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Registered Charity Number 1089810



## MISSION

To help children and young people, throughout the world, develop skills which will enhance their present and future emotional wellbeing.

## Top fundraiser Paul climbs Mount Kilimanjaro

**M**ount Kilimanjaro is Africa's highest mountain and one of the world's largest volcanoes. Unlike the great peaks of the Himalayas, it is not surrounded by other mountains, but stands in splendid isolation, soaring 19,341 feet (5,895 metres) above Tanzania. Even in the searing heat of an African summer, its summit is covered in snow.

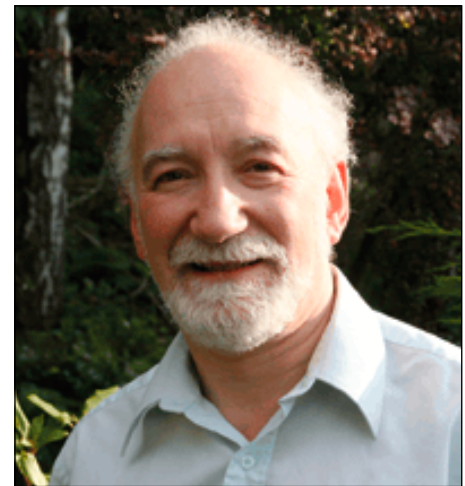
Early last year, thousands of miles away in London, Partnership for Children's former Chair Paul Rubenstein became fascinated by Kilimanjaro and the thought that he might be able to climb it. The fascination became 'almost an obsession', and in January 2008 he set off for Africa on a remarkable fund raising challenge.

'The first thing was that I wanted to do something to help Partnership for Children,' said Paul. 'Last year my son and I climbed Snowdon in Wales, and I really enjoyed it. It was hard walking, rather than mountaineering, but one section was very steep and I found it tough. So I asked myself 'Am I just past it at 55 or do I get fit?' I started going to the gym, and when a few months later we climbed Ben Nevis in Scotland, I found it significantly easier, even though it was actually a longer and harder climb.'

Kilimanjaro, though, would be an altogether more serious challenge. It does not require technical mountaineering skills, but this is the highest 'trek-able' mountain in the world, and Paul knew the climb would be tough. He began training in the gym four or five times a week, went for long walks at weekends, and in the last three weeks before leaving for Africa made daily trips to The Altitude Centre in Central London, training his body to function on reduced oxygen.

Paul caught his first glimpse of the mountain on the flight from Nairobi. He saw the snow capped peak showing above the cloud – and above the plane! 'There was certainly a feeling at that moment of it being real,' he recalls, 'although it actually looks far more terrifying the closer you get to the top.'

Paul was in a group of six people,



supported by guides and porters, and didn't know any of them at the start of the journey. Climbing Kilimanjaro has become very popular, with 30,000 hopefuls attempting it every year, but Paul's group had chosen the less popular Rongai route. 'I think each of us was hoping to get a sense of isolation,' he said.

The climb to the summit would take four and a half days, followed by another day and a half to come down, a 52 mile round trip. The ascent began in 32 degree heat and the early part of the walk was through fields and rainforest. Then they spent a couple of days crossing moorland, before the temperature dropped and the vegetation thinned as they crossed an alpine desert region, leading to the base of the final ascent.

They were climbing all the time, and altitude sickness was a real danger, but



Paul (foreground) with his fellow climbers

Paul's training back in England stood him in good stead. 'Of the six of us in our group, I was the only one who didn't feel sick or have very bad headaches. I was very lucky.'

The final climb to the summit started at midnight, with Paul and his comrades climbing slowly over frozen scree, their path lit only by head torches. They climbed steadily for almost seven hours.

'I'm sure one of the reasons you start the final ascent in darkness is that many people would give up if they could see the mountain towering above them,' he said. 'Every time I looked up, all I could see were the tiny lights of head torches above me, and they seemed to go on forever.'

Just before dawn Paul reached Gilman's Point on the rim of Kilimanjaro's giant crater. The months of training had paid off. The dream had come true. He stood and watched the sun rise over Africa.

A further walk around the crater from Gilman's Point leads to Uhuru Peak, which is technically the highest point in Africa, but Paul decided not to go on.

'I was very tired and losing concentration. My right leg wasn't always doing what I wanted it to do! Those are signs of altitude sickness and so I realised it was time to head back down.' On that day alone, he walked for 13 hours, climbing 1,300 metres and then descending 3,000 metres.

On their last day on the mountain, Paul spoke on behalf of his group to thank the porters and guides for their help. They in turn sang a song in Swahili, venerating Kilimanjaro as a terrifying giant, with a snake that could swallow you up. But they had climbed the giant, avoided the snake – and triumphed.

Paul was the only one in his group who used the climb to raise money for charity, and he expects to raise more than £11,500 for Partnership for Children, the most successful individual fund raising effort in the charity's history. Two years ago, he and his daughter Katie raised £4,400 with a sponsored parachute jump.

'I just believe so firmly that PFC needs to survive, that it needs to grow,' he says, 'and to do that it needs funds. Quite a few of my sponsors have said to me "I've had a look at the website, and it's wonderful work that this charity is doing." That's been very satisfying.

'People have been much more generous than I'd anticipated, and I guess there are two reasons for that. They see that the charity is worth supporting, and they know that climbing Kilimanjaro isn't a five minute challenge and that a lot of effort has gone into it.'

Some years ago, Paul twice completed the London Marathon. How did climbing



Mount Kilimanjaro compare?

'At the time, I thought the marathon went on and on for ages, but I now realise it was over very quickly,' he laughs. 'The first time I did the marathon the sense of euphoria was unequalled, but overall the sense of achievement was probably greater for this. It's a quiet sense of achievement that's still sinking in.'

Apart from the funds raised and the satisfaction of achieving a personal goal, how will he remember Kilimanjaro?

'I have this wonderful image of the sunrise from the top, and that will always be with me, but I think in all honesty the picture I will remember is of looking up in the darkness as we climbed the last 1,500 metres and seeing those tiny torch lights stretching on and on and on.'



'I don't think of the whole experience as having been arduous, but the day of the ascent was certainly arduous – and that's putting it politely! I never want to see a day like that again, but I am so pleased that I did it.'

• **To support Paul's Kilimanjaro climb, you can donate online at [www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk](http://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk), or send a cheque to Partnership for Children, 26-27 Market Place, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 1JH, England.**

- **Contact us if you would like more information**
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