

THE ASCENT OF MEN



High ambitions: the team pose for the photo on the top of Mount Kilimanjaro

Back in August a team of UK chefs and front of house staff attempted to reach the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania to raise money for Farm Africa. Here's how it got on

Rising to almost 20,000 feet above sea level, it's a lot easier to go round Mount Kilimanjaro than over it. But where would the challenge be in that?

That was presumably the logic employed by Dinner by Heston Blumenthal's Ashley Palmer-Watts, John Freeman of Restaurant Sat Bains, Tuddenham Mill's Paul Foster and Paulo de Tarso, maître d' at Bar Boulud, who set out to Tanzania recently to scale the impressive lump of rock and simultaneously lay to rest any doubts about their stamina and will power.

The restaurant industry team also took up the challenge to raise money for Farm Africa's Food for

Words
Stefan Chomka

Good initiative, which brings together the food and hospitality industry to help solve the important issue of world hunger. For Palmer-Watts it also meant a return to Africa following his visit to Kenya last year to work with fish farmers and bring his restaurant industry expertise to Farm Africa's fish farming enterprise.

Before taking on the peak the team first flew into Kisumu in western Kenya to visit the community of fish farmers Palmer-Watts had stayed with last year, to lend a hand with the fish harvest and put their cheffing skills to good use. Then it was on a plane

to Tanzania for the seven-day ascent that would put them well and truly out of their comfort zone.

Incredibly, all members of the team completed the challenge and arrived at the summit in one piece - although it didn't feel that way. "Climbing the mountain was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life," says Freeman. "The feeling of pushing yourself mentally and physically far beyond what you thought you could, cannot be described in words."

Foster's experience was similar: "My body was finished - it was only mental strength that got me there. I kept thinking positive thoughts about my wife and daughter while climbing, and as a team we pushed each other through it. When I got back

to camp after summit night I had to get a porter to take my shoes off, I have never been so tired."

Paulo de Tarso, a man most commonly found traversing the Bar Boulud dining room impeccably dressed in a three-piece suit, also managed to reach the top, although he had to swap his Italian loafers for more rugged climbing boots. "We were woken at midnight to start our final ascent," he recalls. "We knew we were facing the most difficult part of our journey and that we had to climb for seven hours with little oxygen and in freezing conditions. We saw other climbers being carried down not able to make it, and people being sick on their way up, not sure if they'd complete their climb. The whole experience of going to Africa was incredible. It took my breath away in every way."

As well as scaling the mountain the team also smashed the not insignificant target of raising £50,000 for Farm Africa, with a total of £54,000 achieved so far. If you want to add to that amount you can still make a donation at www.virginmoneygiving.com/chefskilimanjaroclimb.



Water way to do it: Paulo de Tarso shows off his carrying skills

GROWING A FUTURE FREE FROM HUNGER

The achievement of the Farm Africa Kilimanjaro team will help end hunger for families across eastern Africa, like Celine Adhiambo's. Celine is a widow living in Kenya with her young children. Before she joined a Farm Africa project she was destitute and labouring for 38p a day. Her community had been growing a local variety of cassava that was increasingly hit by disease and was producing less and less each harvest. Farm Africa provided training and an improved variety of cassava that not only produces three times as much but also matures in half the time. Celine's cassava yield has gone from just over 3 tonnes per hectare to 22 tonnes - a seven-fold increase. Celine is happy that now she can feed her children every day. She is also able to pay school costs, helping them look forward to a brighter and more secure future. Every £350 raised will help take a family in Africa out of hunger and poverty - for good.

END HUNGER >>> GROW FARMING FARM AFRICA

CHEFS' BLOG

THE EXPEDITION IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Trip day 2

A reunion with old friends

Ashley Palmer-Watts: "I was overjoyed seeing Joyce and her family again. We first started the day by visiting the local aqua shop where Paul, Paulo and John got to learn about running a shop and fish farming in general. We were all amazed that one shop could reach so many farmers, help them set up their own fish ponds, and they can use the shops for all their farming needs. It's been a very emotional day for me and leaving Joyce, her family and her grandchildren Kelly and Nicole was very difficult. They have truly touched my life."

Trip day 3

The realisation hits home

Paul Foster: "The nerves are starting to kick in now. We haven't had much time to think about the climb ahead as we've been so busy visiting Farm Africa's projects. But I am very excited about the challenge to come."

Paulo de Tarso: "The size of this mountain is unbelievable. It's been such a surreal experience climbing on rocks that have been here for thousands of years. The whole team, the porters, the crew are just incredible. They carry so much for us and always have a smile on their faces."

Climb day 1

The off

APW: "You think you know what you're doing but then you get to the trail head and realise you have no clue. It's pretty intense!"

Climb day 3

A new landscape

APW: "It's like being on the moon. It's just a whole other world."

Climb day 4

4,600 metres up

John Freeman: "The altitude symptoms are some of the worst feelings in the world. You literally feel like you can't move, eat or drink. But you have to hike up steep slopes and rocky ravines. You have to force yourself to take in nutrients and it's just so difficult when you feel nauseous. But I'm just starting to feel better now."

Climb day 5

The chefs go over 'the wall'

PdT: "It's extraordinary to see how long it takes to get from point A to B. We could see the camp - our final destination for the day - from the top of the wall, but we were still hours away. To cope with that took a lot of mental strength to just keep moving forward."

APW: "Today's lunch was the best meal I have ever had."

Climb day 7

The summit

PF: "That was the toughest thing that I've ever done. My body completely gave up on me. I could barely put one foot in front of the other but my head was the only thing keeping me going. I was determined to make it to the top. When I actually made it I'd never been so emotional; a sense of relief, pride and pain all at once. I was just so drained, all my feelings blurred into one emotion."

