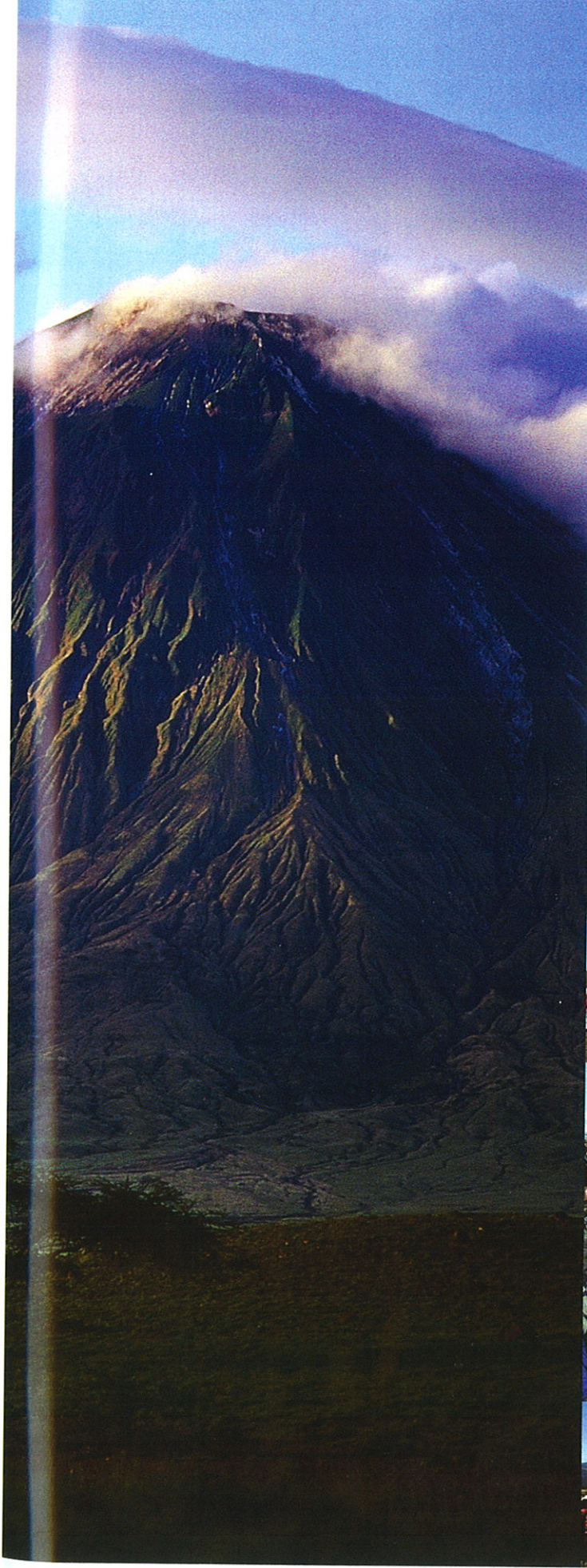




# Peak Performance!

*Team ACE climbs Mount Kilimanjaro for the challenge of a lifetime and raises \$300,000 for charity.*



BY ANNE LOXTON

Fifteen ACE employees and associates rose to the challenge of raising money for underprivileged children this July; in fact, they rose a total of 19,340 feet. Bermuda-based Edmina Bradshaw, Debbie Smith, Keith White, Roger Gillett and Patrick Mitchell, and colleagues from offices in Japan, Washington, Philadelphia and Atlanta, headed to Africa for the experience of a lifetime: to climb its tallest mountain and raise money for local charity, the ISIS Foundation.

Why climb a mountain? Bradshaw organised the trip as a way to contribute that involved more than just writing a cheque. "There were several reasons I chose the climb. To begin with, it's symbolic: Kilimanjaro is the tallest mountain in Africa, and to climb it would no doubt attract attention. I felt we needed to earn our contributions, and pushing ourselves to our physical, and as it

turned out mental, limits seemed appropriate. And for all of us, it fulfilled a personal challenge." For many of the climbers, the ascent also marked an era in their personal or professional lives.

The prerequisite for participating in the climb was to raise \$10,000, and ACE committed to match all donations. "The \$10,000 target, combined with the reality of the climb, ensured that only those who were really serious about it committed themselves. And the ambitious target forced participants to get creative." To raise the money, some had garage sales; in Japan they taught English; in the UK some did busking in the subway; others hosted tennis tournaments, treasure hunts and even a blue grass evening. At last count, \$300,000 in total

can do anything'; this preparation took away any avoidable risks. The rest was up to us—to make it to the top of the mountain."

Despite strict training, none of the group was really ready for what lay ahead. "Standing at the bottom looking up, we all wondered whether we'd make it," recalls Bradshaw. "As we climbed, the question became 'will I make the next two steps.' We quickly learned that, in reality, there is no way to train for the effects of altitude combined with bitter cold and rough terrain. As the climb progressed, we discovered that we all have strengths and weaknesses and learned to work off each others' strengths to get each person to the top."

these guides became the leaders, and Bradshaw believes this had one of the biggest impacts on the group.

"We knew our guides would lead us up the mountain; but they ended up guiding in ways we hadn't anticipated. They were in charge and that was clear, but they were there for our safety and we would never argue with them. They could sense when we weren't well, if someone wasn't acclimatising well or even if we weren't drinking enough water. They encouraged us, held our hands when we were tired or frustrated and forced us to think positively to achieve our goal.

**"One point of epiphany was when we climbed through the clouds. When you look down at the clouds and realise that you took yourself up there, it is an awesome experience."**

has been raised, and donations are still coming in.

Finding an appropriate charity was itself a challenge. Bradshaw knew she wanted the money to go directly to disadvantaged children in third world countries, but not necessarily through a high-profile charity. She narrowed it down to the ISIS Foundation, a Bermuda-based

charitable trust that provides education and health

programmes for children in the developing world, primarily Nepal and Uganda. She knew about the ISIS Foundation through a colleague from Uganda who had seen the results of their work first hand. The ACE Risk Management group did due diligence on the Foundation and concluded that it was a perfect match for Bradshaw's objectives.

Finally came the biggest challenge of all: the climb itself. Bradshaw worked with Charity Challenge, a U.K.-based organisation to organise the trek. Charity Challenge did due diligence on everyone involved in the climb, including the guides, to reduce risks the group might encounter on the mountain. "This was a real project from start to finish, which is why I called it Project Pinnacle," explains Bradshaw. "A lot of thought and work went into it long before we got to Africa. The tag line for ACE is 'take away risk and you

The group's trek up the mountain took the 'road less travelled' for two reasons: to actually see the mountain, and, more importantly, ascending slowly allowed them to get acclimatised which increased their chances of reaching the top. The ascent took eight days; the descent, on more established paths, took only two.

"Acclimatisation became a focus; there is no way of predicting how each person will be affected by the altitude, which added yet another level of

uncertainty to the climb," Bradshaw explains. "Every member of our group suffered from altitude sickness (known as AMS or Acute Mountain Sickness) at some point during the climb. Symptoms include headaches, nausea, migraines, delirium and nightmares. People would claw at the tents at night. The only way to know how it was going to affect us was to experience it." Fortunately no one in the group suffered extreme cases of altitude sickness.

Bradshaw compares the climb to the business world, in that it took qualities such as intelligence, strength and creativity to overcome the risks and make it to the top. But this group of executives had to quickly forget corporate roles and cede all authority to the local Tanzanian guides. On the mountain,

They became spiritual leaders, and taught us a lot about the mountain geography, history, flora and fauna; they knew the mountain well and helped us to appreciate it."

Each day the climbers got a performance appraisal from the guides, both individually and as a group. "This helped us to review what went on during the climb, and reminded us daily of why we were there."

A typical day on the mountain started at 6:30 a.m. with a large breakfast of porridge and a pep talk from the guides. The climbers carried their own packs with energy snacks and water; each person was required to drink 5 litres of water a day

and eat enough to keep their energy high. Tents were set up at different sites each day, sometimes along a rock face. The evening meal consisted of soup, a carbohydrate and a protein. "It is surprisingly difficult to sleep at high altitudes, but by the end of the day we'd crawl into bed at 7:00 p.m. with only enough energy to sleep and stay warm. In the middle of the night there is an inky black dark, which made using the washroom at night one of our most serious challenges!" The climbers didn't have the luxury of deciding whether they got enough sleep; they were up every morning at 6:30, ready for the day's climb.

What drives a person in such circumstances? The same as any challenge—you set goals, and

**"You begin to rethink your life and what's important."**

with these goals in mind, giving up is not an option. For the climbers, their trek started to symbolise the lives of people who face challenges every day: "After ten days on the mountain, we could just come back to our comfortable lives; many people don't have that luxury." Those from Bermuda dedicated the climb to colleague Kirsten Badenduck, who suffered a serious accident just before the team left for Africa. "The challenges we faced on the mountain are nothing compared to what she has ahead of her."

The people they met during the climb, particularly the children, also inspired them to keep going. "We had a lot of interaction with people along the way, and that affected us all deeply. And we kept in touch with home by satellite phone and knew our colleagues were tracking our progress each day and that support kept us going. We proved to ourselves and everyone that we are all capable of a lot more than we realise."

The sheer vastness of the environment heightened the emotion of the climb. The climbers found their minds were free from all thoughts of Western civilisation, which

provided an opportunity for introspection. "One point of epiphany was when we climbed through the clouds," says Bradshaw. "When you look down at the clouds and realise that you took yourself up there, it is an awesome experience. You begin to rethink your life and what's important."

For the final ascent, the group rose at midnight for what turned out to be the hardest day of the climb. Nine hours of climbing, mostly through pitch-black night, took them to the top. "Standing at the summit was surreal. We were so tired, it was almost difficult to take it all in and appreciate the significance of it." The visit to the top was limited to ten minutes per person, after which time the lungs start to fill with liquid. But while there, the climbers took in what they describe as awesome splendour. "You feel like a pioneer. When you look around you can see forever; there is really no way to describe how it feels."

Everyone in the group made it to the top, and 13 made it to the summit. One member of the group had sprained an ankle after he slipped and lost his footing, and the physician

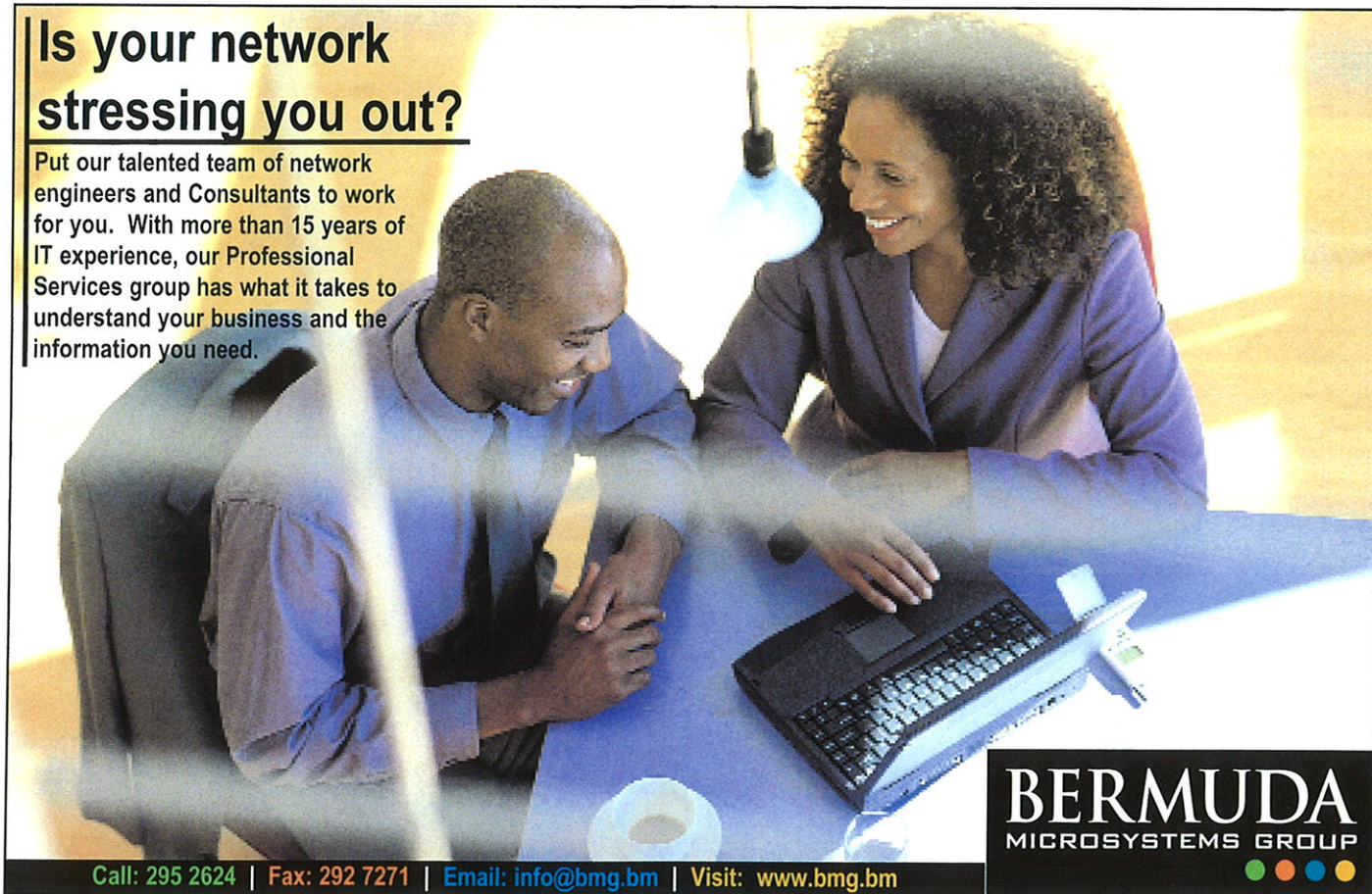
that travelled with the group and the guides decided that it was better that he not ascend to the summit, although he was able to climb back down the mountain. Another suffered from altitude sickness at the top and couldn't stay.

Perhaps one of the more surprising things for the climbers has been difficulty getting back to 'civilised life'. "Our first night off the mountain was spent at a lodge, and it was absolute luxury," says Bradshaw. "We had showers, brushed our teeth, did things that we normally take for granted in our day-to-day lives. We also realised the barriers that society puts around us regarding etiquette and behaviour—we actually had to get used to using cutlery and modern facilities again!"

Several weeks after returning from the climb, Bradshaw still gets tears in her eyes as she recalls the experience. "It was so moving, and made us develop a true appreciation for those who lead more challenging or desolate lives. On the mountain, we got the opportunity to think about what is really important. I believe that we are all better people because of it." **BB**

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