



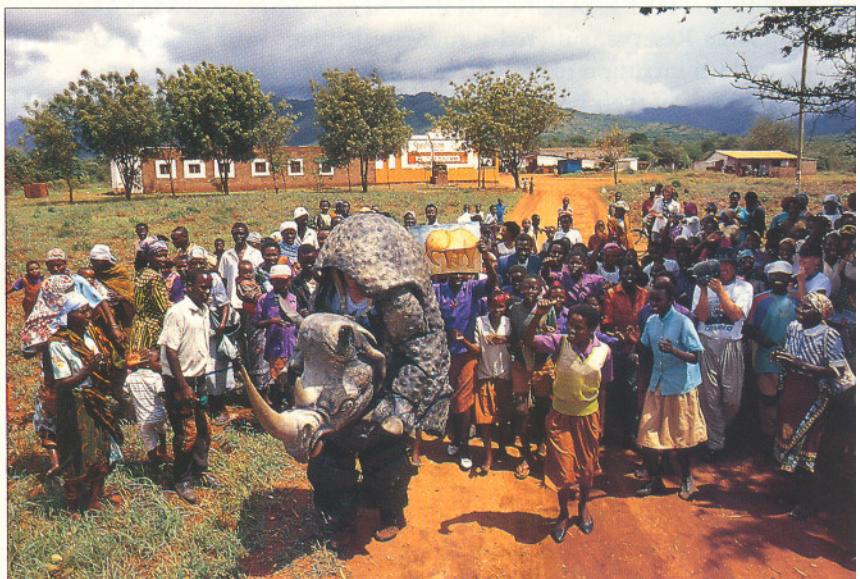
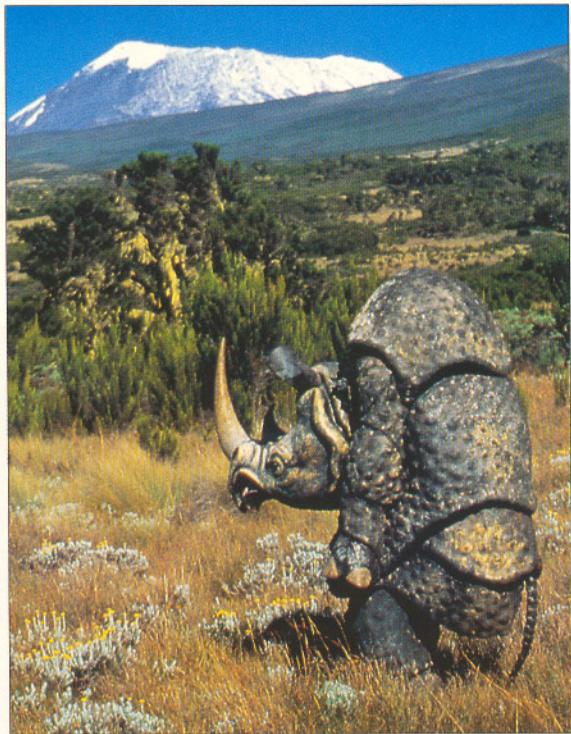
Above; Top Hut at 15,700 feet. 300 kilogrammes worth of rubbish later it was clean . . .

Clean up on



Right; On the Naro Moru Route on the western side of Mount Kenya, volunteers walk towards Mackinder's Camp.

A rubber rhino climbs



Above; At each of the many stops along the walk route, curious people followed the rhino to discover more.

Left; The rubber rhino on its way up Mount Kilimanjaro.

Mount Kenya

*Story and photos by Nikunj Shah
and Divyesh Upadhyaya*

MAN HAS ALWAYS SEEN mountains as symbols of power and landmarks of strength. They have been used to sell everything from insurance to cold lagers. Climbing to the summit is considered the ultimate challenge and has its own thrill of achievement.

Mount Kenya is the second highest in Africa, standing at 17,058 feet, it is not more than a mile south of the equator. Over the years it has proved to be a popular and demanding climb and attracts several thousand visitors every year. One of its primary attractions is the varied terrain which gives rise to some spectacular scenery and exhilarating climbs. On its lower slopes are dense tropical and bamboo forests which rise up to 10,500 feet. This region has a fair number of wild animals and coming across a herd of buffalo on an early morning trek is no rare occurrence. Between 10,500 and 14,500 feet is the alpine zone. Its curvaceous ridges and gently sloping valleys are characterised by tussock grass, senecia and giant lobelia trees. These areas offer

some of the best views of the main peaks and of the extensive plains beneath. Above this region is the peak area with several permanent glaciers and snow fields. The third highest peak, Point Lenana (16,355 feet) is accessible to any fit walker. The two higher peaks, Batian and Nelion can only be reached by technical climbs.

However, the irresistible appeal of this mountain and the lure of its challenge has had some deteriorating effects on the more popular routes. The natural splendour has been defaced by eager 'I have climbed' visitors who have no care for the environment. Substantial amounts of garbage have accumulated on most of the access routes and in and around the campsites and huts. The problem is a more serious one in the Mount Kenya National Park than in the other national parks - primarily due to the altitude factor. The tougher the climb becomes, the less a climber wishes to carry and there is a common tendency to leave behind all the 'unnecessary weight'. Most of this waste is solid and non-biodegradable and when left on the ground

continued on following page

Kilimanjaro

*Story and photos by
David Stirling*

Whose
Wildlife
is it,
Anyway?

IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT national parks and reserves make up a minute percentage of Africa's land mass and it is not surprising that 80% of wild animals in Africa roam outside these areas amongst local people. Rapidly expanding human populations combined with pressures to practice conventional agriculture has meant that rural communities have turned wild habitats into ploughed croplands. This change in land use has severely affected areas around national parks and, in some cases, has led to environmental degradation, social decline, poverty and starvation amongst local communities who live with wildlife on their doorsteps.

For the past 20 years the majority of international conservation efforts to protect endangered species like the rhino, elephant, and more recently the tiger, have neglected to involve the real guardians of wildlife - the local people. Without their support, wildlife has little chance of survival in its natural state.

With all this in mind, Save the Rhino International, one of the UK's leading campaigners, decided to put together a unique fund-raising concept to highlight the people/wildlife conflict in areas of Kenya and Tanzania. The ingredients were eight walkers and a 30 lb, eight foot high rubber rhino costume! The challenge was to walk the rhino from Mombasa at sea level to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest point. The expedition would last for a month and cover 300 kilometres to the base of the mountain before climbing to 19,340 feet.

The walk passed alongside Tsavo National Park which, at 20,807 square kilometres, is one of Africa's largest national parks. Rural communities who live on the boundary of the park have rarely seen the positive effects of wildlife and thus one of the primary objectives of our expedition was to identify the negative impact wildlife has on its human neighbours and find out why there is a lack of emotional ownership amongst local people in regard to their wildlife.

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Clean up on Mount Kenya

retards the growth of flora in addition to being an eyesore. The garbage situation is currently one of the main problems facing Mount Kenya. Ulf Carlsson, chairman of the Mountain Club of Kenya observes, 'It is such a shame to see all the litter along the paths and around the campsites on the mountain. Let the mountain bring a change in you but you must not change the mountain!'

The problem has necessitated the organization of regular clean-up exercises in order to bring down the accumulated garbage. One such initiative in July 1993 yielded more than half a tonne of litter from the Naro Moru side and around the peak areas.

'Let the mountain bring a change in you but you must not change the mountain!'

There are three main tourist routes on the mountain. The Naro Moru and Sirimon routes are to an extent taken care of by Naro Moru River Lodge and Mountain Rock Hotel respectively as they own and manage the huts on these routes. The third, the Chogoria route, has of recent proved to be more popular with visitors. It has, at the lower

heights, arguably some of the best scenery on the mountain. The huts on this route, owned by the Mountain Club, have maximum room for eight people and are not commonly used except for cooking. Most visitors use tents for accommodation and as a result the garbage problem has been accelerated on this route. Another area of concern is the Austrian Hut. It is located among the boulders and scree at 15,700 feet and is used as a base by climbers attempting the higher peaks. The hut is also used as a resting point by trackers attempting the Lenana peak from all three routes and is hence one of the most frequented huts on the mountain. Due to the adverse conditions that exist at this height, climbers often discard most of their litter inside this hut. During a previous clean-up, a substantial proportion of the total litter collected originated from the Austrian Hut.

The Chogoria route, Austrian Hut and the main peak are some of the regions targeted for a clean-up project planned for July 1995. The exercise, supported by the Mountain Club, is projected to last for a period of 12 to 13 days and will be carried out by a similar number of climbers.

Even though such projects are a welcome initiative and do go a long way in helping to keep the mountain clean, are they really a permanent solution to the problem? As per Bongo Woolly, the warden at the Mount Kenya National Park, 'As long as there are visitors to this mountain there will always be the problem of garbage on the mountain and regular clean-ups are the primary solution'.

This is a view shared by many regular climbers. Several attempts have been made, in the form of brochures and sign posts at strategic locations on the mountain, to educate and inform visitors of the situation and to try and ensure that they do not contribute further to it, but most of these have been in vain.

One possible solution is suggested by a well known adventurer, the director of Savage Wilderness Safaris, Mark Savage. His proposal draws a parallel with what is currently being done on the Himalayan ranges. Here all visitors are required to pay an 'environmental deposit' to ensure that they return with what they take up. On Mount Kenya this could be in the form of a garbage bag to be purchased at the park gate by all visitors. The purchase price would be refundable on exit upon production of the bag filled with litter from the items the visitor took up. Even if the tourist were to consider it not worth the effort to bring back this litter, his guide or porter would certainly do so as this would be additional income to him. It is a solution that tackles the problem right at its root and should be given consideration at least on a test basis to judge its viability.

Clean-up projects would not be the final, but just part of the continuous effort required. The primary aim should be to create an awareness of the problem to the visitors who hold the prime responsibility to keep the mountain clean.

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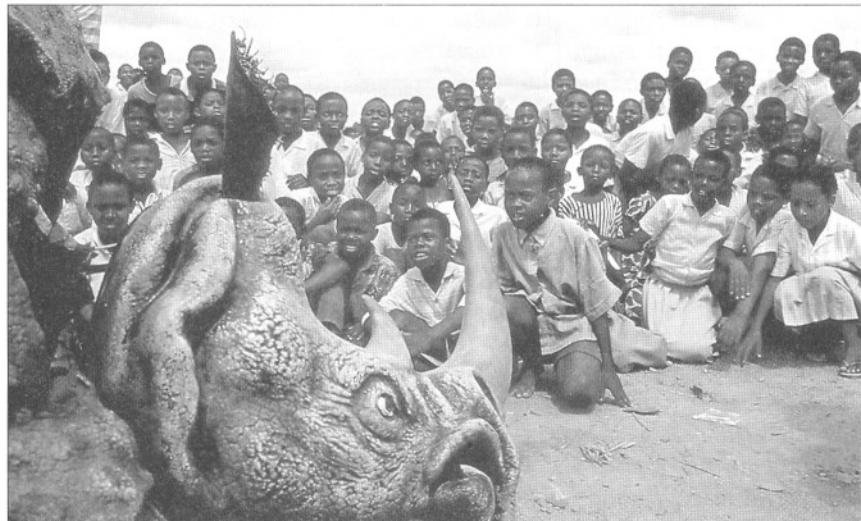
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A rubber rhino, Kilimanjaro & local schools

The highlight of this strange walking entourage was the rhino costume and even though people kept a safe distance, the crowds that gathered behind us to join the walk were proof that we had captured their interest. Up and down the road people talked excitedly about the two-legged rhino and although we would never underestimate the effectiveness of bush telegraph, the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (Mombasa branch) must take a lot of the credit as they worked tirelessly all along the route promoting the rhino climb.

At Voi it seemed that the whole town came out to welcome us and Michael Werikhe, who was walking with us that day, was heard to comment that not since the railway was opened through Voi town had a crowd this big got together.



'Half expecting to come up against disgruntled farmers and uninterested villagers, we were pleasantly surprised and filled with hope by the sheer resilience of these communities whom, over the years, have learned to adapt to the current situation. Wild animals, particularly buffalo and elephant, are destroying their crops yet there is still a healthy respect for these offenders'

Above; School children surround the rhino costume as the walk and its conservation message is explained.

Over the next few days we spent a lot of time visiting primary schools which were situated in wildlife problem areas around Voi. The arrival of the rhino at these schools caused great consternation amongst the children and their parents. The

welcomes we received were unforgettable. Quite apart from undertaking this enormous physical challenge, a large proportion of our work was to highlight a more practical conservation message which will regard the rights of those who have to live with wild animals.

Education has a large part to play in this practical conservation approach. Key primary schools along the walk route were chosen to benefit from the expedition and all these schools are situated where wildlife and, in particular, elephant and buffalo have become increasing pests. Further interviews and discussions with children and their parents revealed just how little they knew about the wildlife. Further conservation education amongst schools must be backed up by regular visits to the park for both children and parents.

Our walk through Tsavo West towards the border town of Taveta was a lonely one and with the school children left far behind we turned our concentration to the mountain ahead. Mount Kilimanjaro has to be one of the most awe-inspiring sights you can see in Africa with its snow-capped summit rising out of the blanket of cloud that envelops it. The short rains arrived late and although we wished them on for the sake of the farmers, for our own sakes we hoped that they might stay away for another week. As it turned out the sun shone almost every day of the ascent and in the afternoon of the sixth day we all successfully reached Uhuru peak at 19,340 feet.

The rhino climb touched the hearts and imaginations of a broad cross section of people in Kenya last year and I hope that we can capitalise on this, encouraging other NGOs and ourselves to work more closely with rural communities when it comes to practical wildlife issues.

Since the climb I have returned to Kenya with £75,000 (funds raised to date) to start the building work at the five primary schools. Michael Werikhe offered his help and the following day (!) he had a *fundhi* (workman) prepared to work on all the schools. Marvelling at the speed and efficiency of these two men, I drove the walk route and visited all five schools with the news that the climb had been successfully completed and work was to begin in late February. With the help of people from the local communities, in quarrying and carrying stones, by June new classrooms were completed at two of the schools and three more were finished by the end of the month. In one location there had been no rain and so there was no water (needed for the floors), the closest source was three kilometres away and a lorry was needed for transportation. Such unforeseen factors caused some delay and point to the great need within some rural communities for basic infrastructure and attendant education and health care. It is now these concerns that hold the key to the survival of wildlife and its areas and it is these concerns that need support, not just from international communities but from Africa's own, resource-full, urban communities.