

Children of Fire—Africa's First Burns Charity

Kilimanjaro Climb



"When you are a burns survivor, don't give up.
You have a lot of things to do in the world, and nothing should hold you back."

To the summit!

Have you ever got up from bed at midnight to go for a walk at minus eight degrees Celsius?

Our teenage burns survivors have—and they hiked 1300 metres up towards the sky, towards Uhuru Peak: The top of Kilimanjaro, the highest point in Africa.

Five days of ascending and acclimatising took them to Barafu Camp, 4600 metres above sea level, the last camp before summit day. They started as a group of individuals, each with different backgrounds, each with different expectations. Five days later they set off for the summit as a team, as friends, having worked equally hard to get there.

All nineteen participants reached the 5000 metre-mark. Twelve made it to the summit, and the youngest of that team, Bongani Madlala (14) reached the rim of the crater at Stellar Point, just 100 metres below the summit.

Congratulations to all of them. They pushed themselves to their limits and beyond, and hopefully they will take the same approach to all else that they attempt in life.



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Altitude Sickness

Altitude sickness occurs at extreme heights when the body cannot adjust to the circumstances, e.g. less oxygen in the air. Symptoms include headaches, dizziness, nausea, change of mental status and fatigue. Altitude sickness is best prevented through a good acclimatisation programme, i.e. ascending slowly and spending several days on the same altitude to get used to it. Drinking at least three litres of water each day will help prevent altitude-related dehydration.

Old wives' tales sometimes say that young people or sportsmen are more prone to altitude sickness. This has nothing to do with their bodies, but with their egos—the youth and athletes tend to overestimate themselves and go up too fast.

Our teenagers were clever and listened to their guide's advice. None of them suffered from altitude sickness.

Participants

Nineteen burns survivors, fire fighters and volunteers from South Africa, Kenya, Norway, the United Kingdom and Germany made up the Children of Fire troop. With guides from Ireland and Tanzania and an American film crew, the team was refreshingly international.



Londeka Ngidi, age 15 from Pietermaritzburg, accidentally tipped hot water over herself as a toddler. She damaged an arm and lost much of her scalp.

Londeka is as gentle and kind as she is fearless—in the Drakensberg she never even flinched when abseiling down sheer rock faces, and on the Kilimanjaro climb she pushed herself beyond her personal limits. Londeka hopes to study medicine when she completes her high school.



Lebohang Motseki, age 14 from Bloemfontein was burned when he made a fire in the veld with his friends. Someone poured paraffin onto the fire, thinking the container held water. The blaze badly burned Lebohang's legs.

One of the youngest contenders for the Kilimanjaro climb, he gained immensely from the new impressions of going to a different country, meeting new people and climbing the highest mountain of Africa.



Deon Slabbert (16) from the Western Cape, was burned in 2006, when someone dropped a lighter onto the floor of a school change room which covered in turpentine for cleaning.

As a reserve climber, Deon was only sure he could be part of the trip a few days before departure. He seemed to be bizarrely prone to accidents, and quickly became the comedian of the group.



Vivian Anyinya (18) from Nakuru, Kenya, was badly burned when she was ten years old and kerosene stove blew up and injured her upper body. She finished high school last year and aspires to becoming a medical doctor. She was referred to Children of Fire's Kilimanjaro climb by an American surgeon working in Kenya at the time. Vivian was gave a hearty thank you speech in Kiswahili to the Tanzanian porters accompanying the group up the mountain.



Mittah Lebaka, age 17 from Dobsonville, Soweto, was burnt when she was eight years old and tried to warm her hands over a four-plate electrical stove and her jersey caught fire. She is a bright and confident teenager and wants to study child psychology. Mittah showed great enthusiasm and initiative towards the Kilimanjaro climb, and was the first to write a motivational essay and to organise herself hiking boots. In mid 2008 she started an internship at Children of Fire.



Mfundo Ntamehlo, age 21 from Alexandra township, suffered severe burns when he walked past an imbawula (a brazier used for heating) just as someone tossed paint thinners into it. He hopes to complete his burns-delayed high schooling in 2009. Mfundo was on the verge of giving up during the hike to the summit but then refused to turn back when the guide told him to. His cheeky friendliness and confidence made him a worthy companion for each of his fellow climbers.



Bongani Madlala, a 14-year-old from Howick in KwaZulu-Natal, was severely burned at the age of three months when his bed clothes were set alight by a fallen candle. He wears glasses for his very poor eyesight, unrelated to the burns.

He is a very active and extrovert boy, proud of his Zulu heritage. He demonstrated leadership skills with the ability to guide younger children and a willingness to help them with their tasks.



Samkelo Radebe, aged 18, lost both his hands when playing with wire near electricity pylons as a little boy. He likes motivational speaking and is also an excellent runner training for the Paralympics.

As a serious athlete Samkelo knew how to push himself to the limit, and despite his disability he took on rock climbing and the slippery walk along Kilimanjaro's crater without a flinch, reaching the summit as one of the first.



Rose Ndunda, a devout Christian girl age 14 from Nakuru in Kenya, was burned as an infant when she crawled too close to an open fire. She had never been to another country before coming to South Africa.

Rose's endearing personality won everyone's hearts in no time. She ran around and leapt like a little impala, using her energy up quickly, but the encouragement and faith of her companions brought her closer to the sky than she would have ever imagined to be.



Kjetil Havnen, a Norwegian youth aged 17, suffered burns to the face in a motor bike accident when he was 14. He wishes to become a counsellor as well as one of the top ten swing dancers of Norway. He took part in the Drakensberg Adventure in 2006 though with hair dyed black so he looked very different that time. He got to know some of the teenagers who also joined the Kilimanjaro climb. The climb let him slip into the position of a mentor and big brother to the other climbers, who were grateful for his encouragement and kindness.



Kagiso Mathebula aged 17, lives in Hammanskraal in South Africa's North West Province. He was burned at the age of seven years, when his brother poured petrol onto wood and set it alight to make a fire in the kitchen. Kagiso is a Muslim by faith and quiet by nature.

Kagiso's message is: "Look at me. It is not easy, but you can make it." Climbing Kilimanjaro helped him get this message out to the world.



Jeffers Zitha, age 15, was badly burned in a paraffin stove explosion at his home near Roodepoort, when he was about ten years old. He lost his mother in the accident He used to be a quiet and reserved teenager but gradually his sweet, kind and helpful side became more apparent.

From the beginning Jeffers believed that he would conquer Mount Kilimanjaro and was proud of the chance to see Tanzania.





Thulani Nhleko, 15, was burned in a veld fire two years before the climb. He stayed out of school because he was teased by his classmates. Only when he was referred to Children of Fire did he resume his education.

Thulani had surgery to his feet in January and March 2007, and despite the doubts of his surgeons, he attempted Kilimanjaro and made it all the way to the summit.



Vusi Mathibela (18) was burned when he was 13 years old, when a candle fell onto his blanket. He was always very self-conscious about his scars. But despite all his struggles, Vusi has become a charming, friendly person with a beautiful smile and a cool hair style. He is an excellent runner and when asked about his fitness to climb Kilimanjaro, he replied boldly: "I am fit enough to run up the mountain easily. I believe in my own strength!"



Musa Zwane, age 18, was burned at the age of two years when a fire broke out in his home. He and Mfundo Ntamehlo are very close friends and attend the same school in Alexandra township.

"It's all about contributing and confidence and hard working. Climbing Kilimanjaro was the happiest dream of my life coming true, and maybe some other kids learned from me. The most important thing is to encourage others."



Tristan Jones, aged 16, has supported Children of Fire since he was five years old and is both a friend and mentor to the other teenagers. He is a volunteer fire fighter in Durban and aspires to a scholarship to study International Affairs at Princeton University in the USA and thereafter to study law. He hopes to work in human rights.

He found the Kilimanjaro climb both a challenging and rewarding experience.



Marietta Neumann (20) from Hamburg, Germany, started to volunteer for Children of Fire at the age of eighteen. She climbed the Drakensberg with some of the teenagers in 2006. "I have seen them overcome their fears abseiling in the Drakensberg, and then surpassing anything they had done before when they took on the summit that cold night."

Marietta wrote much of the Kilimanjaro newsletter. She is now studying medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand.



Gladstone Gcabashe from Durban, aged 46, badly burned his arm after spilling paraffin when he was little and his sleeve caught fire. He is now married with four children, and an A-grade fire fighter. Benefiting from the firefighting training, he had no difficulty making it to the summit of Kilimanjaro.

Children of Fire works closely with fire brigades in different countries. Fire fighters can motivate for a role in the Mount Kenya climb 2010.



Preparation training

Climbing Kilimanjaro is foolish without preparation. The hike to Uhuru Peak is not “a walk in the park”, and a good training plan helps build up the necessary muscles and stamina.

Thulani Nhleko and Rose Ndunda, based at Children of Fire in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, had the privilege of a personal trainer Leslie Longuiera from Ignition Health. They also went jogging at a public sports field every other afternoon.

German volunteer Felix Neumann travelled to all the other teenagers' homes to organise their training: Londeka Ngidi and Bongani Madlala were allowed free access to the facilities at the Virgin Active gym in Pietermaritzburg for a month. Their school teachers also did some exercises with them to strengthen their leg muscles. Prof. Latieef Oluwole Amusa, Head of the Centre for Biokinetics, Recreation and Sport Science at the University of Venda, made Andani Mphaphuli's training his personal task. Other climbers exercised with their football trainers or at their local gyms.



Musa during a warm-up jog at Wits University.



Rose scales the climbing wall at the Old Mutual Sports Hall at Wits University



Thulani, Musa and Mfundo enjoy the view from the top of the Magaliesberg

Their overall fitness and lung function was assessed by the Institute of Biokinetics and Sport Science at the University of Johannesburg, managed by Shohn Wormgoor and Kabelo Sennelo in connection with a research project.

The climbing club at the University of the Witwatersrand let the teenagers try their luck on the climbing wall.

This was more for fun than preparation though, because the hike up Kilimanjaro does not involve vertical rock climbing. Professor Paul Fatti, an experienced mountaineer, gave a motivational speech to the youngsters.

The teenagers also underwent fire fighting training at the Brixton Training Academy in Johannesburg as a fun, team-building experience. They crawled through underground pipes, felt their way through

the pitch black smoke house and then learned how to put out a paraffin fire together by using the bucket run.

Some of the group had a weekend-getaway hiking in the Magaliesberg; for most of them this was

their first encounter with sleeping and eating outdoors, and walking for pleasure and exercise rather than as a necessity.

Equipment acquired that will be used yearly by burns survivors

The temperature during the hike on summit day (or summit night, rather) can go as low as minus 12 degrees Celsius. We were lucky and "only" had eight below, however warm jackets and thermal underwear were vital. First Ascent's Insulator jacket with a nice warm fleece to zip in provided a wind- and waterproof outer layer. Its thermal underwear, fleece pull-overs, over trousers, beanies and gloves kept us as warm as you can expect to be in the middle of the night at 5000 metres above sea level, wind gusts blowing across the steep slope when you least needed them.

Capestorm's super-insulated Firefly sleeping bags kept us warm at night, while Woolworths' sunglasses protected our eyes from the glaring sun that burns even more intensely in the thin air at high altitude. Good hiking boots are a must for any long hike; Ram mountaineering and Crouch Footwear, based in Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg respectively, donated excellent quality boots for most of our climbers. Ram mountaineering also donated head-lamps which, unexpectedly, were not needed for the summit hike because the full moon shone so brightly. But for the hours we spent in tents or strolling over the campsite at night trying to find the nearest long-drop, they were brilliant.

Last but not least, a disposable camera in each climber's backpack allowed them to document their adventures and show pictures to their friends and family.

Thank you to **First Ascent** and Carmen Barkhuizen for free rain pants and bean-



Mfundo Ntamehlo, Musa Zwane and Deon Slabbert sport their First Ascent outfits and hiking boots from Ram Mountaineering and Crouch Footwear.

ies, as well as discount on all of their other products. Thank you to **Capestorm** and Pierre van der Spuy for discount on their sleeping bags; **Ram Mountaineering** and Simon Larsen for good hiking boots and head lamps, and to Ryan van Niekerk for helping with contacts for mountaineering companies; **Crouch Footwear** and Peter Crouch for a speedy last-minute donation of brand-new steel-capped leather boots five days before the climb; and **Fuji Film** and Derek Pearman for equipping the team with disposable cameras, also a last-minute-donation.



Samkelo with a Black Diamond headlamp

Gems at Home Affairs

Most people associate the Department of Home Affairs with long queues, depressed officials and bad service. We are not disputing this but if it wasn't for some few dedicated individuals who moved mountains for us while most of their colleagues were on strike and throwing stones at their cars, some of our climbers would have never been allowed to leave the country. We would like to thank Minnie Prinsloo from the Identification Section at the Pretoria Head Office; Presley Moga from passport collections at the Braamfontein branch; Magda Wallis from

Head of Passports at the Pretoria Head Office; and Ourania Koutoulogeni from the Passport Section at the Braamfontein branch. Andani Mphaphuli's passport was only printed and collected 24 hours prior to departure!



Tanzanian High Commission and Tanzanian National Parks Board

The Tanzanian High Commission in Pretoria was involved early on to make contact with different entities in the country, such as local media and Tanzania National Parks (Tanapa). Minister Plenipotentiary Christopher Mvula, main correspondent at the High Commission, invested much of his time to find useful contacts for Children of Fire. Gerald Bigurube, Managing Director of Tanapa, kindly granted free entry to the park for all participants from Children of



Fire's side. Normally the fee was 140 US Dollars *a day* for each person. The unusual waiver was allowed because the climb was *not* a fundraising initiative. Otherwise what seem to be enormous fees for those of us from other African countries are actually essential to the Tanzanian economy. People from East African neighbours Uganda and Kenya pay minimal fees—Kilimanjaro is their mountain, too.

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Two of the teenagers, Samkelo Radebe and Tristan Jones, who are both aspiring to a career in law, were given the unique opportunity of a short term internship at the International Criminal Tribunal for

Rwanda. This was made possible with the help of Chief Justice Pius Langa as well as Marlize Keefer, who hosted the boys in her own home while they were in Arusha. (see p.21/22 for more).

Prep talk by Deshun Deysel, first black female to summit Mount Everest

As some of the teenagers met at Netcare's Travel Clinic at Linksfield Clinic to get their yellow fever and hepatitis jabs, experienced mountaineer Deshun Deysel took the opportunity to tell them what to expect from climbing the highest mountain in Africa.



Deysel, a South African citizen and the first black woman to summit Mount Everest, told them about physical and mental challenges they would face, such as altitude sickness, the extreme cold and fatigue. She also told them about her Everest climb—her team spent several weeks

ascending and descending in order to get used to the high altitude, and at 7000 metres above sea level they were barely able to sleep because of the thin air.

For the first time the teenagers had to start thinking about the serious side of their upcoming adventure. They realised that climbing a mountain wasn't child's play and that reaching the summit was not guaranteed. But they also learned that success was a personal best achievement and not necessarily getting to the top. Deysel has climbed the highest peak on every continent.

A Taste of Tanzania

Most of the climbers had never been to another country, so before they went, they needed to get a *taste of Tanzania*.

Where better than beneath the thatched lapa of *Moyo*, an African restaurant and the hub of East African style with Indian, Arabian, tropical and ocean influences on its cuisine.

Tanzanian staple foods are *cassava* or corn *ugali* topped with Maasai beef or Futari coconut milk curry and the wide range of bananas grown are used in savoury or sweet dishes, especially the Mkaté pancakes. *Moyo* provided a sample



welcomes
Children of Fire
to a
Taste of Tanzania

STARTER
Coconut Bean Soup (coconut milk and the delicate use of curry give the soup its unusual flavour)

MAIN MEAL
Chicken Dar Es Salaam (usually served when there are special guests)

Accompanied by:
Fried Plantains
Braised Cabbage
Ugali (cornmeal staple starch) made from cassava

DESSERT
Fresh Pineapple with honey
Chapati Majis (thin pancakes) served with cinnamon sugar.

South Africa

Tanzania

of these African flavours, including its *Chicken Dar Es Salaam* which is usually served for very special guests.

Kiangi Kiangi, Kabenga Kaisi, and Angela Mwageni, Members of the Tanzanian Society at the University of the Witwatersrand, told the teenagers about Tanzania's history including help to South Africans

during apartheid years. The teenagers started to understand the cultural and political characteristics of the country.

Moyo was also proud sponsor of Musa

Practising for the spotlight at IAJ

Scaling Mount Kilimanjaro was bound to entail attention from the media for this unusual group of climbers. The Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) prepared the team for radio interviews before they set off. Executive Director Jacob Ntshangase and Janine Lazarus taught the youngsters that it was important to remember what message they wanted to deliver when speaking in an interview. As an exercise, each of the teenagers was asked to talk about how

Zwane, one of the participating teenagers. This made *Moyo* a key contributor to the success of the Kilimanjaro expedition. www.moyo.co.za

they got burned. Thulani was very shy because he was not used to giving speeches in English, while Mfundo and Deon were as cheeky as usual. Coincidentally, a journalist from Channel Africa was at the IAJ for a function at that time and took keen interest in the teenagers' endeavour. She made an appointment with some of them and interviewed them the following day. It remains hard to get the media to cover positive stories.



From left to right: Lindiwe Ngwenya, Musa Zwane, Jacob Ntshangase, Janine Lazarus, Mfundo Ntamehlo, Mittah Lebaka, Jeffers Zitha, Deon de Kock, Thulani Nhleko, Samkelo Radebe. Sitting: Rose Ndunda



Kagiso Mathebula was interviewed for Moretele Community Radio in Hammanskraal north of Pretoria.

Vaccinations and tooth check-up

Yellow fever and Hepatitis A and B are three diseases still present in many countries including Tanzania. The Hepatitis A virus is transmitted through food or drink that is contaminated by an infected person as well as through contact with an infected person's faeces. The Hepatitis B virus is transmitted through contact with the body fluids of an infected person.

Falling ill can mean the end of a trip, so prevention is essential. Netcare Travel Clinic, Clicks, Sanofi Pasteur, Medi-Travel

International, Merit Pharmacy and Dr. Edrich Krantz arranged donations to cover the vaccines and/or administered them for free at the different youngsters' home towns. Netcare Travel Clinic also sponsored the cost of Doximal tablets for climbers as malaria prophylaxis. While the mountain itself is too high for the parasite to survive, there was a risk during the hotel stay at lower altitude.

Prof. Sid Setzer of the Wits Dental Clinic checked all climbers' teeth pre-travel.

Behind the alternative adventure

The logistics of the climb and the actual expedition were organised and brilliantly managed by Adventure Alternative, a trekking company leading expeditions in Argentina, Mongolia, Nepal, Tanzania, Niger and other countries across the world. Adventure Alternative is run by Gavin Bate, who personally guided Children of Fire's expedition. He had already climbed Kilimanjaro 32 times and had been to the top of Mount Everest three times. Bate is kind and competent. We felt sure he could handle any emergency, had it occurred. Adventure Alternative's local manager Castro Kapelo assisted with arrangements for park fee waivers and also managed logistics during the teenagers' stay in Moshi.

In addition to leading expeditions and safaris, Adventure Alternative also provides financial support to Moving Mountains, an Ireland-based charity working mainly in Kenya and Nepal. It helps street children and their families with educa-



*Back: Londeka Ngidi, Gavin Bate.
Front: Rose Ndunda, Vivian Anyinya*

tion, health and welfare through environmentally and economically sustainable projects, and by providing employment for a wide range of people caught in the poverty trap. It also supports several schools, clinics and hospitals mainly in Kenya, Niger and Nepal.

For more information, see:

www.adventurealternative.com

www.movingmountains.org.uk



Children of Fire—The Movie

Roughly one year before the Kilimanjaro expedition, Children of Fire was approached by Junius Hughes, an award-winning film producer from the USA, who wanted to make a documentary about the charity and its field of work. He started filming on the Drakensberg climb in 2006 and has since come to South Africa several times to take footage for his project. Together with South African cameraman Nicky Makgamathe and US stills photographer Tammy Mitchell, he participated in



Tammy Mitchell and Junius Hughes documented the teenagers' journey

the Kilimanjaro climb and filmed the teenagers as they proved to themselves and the world that neither disability nor disfigurement could hold them back from achieving their dreams.

In an effort to bring this message across, and also to raise awareness of the dangers of fires, the documentary is planned to be screened in the USA as well as the UK and South Africa. For more, see: www.childrenoffirethemovie.com

From Johannesburg to Moshi

Camp: Keys Hotel, Moshi, Tanzania

Altitude: 900 metres above sea level

Ascent of the day: 100 metres

What chaos! Twenty people (film crew and climbers) in red shirts and red caps should not be so hard to keep together, but if you are at an airport and they all have one or two pieces of luggage, *plus* passports *plus* tickets, which mustn't be lost, this can prove very hard.



Kagiso and Gladstone wait full of anticipation at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg.

Yet we all made it safely to Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, where we had to wait for five hours until we could board another plane that would take us to Kilimanjaro International Airport. Time was passed with roaming through the comparatively small airport and looking at souvenirs; Kenya Airways kindly arranged for refreshments, and soon everyone was aboard a tiny two-propeller machine—in fact it was so tiny that some bags were left behind! But this



Lebohlang wanders uncertainly towards the small plane that took us from Kenya to Tanzania.

information was only disclosed to us upon arrival in Tanzania...

“I saw Mount Kilimanjaro from the plane. It looked big, but it didn't scare me. I only felt more challenged. I always tried to think positive. I didn't want to think about the fact that it would be cold or hard.” —*Musa*

Most of the youngsters had never been on a plane before and were fascinated by the television screens in front of each seat as well as the meals that were served like they were in a restaurant.

Kilimanjaro International Airport is much smaller than its name implies. It was easier to keep an eye on everyone, and while Tammy Mitchell the stills photographer and Mittah Lebaka placed enquiries about their lost luggage, the others tried to persuade the Immigration Officers to accept Rands instead of US Dollars. They would not concede, and Marietta had to leave her passport as a guarantee that someone would return the next morning with the money exchanged to Dollars.

Two members of Adventure Alternative were already waiting with buses to take us to the Keys Hotel in Moshi, about 40 minutes' drive from the airport. We were welcomed by live guitar music and yet another set of forms to fill in. A buffet was prepared in no time, and the group was introduced to Gavin Bate, guide and owner of Adventure Alternative, and Alwyn Kinane, a physiotherapist from Ireland who accompanied us, too. It was already late at night, but the teenagers loudly expressed their excitement until the early morning hours...

Day Zero—Briefing and rest—enjoying the novelty of a hotel stay

Camp: Keys Hotel, Moshi, Tanzania

Altitude: 900 metres

Ascent of the day: 0 metres

The team was granted a much longed-for sleep-in but then Gavin and Alwyn went round to check that their bags had all the appropriate equipment. In the afternoon, Gavin briefed them about the trip and told them a few rules that one has to abide on the mountain:

- 1) Keep time
- 2) Drink a lot (minimum 3 litres a day)
- 3) Eat well
- 4) Keep warm and dry
- 5) Don't miss the hole! (this refers to the long drop toilets)
- 6) Work as a team
- 7) Go slow!

Rule number five made us laugh. Listen-

“We learned that we should wait for people that stay behind, and that we shouldn't walk too fast. If you walk too fast at the start you might not make it at the end of the day.” —*Jeffers*



Listening attentively to the guides' instructions

ing to rules was easier than observing them.

Later that day Thulani went to hospital to see a doctor, because the heavily scarred skin on his face harboured three abscesses right next to his mouth. No one could tell whether he would even make it to the third camp because a febrile infection could easily turn into an emergency. He was prescribed antibiotics and daily dressing changes, and then we could only pray and hope that the infection would settle.

Day One—Misty ascent through the forest to Machame Camp

Camp: Machame

Altitude: 3000 metres

Ascent of the day: 1500 metres (plus 600 metres by car)

It was our first hike, and it was probably the most beautiful one. From Machame Gate at 1800 metres above sea level, a path led uphill almost steadily through lush green forest like the film “Lord of the Rings”, with moss covering the branches and tree trunks and exotic creepers called lianas hanging down from the thick canopies of indigenous trees.

Animal sighting was poor as their habitat is disturbed by the travellers regularly walking that route. However huge white-necked ravens frequented the camp site and created an eerie feeling as they cawed and soared off into the fog.



The team was welcomed with freshly made popcorn and tea, a welcoming refreshment though unusual to the northern hemisphere participants who associate popcorn with cinema. The cooks demonstrated their expertise as they prepared delicious soup and a full nutritious meal for the hungry hikers.

Day Two—From forest to lava scrub, landscape changes with altitude

Camp: Shira

Altitude: 3840 metres

Ascent of the day: 840 metres

Bright sunshine welcomed us as we crawled out of our tents that morning. Kilimanjaro's was visible for the first time and it looked grand and inspiring as it sat there, waiting for us to stride towards its summit.



As we climbed higher, the forest became thinner and eventually gave way to small bushes and shrubs that persisted the harsh conditions that the 100,000 years-

Day Three—A hard day and no gain in altitude

Camp: Barranco

Altitude: 3950 metres

Ascent of the day: 110 metres

We could not say we weren't warned. "Day 3 is going to be the longest and hardest, but if you make it you'll be fine" is what we heard from the beginning.

We did 700 metres ascent and had lunch at 4500 metres above sea level. Some found it very hard as it went steadily uphill for the first few hours. For the first

The camp was constantly immersed in wet clouds and attempts to dry any damp clothing on the tent lines failed.

Some swapping around happened before everyone was settled in their new canvas homes and despite the long walk the youngsters' voices could be heard chatting till late in the night.

old solidified lava offered. Before noon the clouds caught up with us and we had the strange sensation of feeling extremely cold when a cloud was rushing through and almost unbearably hot when the sun came out.

The climb had been announced to be much shorter than the previous day—height-wise and distance-wise. Yet it seemed like we were on the road for just as long, and the exhaustion at the end was only defused by beautiful views across the sky where dark jagged peaks broke through the ever-moving clouds.

The ground was scattered with smaller and bigger rocks and more than before we appreciated the sturdy sleeping mats our porters were carrying up for us.

time, the group split into a faster and a slower party.

From then on we descended about 550 metres, so by night fall we gained almost no altitude at all.

"At the end of the third day I got really tired. But the people who were walking with me told me to keep going, and that really helped. Sometimes I could also help others, like Londeka. I encouraged her when she was tired." —Rose

Barranco Camp is in a valley, and the sun disappeared behind the mountain in the late afternoon.

The summit looked much closer all of a sudden. Below it rose a seemingly unconquerable rock wall that we were to climb the next day.



At night, the lights of Arusha glimmered far below in the distance.

Kilimanjaro's botanical garden

Kilimanjaro harbours a variety of rare plants, some of which are indigenous to the area. *Lobelia deckenii*, a species of giant lobelia endemic to Kilimanjaro, grows in moist areas, such as valley bottoms and moorland. *Lobelia deckenii* is the only high altitude species of lobelia that lives on Kilimanjaro.

They often consist of between one and 18 rosettes, all connected underground. Individual rosettes grow quickly when conditions are good, and the plant is able to reduce their size or completely prevent them from growing if conditions become less favourable, for example, if an individual rosette is crowded by another rosette, or if the conditions are too dry. Individual rosettes die after flowering, but the rest of the plant is not affected, becoming tall and cone-like.

©Wikipedia.org



A young lobelia plant with water from the last rainfall stored in its rosette.



Vusi (left) and Kagiso were fascinated with the strange-looking, older lobelia plant.

Day Four—Rock scrambling builds team spirit

Camp: Karanga

Altitude: 3965 metres

Ascent of the day: 15 metres

The “unconquerable” rock wall was one of the most pleasurable parts of our 7-day-hike. While Samkelo, who lost both hands when his kite wire touched a high voltage cable at a young age, astonished



all by scaling the most difficult passages without help; young Rose had so much fun that she completely forgot to be exhausted. The boys liked to reach out a hand to help the girls, especially Kjetil, a Norwegian burns survivor, who said warmly that everyone in the team was like a brother or a sister to him.

Day Five—a lunar landscape with little air to breathe

Camp: Barafu

Altitude: 4600 metres

Ascent of the day: 637 metres

Today felt more like coming closer to the summit. It was a relatively short hike, and the guides kept us walking by constantly claiming the camp was “just behind that peak” ... but each time there was another peak to surmount.

Barafu camp was built on a steep and rocky slope. To get to the toilets from our campsite one had to scramble some 30 metres upwards, which was way more exhausting than it sounds because of the very thin air, and took several minutes. The high altitude also increases the need to urinate more often...

No one really had the breath to be naughty. You had to stop to breathe after pretty much everything you did: Getting changed, opening and closing the tent, putting on shoes, taking a journey to the

Day Six—To the summit!

Summit: Uhuru Peak

Altitude: 5895 metres

Ascent of the day: 1295 metres

We had hardly slept. Because of the thin air we woke every few minutes, catching our breath, because our bodies were still used to slowing down lung activity when we relaxed. We had all taken half a tab-

Hardly any height was gained that day, and everyone welcomed the extra time to get used to the altitude. We had lunch at the camp, and everyone was joking around and giggling together. We wondered whether it was the thin air that made us laugh so hysterically.



Londeka takes a rest on a natural chair at the strange new campsite.

toilets... it was really quite a slow life up there.

Gavin and Alwyn sent us to bed early that day, because we would get up at midnight to start the final ascent to the summit.

let of diamox, medication that helps prevent altitude sickness. One of the side effects was increased bladder activity... Another thing to keep us awake.

We were woken up at midnight sharp, and stumbled towards the table where the porters filled up our bottles with hot

water. We grabbed some biscuits that were laid out on plates and made sure that we had everything we needed for our final ascent: water, sunglasses, gloves, two layers of socks minimum, more water, some snacks, sunscreen, and our cameras. Torches were hardly needed because the full moon lit the mountain side brightly. Far up ahead we could see other climbers' torches making threads of light dots along the path, slowly creeping towards the summit like caterpillars. Soon we would be up there...

The hike out of the camp seemed to take forever. We went steadily uphill, and after what seemed like more than an hour the lights of the tents below us seemed unfairly close.

Some time above the 5000 metre mark the first climbers started to falter. Londeka fell asleep on her feet and eventually collapsed flat on the ground. One of our kind porters accompanied her back to the tent. Her ascent was over, but she had given her best and was a winner to us all. Rose, Vivian, Vusi, Lebohang and Deon turned back soon after Londeka went down. Mfundo was close to breaking down, but when Gavin told him to turn around and go back to the camp he suddenly had a burst of energy and strode

“As we were climbing to the summit, I came to a point where I thought I couldn't move anymore. But there was always someone who kept pushing me and holding my hand to help me. I now know that I am not alone.”—*Mittah*

past him as if he had never felt tired.

While Andani, Kjetil, Tristan and Samkelo showed no signs of tiredness at all, Alwyn surprisingly succumbed to altitude sick-

ness just before dawn. Then the sun came out.



A spectacular play of light through the thick layer of mist on the horizon made our skin prickle with awe and the warm rays of sunlight soothed our cold feet and hands and raised our spirits.

Bongani, who hadn't spoken for hours, decided he had achieved his personal

“I could see the clouds from the top, we were higher than the clouds. The guides told me that you could see Tanzania on the one side and Kenya on the other side. I was on top of the world right between two countries!” —*Bongani*

goal when he reached Stellar Point, the rim of Kilimanjaro's crater. He cheered on the other climbers passing him on their way up while he had a well-deserved rest with tea and biscuits with the porters. For others the signboard there was an anticlimax. Tristan thought it was the summit at first and had to dig deep to find the energy to carry on.

The top of the mountain was covered in old snow, frozen and trampled hard by many feet. Samkelo was rather wary of the slippery ground, and Andani preferred to walk with a porter's assistance.

Then, one after another, they reached the sign at the summit. It was 9 o'clock



in the morning. "Congratulations! You are now at Uhuru Peak" were the first words written on the dark wooden boards nailed to two poles. They were covered in stickers and messages from previous summiters.

Mittah burst into tears when she finally arrived, even though she had never shown any doubt that she would make it. Her peers joyously congratulated her on her success. Kjetil gave Marietta a swing

and dance lesson and Tristan proudly pulled out the Welsh flag of his heritage for a photograph. A set of photos was also taken with the teenagers wearing T-shirts from the various sponsors, to thank them later.

Gavin, who had taken over the filming for Junius, took beautiful shots of the scenery and also let some of the climbers give a word to their success.

We had about half an hour at the peak,

Day 7—The only way out is down, slithering, sliding, any way you can

Summit: Uhuru Peak
 Altitude: 5895 metres
 Descent of the day: 1295 metres

We did not descend on the route that we came up. Parallel to the zig-zag path that had led us to Stellar Point that morning, a narrow scree field stretched almost all the way down to Barafu Camp. You take big jumps, land hard in the scree below you and then slide another metre or two before taking the next jump. It takes you down three times as fast as up, but it is



One after another descends down the icy slope towards Stellar Point; the jagged peak of Mawenzi looms in the background.

very tiring for the knees and thighs, and if someone is in front of you, you 'eat their dust'.

We ate lunch at Barafu Camp; the porters had already taken down most of the tents and carried our luggage to the next camp. After eating we slept with our heads on the table until the guides mercilessly roused us to set off for Millennium Camp.



Tristan finds himself back in lush vegetation after days of rock and ice.

It was just a two-hour march but the steady downhill strained knees and thighs once more. That day we went from freezing conditions with ice and burning sun through African high desert and moorland into the foggy, lush heather zone—the experience of one of Mount Kilimanjaro’s wonders: the inclusion of seven different climate zones within but a few square kilometres.

At the camp, the rest of the team had already settled in and welcomed their fellow climbers back.

That night we had our last supper on the mountain. The moods ranged from happy exhaustion over sadness that it was over, to anticipation of the hot showers and soft beds that awaited us at the hotel.

Teens talk about the trip

“The best thing was that we got along nicely, and worked together as a team. I like what we achieved as a team and what I achieved for the team. It was good to meet all the new people and I made new friends on the mountain.” —*Kagiso*

“I noticed that a lot of things are different in Tanzania. The cities look very different, and the people speak a different language. Also all the cars in Tanzania are very old. They don’t look as nice as the cars in South Africa. But there are nice girls in Tanzania!” —*Jeffers*

At one point I wanted to go down, but I was nearly there, I wanted to show my Mum and Dad that I could make it, because they said I can't. Now I brought pride and honour to my family.” —*Bongani*

“During the trip I learned that the team spirit is really important. I learned how to help people to make them go further, and it made me feel good to help others. I think this was very useful because you need to help people in your life and you must not let people down.” —*Musa*

“I would have liked to stay longer, to see more of the mountain, or just climb it again!” —*Mittah*

“I was not disappointed that I did not make it, I was proud of myself because I reached the 5000 metres, and that I had done the best I could.” —*Rose*

“I was walking in the front with the porters because I felt tired when walking slowly. That is why I lost touch to the rest of the group a little. But we were on the top all together, which was good.” —*Andani*

Climate zones



Forest: Lush vegetation drenched in heavy rainfalls (2000 mm per year). Endemic trees and flowers include *macarenga kilimandscharica*, the huge *olea kilimandscharica* and *impatiens kilimanjari*.



Heather: Mist and fog near the forest. *Erica arborea*, *philippia excels*, *stoebe kilimanjarica* are the commonest heath-like shrubs. There are also many proteas.



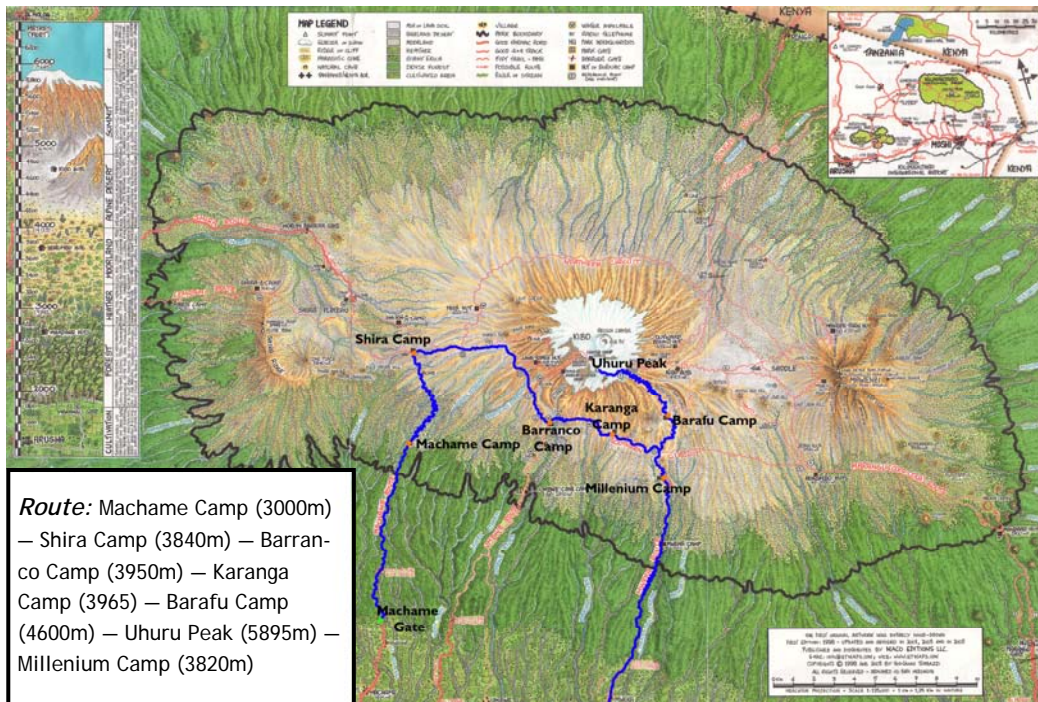
Moorland: Cool and clear climate. Frost is regular and sunshine can be quite intense. Clusters of the giant lobelia *deckenii* (endemic) and the endemic giant senecii Kilimanjari, *cottonii* and *meyeri*.



Alpine desert: Intense radiation, high evaporation and huge daily temperature fluctuations: nights below 0°C and daytime over 35°C. Scarcity of water and soil thinning. No favourable conditions for plant life. Mosses, lichens and few everlasting flowers.



Summit: Arctic conditions: Freezing cold at night and burning sun during daytime. Oxygen is nearly half than sea level. Little protection from the radiations of the sun. There is no surface water. Only lichens and the everlasting *helichrysum newii* survive.



This map can be bought at the Keys Hotel in Moshi, Tanzania. © 1998 and 2003 by Giovanni Tombazzi

Porters are sometimes referred to as sherpas after a Tibetan people living on the south side of the Himalayas who help Everest climbers. They carried the team's tents, sleeping mats, food and luggage. Some might say that 'real' mountaineers should carry their own things. But our inexperienced teenagers, some of them very skinny and small due to lack of nutrition in the past, would have struggled to make it even more with an extra 20 kilograms on their backs.

Among the porters were two cooks and

seven experienced guides. Many of them were young men financing their studies by helping expeditions in their holidays.

“The porters are very nice. When they come and bring food, they smile and talk to you, and they carry everything for you.”
—*Andani*

All of them had remarkable stamina—every day someone went down to the village to fetch fresh vegetables and other food and sometimes fresh water. And someone brought Mittah's bag, which had been lost at the airport, to Karanga at almost 4000 metres—within one day!



Left: The porters celebrate a successful day's work with communal dancing and singing on the mountain-side. Right: Two porters carry heavy loads ahead.

Hope and closure for Rwandans

Tristan Jones writes about his experience at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania. After the 100 days of killing, an army intervened - the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) which was Tutsi and had been

The ICTR is somewhat like the institute I would see myself working for in the future. At the age of 16, I was the youngest-ever intern at the Court; normally only people with a Masters in Law are allowed to work there.

The ICTR was set up in November 1994 following the horrific bloodshed in Rwanda over several

months earlier that year. While South Africa was dancing for its new-found non racial democracy, Rwanda was dying.

The Hutus attacked the Tutsis, killing one million people and raping some 300 000 women in 100 days. These people had lived alongside each other for generations but it was perceived that one group did better in jobs and the economy. They were killed because they looked different.

Rwandan facial differences were about nose shape and one group was seen as taller than the other. The same absurd racism has existed in South Africa where people were separated within the same families by the relative curliness or not, of their hair. There were economic and social benefits from having the favoured "look" of the day.

The focus on cultural or ethnic differences was the root cause of the Rwandan genocide.



Tristan and Samkelo talk about their time at the ICTR. © *The Citizen*

training in a neighbouring country. Then some semblance of normality was restored. The well-armed soldiers killed a large number of militant civilians who were poorly trained and mostly armed with machetes (pangas).

The United Nations' Security Council decided to set up the international tribunal to prosecute people

responsible for the genocide and for other violations of human rights at any time in Rwanda during 1994.

When I was there, there were 11 trials in progress involving 27 accused. So far 33 cases had been completed resulting in 28 convictions and five acquittals.

Inside the court there are three translators available for English, French and Kinyarwanda, the main language of Rwanda. People speak in whichever language they are at ease.

Judges come from many countries with disparate legal systems. The Prosecutor is Hassan Bubacar Jallow from the Gambia. His deputy prosecutor is Bongani Majola from South Africa.

It was Mr Majola and Pius Langa, Chief Justice of South Africa, who were instrumental in my and Samkelo Radebe (18) being allowed to attend the ICTR.

We were given a series of witness state-



Samkelo Radebe and Tristan Jones with Protocol and External Relations Officer Moustapha Hassouna.

ments, to analyse their relevance to the case of a man due to be tried in 2008 on several joint counts for conspiracy to commit genocide, genocide, complicity in genocide and crimes against humanity (murder, extermination and rape) and additional counts.

The statements were from people who had allegedly overheard other people planning murders, who had seen the murders or who had witnessed other crimes, or who had been victims of crimes themselves. Statements I read were from men and women of all ages.

When I read the statements I felt disgust, horror; yet they didn't seem real. They seemed like a script out of a movie. I could not relate to them—the level of cruelty was too distant from my own life.

I have seen people die through my long term fire brigade volunteering, but that was always accidental death. The scale of Rwanda was hard to comprehend.

When I read through the statements, I had to see if the name of the person to be prosecuted was mentioned. If he was in some way identified as having a connection to the charge. I wrote summaries of the statements and how they were connected to the case.

The descriptions were vivid: Hiding in

toilets, running through bushes, seeing people dying on the road, statements from Tutsi survivors and from some Hutus too; those who had not participated in the atrocities and those who, while not participating, had not actively resisted the crimes either.

In Rwanda it was Africans killing Africans and no one with money and power really cared—and they still don't. The media seems not to report on the work of the ICTR.

My conclusion after working in Arusha was that justice needs to be done, and to be seen to be done but that it is not enough in relation to the enormity of what took place, and maybe not the most -effective use of money to improve the future of Rwanda.

I would like to work in such a court but I would like the Court to work hand-in-hand with realistic measures to rebuild a nation.

I believe that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission—as was held in South Africa—might have been a better solution than the ICTR simply because there is limited finance to fix Africa's problems and we need to find the best affordable way ahead. I do feel that the Court gives hope and closure to Rwandans, allowing a nation to move ahead.

I was grateful to the United Nations for the chance to be at the ICTR and hope that the knowledge I gained might help me in the future to prevent such cruelty and devastation.

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Essay-writing as an entry ticket

All teenagers had to write an essay about it, and do research about the mountain themselves, why they wanted to climb it itself. Where their English or literacy was limited, they were interviewed.

Londeka Ngidi (15) from Pietermaritzburg

Why do I want to go? I want to go because it is an experience of a lifetime and an opportunity that a young girl like me would like to have. I think it will be a good thing for me because I will get a chance to meet different people out of Africa. In that case I get to learn about their way of life and the language and culture.

I want to go and climb that mountain because it is the highest point in Africa and the world's highest freestanding peak. Not everyone has had a chance to go and climb that mountain. Maybe I'm even the first teenage girl in Pietermaritzburg to go and climb Mount Kilimanjaro and I think that everyone will be proud and I will be proud of myself.

Going to the Drakensberg last year [2006] has inspired me to want to go to Kilimanjaro because of the activities we did and the nice people we met. It was so joyful and fun; it was beyond my expectations. There are things that I enjoyed while I was there like hiking, the zip line, abseiling and quad biking. I also enjoyed it when we went to see the Drakensberg Boys Choir perform and when we met the Amangwane King.

In life we all have opportunities and this is an opportunity I must grab with both my two hands. I've never crossed countries before nor have I ever been on a plane. I don't want to go because of the fame but because I believe and trust myself that I can do it. And because hiking and climbing is good for our health.

I want to go because it also gives me a chance to meet different people that speak a different language and believe in different religions and culture, and in that way we get to know about their way of life and culture. We'd also get a chance to speak another country's language, that I can say is a good experience.

If any person asks my short-term goal for this year I'll tell them that I want to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. I think that my country will be proud of me and the other children. If I go to Kilimanjaro I will make sure that I share my experience with my children and friends in my community. I am a brave, confident and believing person and those are the qualifications that are needed for me to go on this adventurous trip. I seriously don't think that you would want to go to Kilimanjaro and leave me behind!

I pray that we have enough sponsors to help us make this trip successful.



Lebohang Motseki (14) from Bloemfontein

My name is Lebohang Kington Motseki. I was born in 1993/04/13 at the small town of Reddersburg sixty kilometres out of Bloemfontein. I was born in a family of four members which are my father, mother and my brother. My parents are working as domestic workers, and my brother is still unemployed.

I started school at Phuthanang Primary School at Bloemfontein, where I did grade one to grade two. Then I headed over to my birth place where I did my grade three to grade four. Then I came back to where I started school.

I got burnt in 2005/09/30 near the casino. I was burnt by fire field, then my friends helped me. Then they called an ambulance that took me to Pelonomi Hospital, where I got treatment. It was very painful and I felt cold and thirsty. I was admitted for three months and discharged on the 16/12/2005. While I was at hospital, the doctors took me for a skin graft that helped my wounds to recover fast. Doctors and nurses treated me very nicely. I went to a therapy, another thing that helped me, so I would like to encourage other people if they got burnt they must not lose hope, because they can be helped. I was very happy when I was told that I will be heading to Kilimanjaro. It will be a moment that I will never forget because it will be my first time to fly.

Lastly I want to thank my parents for the support that they gave me. And I thank the Department of Health and Pelonomi Hospital for the chance that they gave to me.

Bongani Madlala (14) from Howick

My name is Bongani Madlala, I am a 14-year-old boy from Howick, near Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu Natal. I lost my left ear and hand in a fire when I was three years old, as a candle fell over and set my blanket alight. I also lost part of my scalp. I live together with my parents, grandma and three brothers. I attend the Johannesburg School for Blind, Low Vision and Multiple Disability Children.

After going to the Drakensberg mountains in October 2006 and climbing down a rock face one-handed which I later learned was called abseiling, I felt fantastic! We also did many other things in the Drakensberg mountains, like horse-riding and quad-biking. Although I like animals a lot, I needed to take a big breath before I jumped on top of that huge horse at Dragon Peaks resort.

Anyway, it was worth it and I learned that you always have to try, instead of doubting and questioning everything which might be different from things you have done before. Doing such special things gives me a sensational feeling! I want to do these special things while



I am young and still able. Climbing is a great sport and nice exercise. The Drakensberg trip made me feel strong and it was great fun too.

I started to believe in myself and now I think I can make it to the top of Kilimanjaro. I am looking forward to climbing Kilimanjaro. I want to show myself and show other people that I can do it. I want to try hard to see how far I can go and make my mother and grandmother proud of me.

It is also very interesting to find out how long the plane will take; I saw how far it is on the map.

Kilimanjaro is Africa's highest mountain and I really want to get on top of it. I want to look down on Earth, and see over the whole of Africa. I was told that there are many difficulties to deal with when you climb Kilimanjaro, like the thin air when you get higher, causing altitude sickness. I need to do training to start a serious attempt towards the peak.

I also wonder if there will be any snow on the peak, because people say that the glaciers on top of Kilimanjaro are melting due to climate changes. Touching the cold ice will hopefully give me the last boost of energy that I will need to reach the top.

Last but not least, I also look forward to seeing Tanzania, I want to see the country and how big it is. I have never been to another African country, so this trip is truly unusual for me. I like to go to new places because I can meet interesting new people there. I don't know much about other African countries, so I am curious about the Tanzanian people's clothing, their houses and how they live. Thanks to Bronwen and all the other people organising this trip, I started thinking about other places where I would like to go to.

When I come back from Tanzania, I want to share what I learned with other people. I will be even more self-confident and I will try to share this confidence with others.

Samkelo Radebe (18) from Soweto

My name is Samkelo Mike Radebe, I was born on the 8th of May 1989 in Soweto. I am studying law in my first year at the University of Johannesburg, currently still doing a foundation course. I live with my father Peter, my mother Salamina and my three siblings in a house in Soweto. My father works for a company which manufactures clothing fabrics, my mother is a housewife.

When I was nine years old we were living in Vosloorus, which is in East Rand. Me and my friends were playing a game where we were throwing metal wires, which we ripped out of a tyre, up to an overhead wire. One part of the wire got stuck at the overhead wire and the other part of the wire came down. When I touched it to pull it down, I got electrocuted and my hands and other parts of my body were severely

burned. A week after the accident my hands had to be amputated.

I started running five years ago, at the age of 12 at Ezibeleni School. Pupils had to run there and I qualified at the trial to run as a representative of the Central Gauteng Province at the Nedbank National Championships. In January 2004 I changed to Hope School – there I became Sportsman of the Year 2006 and got two other awards for team spirit, inspiration, motivation and loyalty. I broke more than 10 South African records for disabled sportsmen. I was awarded Disability Sportsman of the year of Johannesburg district 9 in 2006, elected Head Boy of Hope School in November 2005, and broke five South African records only in 2006. In February 2007 I improved my personal best time for the 100m sprint from 11,72 seconds to 11,60 seconds. I won 24 gold and 2 silver medals in the past 4 years in 100m, 200m, 400m, high jump and long jump. In 2006 I was awarded South African physically disabled junior sports person of the year at the Nedbank National Championships. After having to run at Ezibeleni School, I only kept on running just for fun. I broke two records instantly, 100m sprint and 200m sprint for the disabled. By now, it is still great fun, but I am more competitive. I want to win.

There are special records for disabled/armless people because the body without full length arms isn't as balanced as a "complete" body and you need the arms for swinging and gaining speed when running. Especially when I am running against people with arms, I have a disadvantage when starting, because I cannot bend down and stand on the ground with both feet and hands. I have to obtain a special position, with my left knee bent forward and the right knee behind, slightly bent. My new coach doesn't know my name yet, she only knows me as the "armless boy", but I don't know her name either, so it is alright.

I love the feeling of speed, of acceleration. When flying with an airplane my favourite part is take-off – when the turbines press my whole body into the seat, it is the most enormous feeling. I've flown to the U.K., and I definitely want to see more of Europe. I want to see the Eiffel tower in France, and the historical heritage of Germany. I think Germany has the most interesting history. I am also very interested in Spanish culture and language.

But first of all, I want to fly to Tanzania and climb Kilimanjaro. How many disabled South Africans have reached the top until now? Probably only a few or none at all. If I go I can be an example and idol for kids of my age, both with or without disabilities.

It doesn't matter too much whether I reach the top or not – I just want to show everybody that I have the guts to go up at all. Without hands.

Right now my dream is to climb Kilimanjaro and I am willing to put up any effort to make it come true.

Vusi Mathibela (18) from KwaMhlanga

When I was 13 years old and fast asleep, I awoke with my bedroom and blanket ablaze in fire. The fire spread up the blanket and quickly set my feet, hands and face alight.

My mum and grandmother were in the next room, but unfortunately were too late to prevent my body from being severely burned. My mum went over to the next door neighbours, who took my right to the hospital. I was in pain and couldn't stop crying. While I was in the hospital my mum, and all my friends and relatives came to visit me. I could not even speak for a week. I could only start to talk to all the people who visited me after a week had passed by. I spent the next three months in hospital.

When they finally let me leave, I was very scared to go back to school. I was afraid that the other kids were going to laugh at me because I was so badly burned. The kids at school and people on the street did laugh at me because I had to wear a pressure garment around my head. After time people were nice to me, but it took some time. Now that people know me, they are nice to me.

What life is like today

I stay in Mandela Village with my mother. Last year I finished grade 8, now I am in grade 9 at Thulani secondary school. My favourite subject is Environment and Management Science. I like it because it teaches about business and money. When I grow up I want to be a doctor because many people in the world are sick and I feel I can help them.

I like kwaito music because I get an educative message from it. I have two friends, they give me love and care. I don't like rap music because people say it is not good. On Sunday I like to go to church. Every night I watch *Generations* because it keeps me occupied. My favourite car is a BMW because it is very strong. I also like its colour which is black. My favourite food is pap and stew, because it makes me strong.

My favourite soccer team is Kaizer Chiefs because it has good players. My favourite clothes are Johathana D and Cavella. I like them because they last a long time, but they are expensive. My favourite cell phone is 1/3 Motorola. I like reading newspapers during my spare time.

About climbing Mount Kilimanjaro

I have several reasons why I would like to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. First and foremost I want to prove that disability does not mean inability. Most people in our society view us (Children of Fire) as objects of pity or non-achievers as well as persons incapable of being self reliant. By climbing the highest mountain in Africa, society will see that persons with disabilities are capable of doing the same things that able-bodied persons can do. My other reasons for wanting to climb Mount Kilimanjaro is I want to

expand my knowledge of volcanoes. I do know that Mount Kilimanjaro resulted from a volcanic eruption.

I hope the Tanzanians are going to give us more information on the history of Mount Kilimanjaro. This information will help me a lot in my school, especially in geography. The idea of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro really excites me very much. It will give me new ideas and stories to tell back home. I will also be proud of myself if I am able to make this climb.

Kagiso Mathebula (17) from Hammanskraal

My name is Kagiso Mathebula. I was born on 1 July 1989 in Hammanskraal and still live there. I am 17 years old. I live with my grandfather and my brothers, my parents are staying in a separate house nearby. We live in the Marokolong suburb.

I am in grade 10 at Lethamaga Secondary School which is only a two-minute walk from my home. My father works with glass at his home, while my mother is a pharmacist working at a chemist in Pretoria.

My favourite food is pizza, rice, cheese and eggs. This food gives me vitamins and carbohydrates and makes me strong. My teachers taught me about nutrition at school, I am very interested in every single subject, and I do quite well at school.

I am particularly interested in life orientation, because it gives me the opportunity to talk about past and future of my life and the lives of others.

When I am older I want to help other burns survivors by saying: "Look at me. It is not easy, but you can make it." Often people are simply not educated enough. People are superstitious, they don't know you and it takes time for them to get used to such an unusual appearance. It also takes time for you to get used to people's staring and disrespecting comments.

After school I often play soccer at Hammanskraal local club "Manchester United." I would love to be a professional soccer player, because I could then use my fame to reach people through the media and could then educate them about burns and burn injuries. I admire Brazil's soccer team very much, they have the most-skilled players. If I become a professional I want to play in Brazil. I will also use my fame to do something against crime. I am looking forward to the Soccer World Cup 2010 in South Africa but maybe I will not cheer for Bafana Bafana, I will cheer for Brazil!

With fame will also come money, so I can buy myself a fast BMW 325 or a stylish Polo Classic IG. I thought about becoming a soldier, in order to fight crime, but I don't want to hurt or kill people – plus the salary isn't as good as a soccer player's – so I'd rather be a soccer professional.

I like wearing fancy and expensive clothing brands. When I'm a famous soccer profes-

sional I will wear fancy clothes everyday, so why not start now? Not that I could afford buying it, but my favourite cell phone is the Nokia N90. It has a camera, a lot of other functions and an integrated memory stick.

My friend Jan has more money than I do – he already has a BMW 325 and two other cars. I got to drive the BMW at a safe place recently so now I am really looking forward to apply for my driver's licence as soon as I turn 18.

What brought me to Children of Fire

When I was seven years old, my brother was setting up a fire with wood in our room. He poured petrol over the wood, and lit a match. As soon as the flame reached the petrol, the whole room caught fire, including me and my blanket. The petrol had silently found its way around the whole floor of the room. The fire spread quickly from my face, onto my neck and down my back.

My father took me to the hospital with his car. I was in so much pain. When I got to the hospital I was seen by the doctor straight away. The doctor put a mask on my face and I went right to sleep. I had to stay in the hospital for two months and was in great pain the whole time. I had to wear bandages over all my burns. When I got out of the hospital I was kind of scared to go to school. I was scared of myself when I looked into the mirror. And I was scared that other people would be scared of me or laugh at me. People did laugh at me, they were scared of me, and they said I was a bad person because my scars were something demonic. Their superstition was stronger than their education, but I knew that in my heart I am a good person. So I managed. When I got used to people teasing me, people got used to my appearance. I was so happy that my friends didn't let me down during that whole time. My friends visited me in hospital, they stayed with me despite my injuries.

Some time after my injury, I suffered contractures. Then I got to meet some UMashesha volunteers from the organisation Children of Fire. They were helping a girl Linda Tshabalala from my community.

Children of Fire arranged with a hospital to have my contractures released. More recently they invited me to Johannesburg. I got to meet an American television producer, and for the first time in my life I went to a classical concert.

I like playing with other people, especially with my friends and my four sisters.

Once people know that I am a good person, it does not matter that my face is burned.

If I could talk to children who have been burned and who are now afraid to go back to school, I would tell them: "Don't be scared...I was a small child when I was burned and I'm OK now." I would tell them to stay the lovely person they are. Burn injuries are not only superficial, they do not only affect your appearance, but in your heart you

stay the same loving and lovable person you have been before. If people are scared I would tell them, "I'm a person just like you." If people make fun of you, just say to yourself that these people simply don't know you better.

Mount Kilimanjaro

I want to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in order to experience the greatness of this mountain for myself. I have read information about it in books and have seen many pictures but I want to make my own picture.

I found out that Mount Kilimanjaro is a volcano which I think is very interesting.

At school I was taught that you understand things better by actually seeing and being around them, and I definitely want to learn more about Kilimanjaro.

I am also very interested in the Tanzanian people, into their culture and language.

I would love to learn some Swahili, although I am sure that I should be busy enough learning South Africa's 11 official languages.

It would be such a wonderful experience to be on top of such a high mountain as I have never been on a mountain.

My science teacher taught me that the higher you go the cooler the air becomes. I also learned that the air gets thinner, and if your body gets used to air with less oxygen, and you then come back to a place with air that is rich of oxygen, your body gets an energy boost. Felix the volunteer from Germany told me that boxers often go and practise in the mountains to be fit for their fight on sea level. I wonder whether I can run faster than all other guys at my soccer club, when I am back from Tanzania.

I know it will be tough on Kilimanjaro and that I have to train a lot in order to make it. I am very eager to do so. There are so many things that we do not learn at school.

The more I learn from other sources, the more I want to find out about the world myself.

SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

- Adventure Alternative for managing the climb at discounted rates
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- Cape Storm for discount on their wonderfully warm *Firefly* sleeping bags
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