

TRAVEL



82 SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE IN KENT

A new Turner art gallery adds to the charms of this idyllic corner of England

Edited by JANE MEMMLER

sundayexpress.co.uk/travel

Taking on Kilimanjaro

Father of London Mayor Boris, environmentalist STANLEY JOHNSON rolls back the years on an expedition to 'the roof of Africa'

POLÉ, POLÉ. In Swahili this means "slowly, slowly". Old hands will tell you that if you are planning to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the highest peak in Africa and the world's highest free-standing mountain, polé, polé is the way to do it. Particularly if, as I am, you are halfway through your 71st year.

I had heard tales before I set out last month of how such supremely fit people as former tennis champion Martina Navratilova had failed to make it to the top.

Google "climbing Kilimanjaro" and you get a whole litany of things that can go wrong, from altitude sickness to acute pulmonary or cerebral oedema. Someone is bound to suggest that you update your will before you leave for Africa. My advice is don't worry.

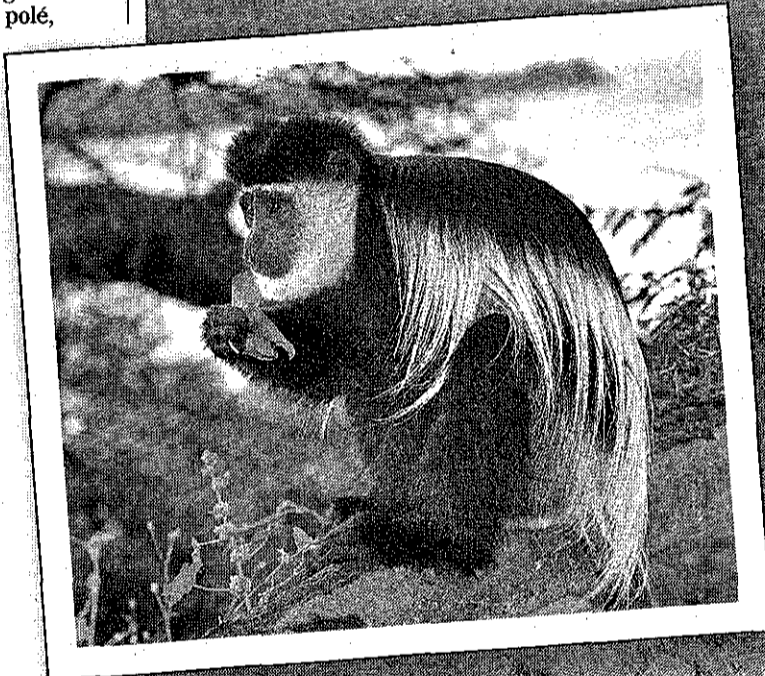
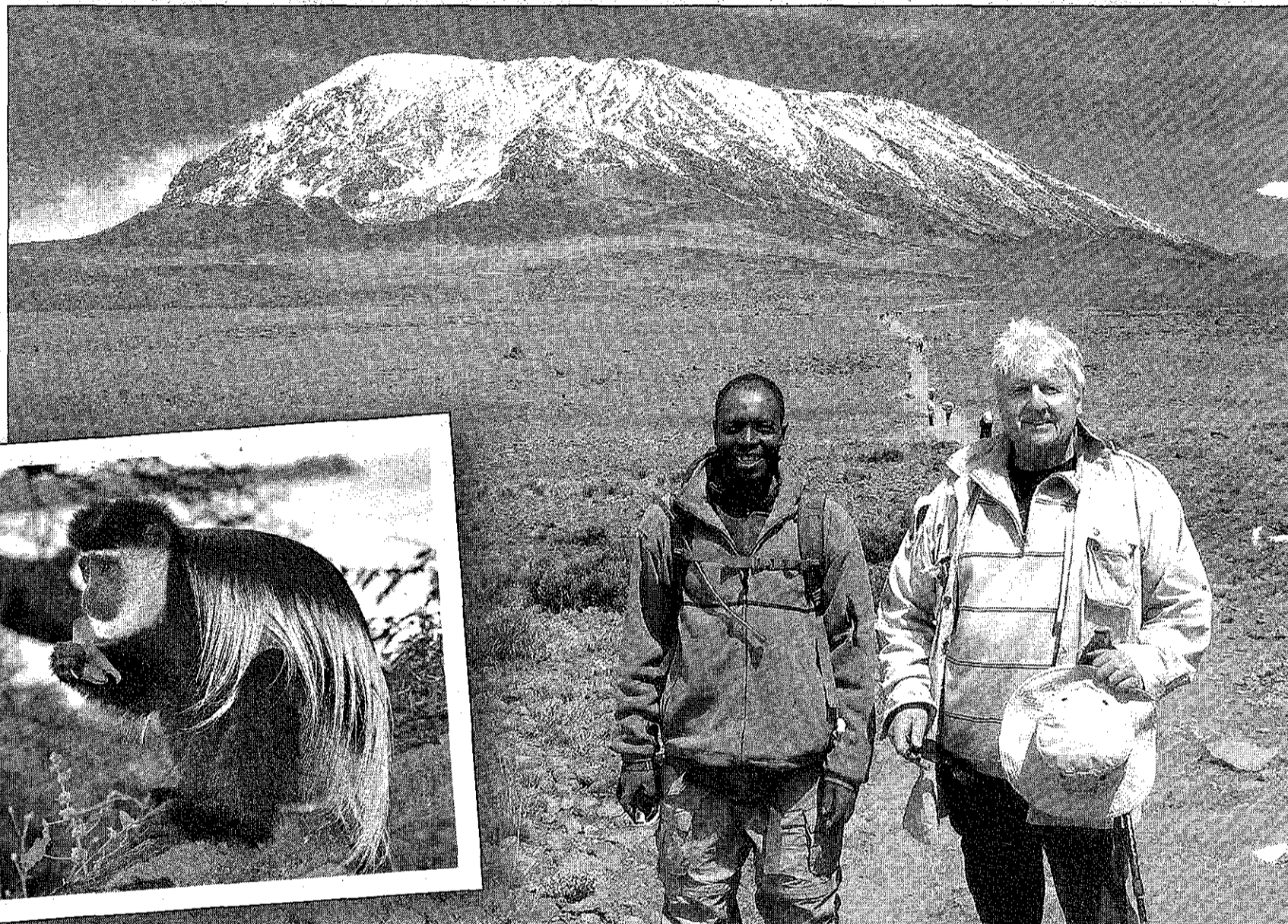
I am not saying this is a total cakewalk. It isn't. There are some long days' walking and climbing and the assault on the summit can indeed be daunting, as can the long descent.

For the average fit septuagenarian, however, I would say climbing Kilimanjaro is totally doable. I would go further. From my personal perspective, the week I have just spent climbing up 18,651ft has been one of the most memorable of my life.

If you don't actually enjoy climbing Kilimanjaro you are wasting your time and money. I knew right from the start that I had the right formula.

Although I am sure that I could have arranged for some travelling companions I decided not to. I wanted to be free to set my own pace or, more accurately, to follow the pace set by my guide without having to worry if it was too slow or too fast for someone else.

I didn't want to find myself idly chatting about which film would win the most Oscars or whether the Lib Dems would pull out of the Coalition. Solitude, of course, is



ON TRACK: Stanley with guide Elibariki on the mountain trail which passes through rainforest where black-and-white colobus monkeys, inset, abound

a relative term. Besides myself, my Kuoni party comprised a guide, a cook, four porters and even a waiter.

The rhythm of our days on the mountain was straightforward. I had decided to approach Kilimanjaro from the Kenyan side along the so-called Rongai route. There are six approaches but Rongai is less-frequented and one of the most delightful.

Entering Mount Kilimanjaro National Park at Rongai Gate soon after lunch on day one, we spent our first afternoon walking up to Simba Camp (8,612ft).

With the team having gone ahead to pitch the tents and prepare the evening meal, my guide Elibariki Simon and I took a leisurely uphill stroll through the rainforest.

That is one of the extraordinary things about climbing Kilimanjaro. In the space of four days you pass through tropical rainforest into a zone of heath and moorland. Then as you rise above the 4,000m

(13,120ft) contour you continue through a kind of lunar landscape before ascending beyond 5,000m (16,400ft) into the summit zone.

That first afternoon in the rainforest we must have seen at least 20 black-and-white colobus monkeys, with their extraordinary long capes of white hair and flowing white tails, leaping from tree to tree. The same number of blue monkeys was also evident as well as a chameleon and a variety of sunbirds.

IFOUND myself adopting a defensive strategy. Even if I don't make it to the top, I said, I will have had a wonderful outing in one of Africa's most astonishing national parks.

One of the advantages of taking a wholly tented approach to Kilimanjaro is that you are not bound by anyone else's timetable. You don't have to observe check-in

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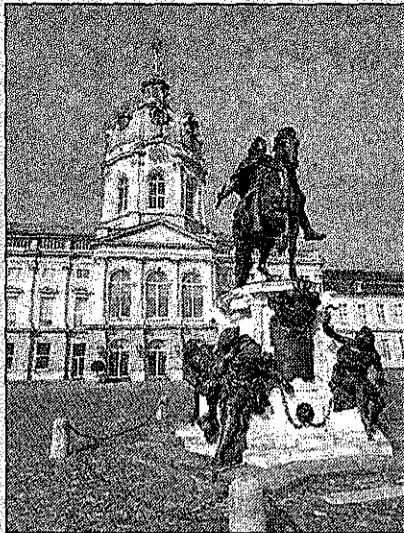
JAMIE OLIVER took his culinary know-how to Berlin this week with a visit to the Scandic Berlin Potsdamer Platz hotel.

The chef and restaurateur has teamed up with the Scandic hotel group, which has 160 properties in nine countries across Europe, to create new recipes including a five-course children's menu.

Built around the River Spree, Berlin is the capital and the biggest city of Germany. Landmarks include the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag, home to Germany's Parliament built in 1894. Families will enjoy Tiergarten Park which also boasts the country's oldest zoo.

For a glimpse of regal Germany, head to the palace of Schloss Charlottenburg built as a summer residence for Queen Sophie-Charlotte in the 17th century.

A popular German afternoon tradition is kaffee und kuchen (coffee and cake). Charming Art Deco-styled Café Anna Blume in the Prenzlauer Berg district, which also serves as a florist, sells fantastic home-made pastries, a decadent cake selection



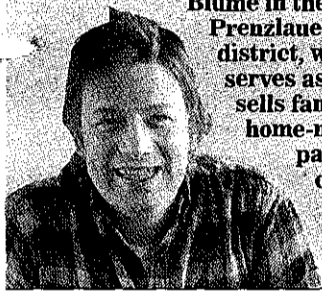
ORNATE: Schloss Charlottenburg

including lime cheesecake and even edible flowers.

● GETTING THERE:

BA (0844 493 0758/ba.com/berlin) offers three nights at the four-star Park Inn Berlin-Alexanderplatz from £258pp (two sharing), room only. Price includes return flights from Heathrow. For April departures. German National Tourist Office: 0207 317 0908/germany-tourism.co.uk

CHARLOTTE CIVIL



TRAVEL



WARM WELCOME: Masai people of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania perform a traditional dance

'Mission accomplished'

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and check-out times as you do if you take the Marangu route where you have to move from hut to hut under a strict timetable.

I never felt the advantage of our choice of route and mode of travel (tents plus porters) more keenly than at the end of day four when we made the final push for the mountain's summit.

We reached Kibo Camp, 3,000ft from the summit, at about 5pm. Elibariki poked his head into my tent to give me final instructions: "Dinner at six. Then you sleep until 11."

It seemed a long time. "11 tomorrow morning?" I queried. "No, this evening; we start climbing at midnight."

ELI WAS as good as his word. We left Kibo Camp for the final push to the summit at exactly midnight. With a full moon shining on the mountain we had no need of head torches as we scrambled upwards, although we carried them with us just in case.

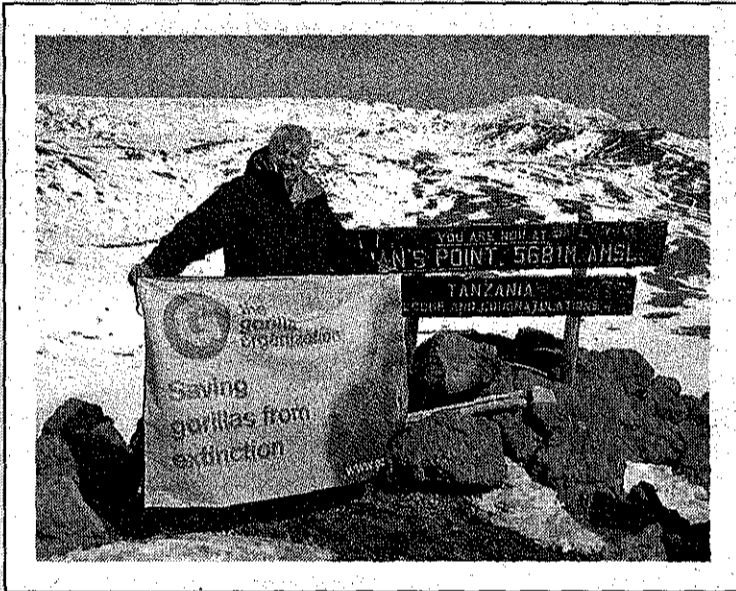
At about 6.30am the sun rose above Mawenzi Peak, Kilimanjaro's lesser twin. We were already high above the clouds.

At 10am we reached the rim of the mountain and from Gilman's Point we were able to look down into Kilimanjaro's ice and snow-covered crater.

Mission accomplished.

Eli helped me unfurl the banner of The Gorilla Organization, whose chairman I am. So far we have raised almost as many UK pounds for gorilla conservation as the altitude (in feet) I climbed.

As importantly, Eli helped me safely back down the mountain. Although I didn't experience any



PEAK PERFORMANCE: Stanley unfurls his banner at the summit



WILDLIFE: A Kenyan chameleon

kind of altitude sickness at any point on the mountain my feet were certainly tired and aching when, at around 2pm, we made it back to Kibo.

This was where taking the tent-only option paid off. If we had been "hutting" rather than "tenting" we would have had to vacate our berths after the briefest of rests to trudge on down that same day to the next camp at Horombo three or four more hours' steady walking. This on top of a stint that had begun 16 hours earlier when we first set off for the summit at midnight.

Staggering into camp I put my foot down. "I'm not going on down to Horombo," I told my guide. "Not today. I'll do it tomorrow. I am going straight to sleep in my tent. Here and now."

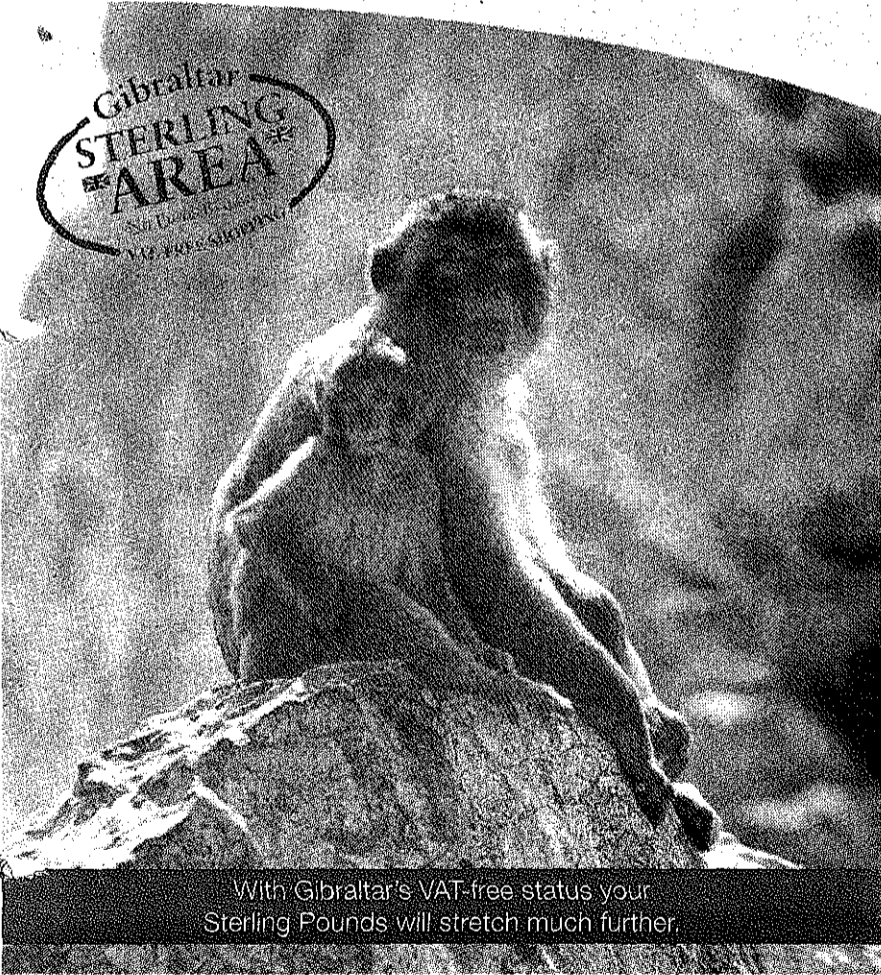
Which is exactly what I did.

● GETTING THERE:

Kuoni (01306 747 008/kuoni.co.uk) offers seven nights on the escorted Kilimanjaro Climb - Rongai Route from £2,015pp (two sharing), full board. Price includes two nights at Marangu and five nights on Mount Kilimanjaro, return flights with Kenya Airways from Heathrow and transfers. For departures April 2011. Tanzania Tourist Board: 0207 569 1483/tanzaniatouristboard.com. To support the work of The Gorilla Organization visit: events.gorillas.org/stanleyjohnson

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