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## HEALTH &amp; FITNESS



PHOTOS COURTESY OF D. BRANDON HORNSBY

## UP TO THE CHALLENGE

SOLE PRACTITIONER BRANDON HORNSBY reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro on Christmas Day 2007

BY TAMMY LLOYD CLABBY

FOR 30 DAYS D. Brandon Hornsby, 39, wore his new “heavy-duty” hiking boots to his Midtown Atlanta office, replacing them with dress shoes only when appearing in court or for a deposition. He was breaking in his “new best friends” for a sojourn to Africa and a self-illuminating trek up Mount Kilimanjaro.

In mid-December 2007, as the sole practitioner worked feverishly to close his office to head to the airport, he received word the flight for the first leg of his trip had been canceled. Hornsby recalls frantically grabbing his backpack, stuffed with layers of clothing and gear, and running down 14th Street to catch a cab to the airport. There he negotiated a new flight to Amsterdam, Netherlands, and on to Tanzania to begin his first trek up one of the seven summits, or the highest mountains on the seven continents.

Hornsby reached the top of Mount Kilimanjaro on Christmas Day. He recently shared his thoughts about the journey and what he called “a great Christmas present.”

**Q: How did you decide to make the climb?**

A: Climbing one of the seven summits is the ultimate personal challenge. I chose Mount Kilimanjaro because it is the most accessible of the seven summits, but also because of its beauty. It’s romantic as in [Ernest] Hemingway’s “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” As a kid I did a lot of rock climbing. As an adult I wanted to take it to a different level.

**Q: Did you go with a friend?**

A: I went with a group of 12, and I only knew one person. But because of the challenge, you quickly get a lot of camaraderie.

You have to work as a team.

**Q: How do you go, and how much might it cost?**

A: It is important to find a good and reputable company to make the trip with. You definitely need to go with a company that is experienced. I went with Thomson Treks, the same company that did the IMAX film about Kilimanjaro. Mine was \$7,000 plus about \$1,500 for the flight.

**Q: What kind of training is involved for the trek?**

A: In my case, I did not train enough, and I felt the fear of God as I flew into Africa. I only worked hard at it for about a month. Ideally, you should train for three months. It’s different from rock climbing, in that you carry a pack, which might weigh 25 to even 40 pounds. I ran at Piedmont Park, and started a low-calorie diet. We are lucky we have Stone Mountain, which of course is not as steep as Kilimanjaro [19,335.6 ft.] But, I trained there going up and down the mountain with a full pack.

On the actual hike, after you reach about 10,000 feet, every pound feels like 10 extra pounds.

On the trip, you have porters who carry a great deal of the equipment. They shout “jambo”—meaning hello or coming through, in Swahili, as they go up the mountain ahead of you, with all the gear on their heads. Then they set up the next base camp before you get there. The one thing you can’t train for is altitude sickness. Even if you could train out West, it still could get you.

**Q: Did you become ill on the trip?**

A: I was never given oxygen, though at one point I certainly thought I needed it. At about 15,000 feet, I was so sick I began asking myself why I was doing this. Suffering from altitude sickness is like suffering



**Top:** In mid-December 2007, sole practitioner Brandon Hornsby began his first trek up one of the seven summits, Mount Kilimanjaro. He traveled with a group of 12. Middle: Hornsby called his journey to the summit “a great Christmas present.” Above: A base camp during the trek.

from every sickness you’ve ever had in your life, all at once. You feel nausea, dizziness, vomiting and aching. After a night of rest and hydration, I was OK to go on the next day. One of our group, a highly trained triathlete, did not make it to the top because of altitude sickness.

**Q: Did you ever think you would not make it?**

A: I was very committed but very intimidated in the beginning. I knew I should have trained better. It is a very large mountain. When we arrived at the village, Moshi, where the climb begins, I was very taken aback by the emotionality of it. I knew it would be the ultimate challenge, success or failure.

**Q: Is it a spiritual trip?**

A: I came back very humbled by the

enormity of the challenge, believing it was the personal challenge, but it turned out to be the ultimate team challenge. I had to go with many others. It’s personal, but I could not have done it without the support of others. I also never comprehended the love of the Tanzanians for the mountain and what they give to those who want to summit.

**Q: Will you try another summit this year?**

A: I have decided I will climb Aconcagua, the highest mountain outside of Asia. [22,841 ft.] It’s in Argentina, in the Andes. But, I won’t make it this year as it requires three weeks off and is higher and more technical which means I’ll need much more training and gear. ☼

Tammy Lloyd Clabby is a freelance writer for the Daily Report.