, ie wet weather and warm clothing predominately.

Acclimatisation is essential, and even then most experienced trekkers suffer some degree of altitude sickness so the plan was to take it slowly...we got very used to hearing "Jambo, jambo, pole, pole!" (Hello, hello, slowly, slowly) and slowly we went. Camping out each night, a hot bowl of water to refresh in the morning and one at night to wipe away the dust, a toilet tent consisting of a seat over a bucket, and a mess tent which served us 3 meals a day and walking 6-12km a day, mostly uphill became the routine.



Chilly morning of day 3



The magnificent Mwenzi Peak

We were told "All trekkers will suffer considerable discomfort, typically shortage of breath, hypothermia and headaches" but we were fortunate!!! We had ideal conditions, cold and a bit windy but sunny every day above the cloud level (which sat at about 3200m) and yes, it was COLD at night but none of us suffered the extremes of altitude sickness and none of us suffered from hypothermia or any water born gastro type bugs which cause the nasties!

The monumental day was summit day...of course! The morning of day 6 we set off at 12.05am, in the dark and the cold aiming the reach the summit at around sunrise. The hardest part of this morning was reaching Gilman's Point, a milestone in its own right! Thanks go to our guides who encouraged and nurtured us up this torturous terrain and who sang to break the monotony of hiking in the dark during hours when normal people are sleeping, we reached Gilmans just after 6am and I have never been so grateful to reach a rest point.



Gilman's Point!! :o)

A well earned rest stop saw us all rejoicing in succeeding to climb the steepest/toughest part but I knew we still had at least an hour to go before reaching Uhuru Peak... the end was in sight...but it proved to be A LONG WAY AWAY!

That last 1hr and 35min was what I guess child birth must be like, you forget the pain and only remember the joy of finally achieving what you set out to achieve (so to speak). I do remember seeing loads of other hikers scrambling up the slope to reach Stella Point and being grateful that we were already there!

Finally, with about 20m to go to reach the Summit, I had to ask my guide to pause for a moment so I could "enjoy the view", my code for "I need to rest"...I know...I only had 20m to go but it was a hard 20m!!!



It is impossible to describe what it's like being on the "rooftop of Africa" as the summit is often referred to...I was so tired, it was so hard to breath, it was so COLD, -15°C actually, but I had worked so hard to get there, it was breathtakingly beautiful and I was there with 5 people who are particularly dear to me AND we all made it! 20 minutes later, we were on our way back down! All that effort for 20minutes, a few great photos and the deepest satisfaction of knowing I'd done it!

It only took us 12.5hrs of actual hiking to get from summit to registration gate, 3995m down and about 35km...but let me tell you, there was NOTHING better than a hot shower, a good feed and a great night's sleep to finish off our amazing experience.

If anyone asks me now "can anyone climb Mt Kilimanjaro?" my response is simple, "YES!"...if you have the right frame of mind, the determination, average fitness level, a great tour guide and the correct preparation, Mt Kilimanjaro is definitely "do-able" ...isn't not easy but really, where is the joy in achieving something that is easy??? It **IS** one of Earth's toughest challenges and I am immensely proud to shout "I'VE DONE IT". Now my motto is, "I've climbed a mountain, I can do anything!"

