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PAGE 12

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Heavy load: Porters are accustomed to carrying all supplies on their heads and backs. Photo Luca Pittalis.



High point: Luca, left, is congratulated on reaching the summit by porter Joseph, who has climbed Kilimanjaro more than 300 times. Photo Luca Pittalis.

Capturing Kilimanjaro before the ice vanishes

Filmmaker Luca Pittalis has produced a new documentary shining a light on global warming in the heart of Africa by investigating the shrinking of the glaciers on the continent's highest mountain Kilimanjaro.



Luca, pictured above, who lives in Bancroft Avenue, N2, was funded by Rotary International to travel to Tanzania with three friends. They climbed the dormant volcano in four and a half days and on the way asked the local porters, the people who know the mountain best, what changes they had noticed to the giant ice sheets.

You can see Luca's film on YouTube by searching 'Kilimanjaro: The White Mountain'. Here Luca himself takes up the story of how it was made.

Attempt on the summit

The more I'd read about Kilimanjaro, the more I realised that it was riddled by the effects of climate change. Its glaciers, which have inhabited its slopes for nearly 12,000 years, are receding faster than ever. When I failed to find any documentaries that even mentioned it, I decided to give it a try.

After four days moving up the lower slopes, we set off at midnight for the attempt on the 19,300ft summit and it was brutal. We had no prior climbing

experience. We trekked seven hours in the dark in -20C. With little time for acclimatisation, we felt the effects of altitude sickness and this made the filming process a real challenge. The locals repeatedly told us to drink water, their 'medicine'.

Guides who know the mountain

It is law in Tanzania that you climb with registered guides and porters. It is important for safety and for their economy. Many of them half run up, carrying 15-20 kg loads on their heads. Our head guide, Eden, told me in an interview that he had summited Kilimanjaro over 200 times. The porters reported 20-metre shifts in the glaciers' positions alongside the trekking paths, which was not just fright-

ening, but also agreed with the scientific literature. They said they had been told that the mountain will be ice-free within the next two decades.

On top of the world

At 7.20am, we reached the summit, or as Eden called it, his 'office', and he produced a football that he had been carrying in his bag the whole time. Kicking a ball around at 5,900 metres with a few football-fanatic Tanzanians is something you don't forget.

It is hard to describe what it's like up there: you are above the clouds and there is no light pollution because the whole area is uninhabited. You could even see Jupiter. I'm sure that it is what our earliest ancestors would have been used to seeing.



'Filming challenge: Mount Kilimanjaro stands proud above the high plains of Tanzania. Photo Luca Pittalis.

On the way home we had a short flight from Arusha to Nairobi. We were the only ones on the flight. When the pilot

announced that we would be "cruising at 18,000ft", the four of us laughed... we had just climbed to 1,000ft higher!

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