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The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 19th November 2024: Notice of meeting #1366

Dear Fellow Owls

The 1366th meeting of The Owl Club, preceded by dinner, will be held on Tuesday 19th November 2024, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start, in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club.

Chairman: **President Owl Ron Duff**

Guest speaker: **Finuala Dowling**, on the topic of: ***"The Trials and Joys of Being an Author"***

"Drawing on her experience, poet and novelist Finuala Dowling discusses the difficulty – indeed, the near impossibility - of fulfilling one's childhood ambition to "become a writer". Dowling explores animating encounters with readers, a career that is largely age-proof, and the profoundly meaningful work of making something that is imaginative, uplifting, entertaining and true."

Music: **Cathy Davy and Irish Session**

"The musical programme is something rather different, presented by a five-piece group called Irish Session, South Africa's only traditional Irish Session band, and which has been running since 1989."

WPB: **Owl John Roos** on the topic of: ***"Anaesthesia during the Anglo-Boer War"***

"This presentation will start with a very brief introduction to the history of the 'discovery' of general anaesthesia, the introduction of general anaesthesia to South Africa, and will then take stock of the level of advancement of anaesthesia at the commencement of the Anglo-Boer War."

Dinner price: R320. Dress: Black tie (or similarly elegant attire).

RESERVATIONS & PAYMENTS:

Any Owl who does not have internet access is welcome to telephone the Secretary Bird at 082 440 8204 or 021 671 3121 to book a perch.

All other Owls are encouraged to use the Pay'n Perch procedure by paying their (and their guest's) dining fee into the Club's bank account by EFT and instructing the bank (using the option provided) to send a remittance confirmation email to secretary@owls.org.za whereupon their perches will be booked.

Besides details of your invited guests (see above), no further emails will be needed from you unless you also have special dietary needs or if you are using a dining credit.

In all cases, bookings will close at 6:00 pm on Sunday 17th November 2024.

All bookings will be acknowledged.



The October 2024 Meeting

On Tuesday, 15th October 2024, 65 Owls, 14 dinner guests and three postprandial guests (the musicians) gathered in the Grill Room Kelvin Grove, Newlands for the 1365th meeting. The proceedings started at 18:45, with President Owl Ron Duff welcoming all and inviting Owl Mike Bruton to deliver the Grace, followed by a three-course dinner (see page 16 for the menu and Grace). The President then asked Owls to charge their glasses and to rise for the Toast to South Africa, followed by a short break.

Owl President Ron then congratulated the 17 Owls celebrating birthdays in October, which is close to the average. Birthday Owls this month include Owls Gavin Michelmore who was 80 on 2 October, and Owl Norman Osburn, Owl Hans van Heerden and his son Owl Viljoen van Heerden (on the day before his father!).

Owl Ron then indicated that 40 people are expected to attend the next Colloquium on the 8th October, on the subject of climate change. The Colloquium will start promptly at 10h30 in the Palmyra Room (not the usual Pavilion venue), so Owls were instructed to arrive at least 15 minutes before that time. Owl President Ron then explained that there are 12 confirmed bookings for the excursion to Admiral Söderland's private museum on the morning of Saturday 16th November.

New Owl Isabelle Franzen was then (with due ceremony) inducted, welcomed into the fellowship and invited to dwell in harmony with fellow Owls. The President then (requesting that guests remained seated) ordered that the lights be dimmed whilst he proposed the traditional Toast to Our Guests.



After the toast, Fiscal Shrike, Richard Morris conducted the Club Flutter. The guest speaker for the evening, author Justin Fox, was then introduced by Owl President Ron. Justin Fox, a UCT graduate in English, won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford where he obtained a doctorate in English. He has an abiding interest in landscape and writing about landscape. Justin edited Geta-way magazine for many years, and his literary output has been prolific and wide ranging: and includes travel writing, children's books, and fiction.



After Justin's riveting and most eloquent address, Owl President Ron thanked him for his presentation, followed by David Little's introduction of the performers for the evening, the Cadillac Trio, comprising Albert Combrink (piano), Elina Koytecha (violin) and Louise Howlett (singer).

After the two musical sets, Owl Ron then thanked the Cadillac Trio for their wonderful contribution to the evening's entertainment. Owl Derek Leisegang was then asked to fill the WPB. His topic was "My Kilimanjaro Climb". See pages 8 to 12 for the full report on Owl Derek's WPB.

To conclude the evening, Owls and their guests were invited to raise their glasses in a Toast to the Owl Club following which the President wished all a safe flight home.

Owls are hereby notified that the *December meeting, no. 1367, is scheduled for Tuesday 10th December, and bookings will close at 6:00 pm on Sunday 8th December 2024.*

Further, the Notice no. 1367 will most likely only be circulated *late in the first week of December*, as the Sociable Weaver will be away in the Cederberg during the last two weeks of November.



Musical Notes: The Cadillac Trio: “A Concert Celebrating the Music of Faure, Saint-Saens, Debussy, Web- ber, Piaf and more.”



Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of the Cadillac Trio in Performance.*

The musical programme featured three prominent and experienced Cape Town musicians Albert Combrink on the piano, Elina Koytcheva on the violin, and the singer Louise Howlett. They played a varied programme in a concert celebrating the music of Faure, Saint-Saens, Debussy, Webber, Piaf and more.

Soprano Louise Howlett is a classically trained soprano who can effortlessly slip between styles to jazz and Broadway; off stage she is an avid promoter of classical music as well as a presenter on Fine Music Radio. Elina Koytcheva is one of Cape Town’s versatile violinists whether playing with the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra or as a chamber musician and soloist; and pianist Albert Combrink is celebrated as performer, speaker, historian, and teacher. Together, these three musicians took the assembled Owls on an evocative journey through the streets of Paris.

Part 1: Stories from Paris

Sous le Ciel de Paris - Hubert Giraud

Mai – Gabriel Fauré *Le Papillon et la Fleur* – Gabriel Fauré

Meditation from Thaïs - Jules Massenet

Mon Coeur from Samson and Delilah - Camille Saint-Saëns

After the interval, the programme was as follows:

Part 2: Stories from Paris

Music of the Night from Phantom of the Opera - Andrew Lloyd-Webber

Claire de Lune - Claude Debussy

Chao Paris - Astor Piazzolla

La Foule - Ángel Cabral

La Vie En Rose - Robert Chauvigny



Guest Speaker: Justin Fox: “Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful”

The seduction of the South African landscape, particularly the Western Cape, permeates all my work. As a travel writer, both for *Getaway* magazine and in my books, I've spent the last 25 years celebrating the land.

Where did this infatuation with place and landscape begin? In 1973, when I was 6 years old, my parents took our family to Europe for a long holiday which culminated in two months on the islands of Patmos and Santorini. We were joined by friends and family who arrived by air, ship or donkey. For a child who'd fallen in love with islands and boats, Greece was a newfound Elysium. There were voyages on ferries and caïques, daily mule rides to beaches and monasteries, and Greek dancing in the taverna each night. I felt and knew this to be “home”, albeit a transient and mobile one: my family united in an island setting, with me, the *laatlammetjie*, doted upon, contained yet free. Forever after, my “season in paradise” has been clearly defined as that Grecian summer of 1973.

The places loved in childhood become places of the heart, sanctuaries to which you can return in memory and anchor in the comfort of their lee. For the rest of your living days, there will be triggers – sights, sounds, smells – that spirit you back to that time, that place. Paradise for me, then, is a whitewashed village, drystone walls, a chapel's tolling bell, a kraal with sheep or goats, the scent of basil and leather, barren mountains overlooking a turquoise sea, a tinkling stream of crystal water and the persistent song of cicadas.

Soon after returning from Greece, my parents took me to the Cederberg for the first time. Rounding a bend at the top of Kouberg Pass and seeing Wupperthal far below – an oasis of thatched cottages encircled by mountains – brought a jolt of recognition. Everything about the village was familiar: the whitewashed houses, the chiming church bell, donkey traffic, sheep grazing the slopes, the clear waters of the Tra-Tra River and arid hills covered in fragrant vegetation.

There were other places of childhood topophilia (from the Greek *topos*, place, and *philos*, loving), such as Kanetvlei farm in the Hex River Valley, visited each autumn after harvest when the vines were scarlet. There were trips to my artist uncle, François Krige, in the Little Karoo dorp of Montagu and walks to thermal rockpools through sandstone kloofs echoing with the bark of baboons. There were holidays in Arniston with its thatched cottages on a bluff overlooking a luminous bay where brightly coloured fishing boats were launched each morning and returned each afternoon laden with silver cargo.

Children respond instinctively to beauty, an imprinting that stays with them for life, and powerful early encounters with place help to mould their sensory palates. Indeed, our habits, customs and thoughts are shaped by the “terroir” we first inhabit. Although a hierarchy of places emerges as we grow older, a crucial and indelible bond is established with that early place, or “home” as we most commonly use the term. It remains the centre of our personal cosmos, containing our own unique, unrepeatable beginning. We may move, but we cannot begin again a second time. In a sense we are rooted and grounded in place, by place.

This intense feeling of harmony with our first patch of earth contributes to a sense of wholeness and of “having a place”. We become endemics, adapted to our particular corner of the globe. Seen in this light, our beings have true meaning and value only in their proper home, in a symbiotic relationship with their landscape and ecosystem. Which is perhaps why emigration can be so difficult for many people.



Landscapes shape our personalities. The different geographies of South Africa have helped make the inhabitants who they are. There's the Cape with its fickleness – one minute a Mediterranean idyll, the next a storm-lashed Atlantic crag; the Drakensberg with its moods, drama and churchliness; the Lowveld is steamy, sultry and fanged; the Karoo is an expression of heat, dust and vastness. I am a product of Cape Town, of a western seaboard, a place of sunsets, mountains, beaches and an ocean deeply blue and capricious. I have a visceral response to the fynbos and strandveld, granite and sandstone, vineyards and shorelines of this place, my place. How could it be otherwise? How could I be otherwise?

While travelling, there are moments when we come upon a locale that provokes an instinctive response. Heart, mind and body seem in alignment: we are suddenly an animal in our natural environment and react with a sense of profound recognition, even love. Many of us travel in order to experience such encounters with the “spirit of place”, an invisible force that affects everything within and about the locale, and is often a magnet for artists and writers who are drawn to its unique character, its history and its residents, both past and present.

If there is any universal truth about stories and their tellers it is that they are, in every sense, bound to place. For some writers, landscape is central to the narrative, impregnating the writing with its presence. What would Wordsworth be without the Lake District, Thoreau without his Massachusetts woods, Camus without his sun-drenched Mediterranean coast, Durrell without his Grecian isles?

For my latest book, *Place*, I undertook a series of journeys around South Africa looking at how landscape influenced some of our greatest writers.

I travelled to the mountainous eastern Karoo of Olive Schreiner, to the big-game Lowveld of Sir Percy FitzPatrick, to the vast emptiness of the open veld evoked by Deneys Reitz, to the pioneer highlands of Eugène Marais's Waterberg, to the dreamy bushveld of Herman Charles Bosman's Marico, to the plains of thirst and dust of JM Coetzee's Moordenaars Karoo, to the ancient forests of Dalene Matthee's Garden Route, to the subtropical shores of Zakes Mda's Wild Coast, and finally to the sandstone heights of Stephen Watson's Cederberg.

But all our imaginations, coloured by experience and culture, fill and shape the landscapes we inhabit. My own cultural map of South Africa is a patchwork comprising disparate scraps of literature, art, music, film and photographs. Such a “map” would include evocative poems of place, such as *Drummer Hodge* and *Sweetwater*, as well as short stories like *The Pain*, *The Coffin* and any number of Bosman yarns. It would contain fragments of Guy Butler and Alan Paton as well as the heart-wrenching, place-rooted songs and dances of *maskandi*, *boeremusiek* and *rieldans* – all of it mixed into the *potjie* along with my own travel memories, many of them from journeys undertaken at a young age when my mind's doors were wide open and the topophilic winds blew new and strong and true.

Every person brings their own experience and imagination to a landscape, thereby infinitesimally changing and amplifying it, adding a brushstroke to the great canvas, contributing a thread to the story of that place. Whether it's a poem, a painting or a photograph, each act adds to and deepens the collective experience of place. One could think of this in Cubist terms: each individual facet offering a slightly different dimension to the overall picture. Looked at in this way, a landscape can be read on many levels and from many angles – ranging from geological to historical, mythical to cultural – with its layers blending and rhyming to the viewer's discretion and taste.



I have begun to picture the map of South Africa as a thickly braided quilt of story and culture lines, a great web laid over the landscape. My map would include all routes, from ancient footpaths to modern highways, many of them densified by narratives: oral histories of the San and Khoi, Bantu founding myths and Mfecane tales, the accounts of runaway slaves and indentured labourers, gold-diggers, big-game hunters and empire builders. It would include the stories of modern wanderers – backpackers, campervanners, refugees – all of them leaving faint, palimpsestic tracks.

In the realm of writing, the first descriptions of South Africa were nautical accounts of the coastline by early navigators, then came the diaries and documents of VOC officials and later colonisers. There were popular makers of fiction such as Rider Haggard and famous chroniclers such as David Livingstone, Winston Churchill and Mahatma Gandhi. All of them were map-makers, all of their writing rooted in and giving colour to place. Every single person adds to the story, recording routes and tales on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, or simply by being present. There are even fuddy-duddy anachronists – such as yours truly – who still employ ancient recording devices such as pen and paper as they travel the South African road.

All of the books I chose for my literary quests, both in the travelogue *Place* and in my journalistic meanders, are in a sense love letters to South Africa, saturated with a passion for the land. It is wonderfully rewarding to engage with the land through the pages of great books, but it's even better to put boots on the ground, text in hand, and experience first-hand something of the authors' relationship with place, to hear the voices of their characters *in situ*.

However, the long period of researching these various projects has coincided with a growing disillusionment with my homeland, a period that has seen a dramatic increase in crime, economic depression and the erosion of things I hold dear.

I also worry that my privileged, white, male, middle-aged, middle-class way of apprehending and appreciating the land is obsolete, out of step with a nation heading all-sails-set in another direction. Wild places, old places, places of character and depth, cultural heritage, literature, traditional ways of life and architecture, conservation in all its forms, are under threat from multiple forces in today's South Africa. Over-development, greed, corruption and neglect serve to disconnect people from the environments they hold dear.

I have, off and on, flirted with the idea of emigration: to leave or not to leave this promised, beloved land. My thoughts have been coloured by the books I've been immersed in. Journeys to Mpumalanga, the Waterberg and Marico reignited my love of the bushveld in all its guises, but stories of farm murders, hollowed-out municipalities and corrupt land redistribution that has seen the Zanufication of once prosperous farms cast a shadow. While Zakes Mda paints a positive picture of a local community fighting off the depredations of big capital, the story elsewhere on the Wild Coast has been much darker. But there is hope: large swathes of Knysna Forest now form part of a national park, the heart of the Cederberg has gained protected status, many rural communities have taken up the fight for environmental justice, and plenty of Karoo farms are remote enough to withstand most of the ravages.

But my doubts remain. Colonial South Africa destroyed so much of what indigenous South Africa held dear, and it seems inevitable that one way or another, whether by intent or as collateral damage, the new custodians will destroy much of what conservationist South Africa holds dear. Such is history. I am a product of *pax apartheid*, and *pax Mandela* – paxes that were largely won by force. Now that pervasive violence and corruption are back, what does it mean for one's relationship with the land, for one's engagement with its spirit?

"Ah, but your land is beautiful," they say, but is beauty enough? My thinking about the land brought me reluctantly, via many byways, to the notion of patriotism.



How much is love of country about landscape and how much about people? If it's primarily about the land, is it truly patriotism: beautiful land, troubled citizens? These issues become thornier in a kleptocratic state like South Africa.

How to separate love's grain from cynicism's chaff? A nation's worth is surely underpinned by its cultural legacy and natural bounty; hence the importance of these authors who are implicitly patriotic in their transmutation of place into gold through the alchemy of art.

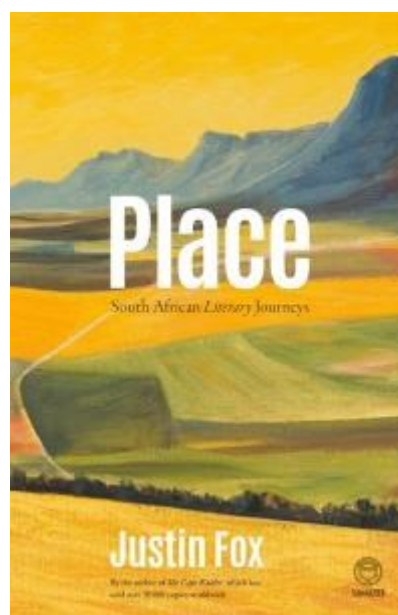
My own "patriotism" is irrigated by these waters. Perhaps there is a lesson in localism here: to be locally patriotic, to love the spirit of a certain corner of the land rather than biting off the whole nation, which is indigestible. I can be fiercely patriotic about a stream or a forest or a local community, and yearn to "belong" to it.

The tentative conclusion I have come to is that perhaps beauty is enough. This place, this Western Cape, is home, and one's attachment to the first places one learns to love, one's sacred places, is unshakeable. The authors who inspired my literary journeys have all become *genii loci*, the spirits of these places, custodians of landscape memory. It is to the shrines of their books that I have been repeatedly drawn for a fuller appreciation of the heart-land and I must assume that, barring a radical change of heart, I will go on making such pilgrimage journeys until I am no longer able to do so. When one's roots are sunk too deep, and one's attachment to the land is too strong, then leaving becomes a species of impossibility.

My own writing continues to venerate this place. As a journalist, my travels around southern Africa are celebrations of the land in words and photographs. Some of my recent writing includes a series of World War II novels set in Cape Town and Simon's Town in which I try to evoke the spirit of the Cape during the 1940s. In the first of these novels, *The Cape Raider*, one scene is in fact set in Kelvin Grove. During the war, my father, Revel Fox, was up north in Egypt and Italy, but my mother used to accompany her brother to the officers' dances here in Kelvin Grove's ballroom, which made its way into my tale.

In my novels the hero, Jack Pembroke, resides in a fictionalised version of our family holiday home, a 200-year-old farmhouse on Red Hill above Simon's Town, bought by my parents in the 1970s. It's an old whitewashed villa surrounded by fig, lemon and olive trees set on terraces overlooking False Bay and has much in common with the Greek houses I fell in love with as a child. My hero's father, Admiral Pembroke, lives in a fictionalised version of an old Edwardian house on Water's Edge beach, where I grew up sailing, swimming and kayaking. And so, at this point in my writing career, I have returned to my childhood places, to capture the spirit of a long ago Simon's Town and False Bay.

In conclusion, the spirit of place is invested in the flora, fauna and topography, the lie of the land; it can be sensed in the wind, smelt in the earth's musk, overheard in the quirky dialect of a local. It is there in the chime of a distant church bell, the bleat of sheep returning to the kraal, the whisper of a southeaster in the milkwoods. When you know it and when you feel it, there is an instinctive reaction. To truly get under the skin of a place, you must listen to the voices of the past, the voices of books and stories, harvesting them in service to your understanding of the land. Literature about place can transform your experience of a locale, offering greater depth, understanding and love. You get to walk in the big, complicated, inspiring boots of artists who have devoted the lives to interpreting these places of the heart.



WPB: Owl Derek Leisegang: “Kilimanjaro: Two Owls and a Mountain”



In his presentation, Derek described his recent escapades in East Africa, more specifically his ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa.

The date was March 2023, having just completed his first 10 year stint of formal employment as an engineer. Natural feelings of pride and contentment were uncomfortably intermingled with a growing realization of just how quickly those ten years had gone by. Life was flying by, with far too little to show for it. Like Bilbo Baggins in *Lord of the Rings*, he was in dire need of an adventure.

After much consideration he finally decided to fulfil a lifelong dream, pack his gear into the back of an old Land Cruiser and head off for a good old-fashioned overland adventure. The plan was to travel up the West side of the continent to within reach of the equator and return on the opposite side.

Consequently, in early July of this year, with a small variable band of fellow adventurers they set out on the trip. Much happened on the journey, but this talk is limited to the ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro.

After an eventful journey, on 24th August, they arrived in the bustling and colourful Tanzanian town of Arusha.

Climbing Kilimanjaro is not an inexpensive exercise. Even on a cheaper “local” option, it came in at just under \$1600 per person. Accommodation was found in a rustic, but otherwise perfectly comfortable hotel, squeezed in amongst the high-rises of the city.

In the party were an Australian named David, along with and fellow Owl Dr Rob Skelton who had flown in for the action.



On arrival they were struck by the sight of a spectacular volcanic peak named Mount Meru (4566 m high) that towered over the town. They initially assumed it be Mount Kilimanjaro itself but that peak was in fact 80 km to the East and a good 1.5 km higher than Mount Meru. They went to bed that night with a growing sense of excitement and anticipation for what lay ahead.

Day 0: Arusha

The day before the hike was spent on final preparations. Their guide, Joshua, took them to a rental shop to obtain vital additions to their kit, including snow pants, thick down jackets, gloves, hiking poles and various energy supplements for the mountain. Joshua checked their gear and then did the pre-hike briefing, promising to pick them up bright and early the next morning.

Day 1: Arusha to Machame Camp (1490-2840 m)

Groggily going down to breakfast after a disturbed night Derek was met by Rob and Dave, neither of whom appeared to have fared much better. They were also joined at the table by the 4th member of their expedition: a short, bubbly, young Chinese girl named Sandy, whom they erroneously assumed to be a complete novice hiker.

Breakfast finished, they boarded a bus and headed off towards the town of Moshi at the Southern foot of Kilimanjaro, picking up their porters along the way. The challenge ahead hit home with the realisation that, within an hour they would shoulder their packs and hike 18 km, complete with 1.5 km of elevation, to the first night campsite. Despite the daunting prospect, Derek decided to give it his best shot, and the rest would be left up to fate and the will of the mountain gods.



Given its immense size, Kilimanjaro is made up of 5 distinct climatic zones, the first of which, the cultivated zone, runs from the mountain's base at 800 m up to a height of 1800 m above sea level. The local people, the Chaga tribe, have farmed these fertile, well-watered lower slopes for millennia and the group passed lush banana and coffee plantations on both sides of the road, eventually reaching the forest line and the Machame Gate, the starting point of the expedition.

The gate itself was abuzz with activity, with 50-60 hikers and at least 150 porters making final preparations before setting off up the mountain. Of the many routes up the mountain they had selected the Machame Route, known for its scenic beauty and good acclimatisation opportunities. The plan was to complete the hike within 7 days, including at least two days at high-altitude, for acclimatisation, before attempting the final summit push.

With the porters carrying the heavy hiking packs, they carried a smaller day-pack, containing at least 3 litres of water, some light snacks, emergency clothing including Derek's large heavy camera which he intended to use to document the trip. The pack weighed 8 - 9 kg which was heavy enough to give a decent workout on the uphill sections. Preparations complete, including signing the big register book at the gate they set off up the path, the porters having already gone ahead. The adventure had officially begun!

From the gate, they entered the second climatic region, namely the Rainforest zone.

This zone is comprised of dense, lush Montane forest which forms a thick band around the mountain between the elevations of 1800 m to 2800m. Receiving up to 2 m of rain per year, the forest is often shrouded in a thick layer of mist, and this day was no exception. Large Camphorwood, Wild-fig and Yellowwood trees, draped in *Old Man's Beard* lichen towered above as they walked; while ferns, orchids and the vivid red flowers of the endemic "Impatiens Kimimanjari" filled out the undergrowth.

When enthusiasm or clumsiness resulted in slipping and flailing, the guide would remind them to keep a slow and steady pace by quietly repeating the phrase "Pole Pole", which means "Slowly Slowly". We would hear this phrase repeated a 1000 times over the next few days - good advice indeed.

After a few hours of steady climbing, the rainforest thinned and they emerged out into a pocket of sunlight, with the peak still shrouded above them. They ascended onto a rocky plateau just above the forest line, revealing a large collection of tents.

At Camp Machame, 2900 m high, they walked over to their pitched tents where they were offered hot water for washing and tea and coffee, served in a separate dining tent next door. They then heard the clanging of pots and pans in the kitchen tent. After a hearty meal and some animated chatter, they retired to the tents encouraged by the progress made and looking forward to what lay ahead.

Day 2: Machame Camp to Shira Camp (2980-3840 m)

After a hot breakfast early next morning, they shouldered their packs and set off up the path once more, hoping that to catch a glimpse of the great mountain as the day progressed.

At 5985 m in height and up to 40 km in diameter, Kilimanjaro comfortably lays claim to the title of the world's largest free-standing mountain. Standing at the base of the mountain and looking up is equivalent to standing in the city bowl of Cape Town and gazing up at five Table Mountains stacked on top of one another.

Kilimanjaro is taller than all the mountains of Europe, Oceania, Australia and Antarctica and is only a couple hundred metres shy of North America's highest peak: Mount McKinley. What makes it particularly special, though, is the fact that it is one of the few peaks of its size that doesn't require specialised equipment to climb.



Provided you are fit enough and can handle the altitude, climbing the mountain is simply a matter of putting one foot in front of the other and you will eventually reach the summit: no ropes, scrambling, rock-climbing or icepicks required. The deceptive simplicity of the climb attracts tens of thousands of hikers to the mountain each year that not only place strain on the mountain's fragile eco-system, but also on the medical teams which have to service the many sick, tired or injured hikers. On average, the mountain claims the lives of between 5 -10 people per year, but many more are evacuated on foot, by stretcher or by helicopter. Their route had an overall success rate of around 75%, and, considering that there were four of them on this hike, they would have to defy the stats to finish.

Due to its steep incline and large elevation gain, this second day was touted to be one of the toughest of the entire hike, but they made steady progress all morning up the long rocky ridge that lay between them and the next camp.

Having left the rainforest the next climatic zone was the Heath and Moorland zone, sitting between 2800 m and 3400 m. The vegetation comprised of woodland transitioning slowly into shorter and hardier heathland shrubs. The mountain is a botanist's dream, with many changes in the surrounding flora. Owl Skelton, a botanist himself, usually disappeared shortly after breakfast only to re-emerge around dinner time, looking thoroughly pleased with himself.

After a few hours of climbing, they reached the Shira Plateau, the location of the next camp. Kilimanjaro is made up of three separate volcanic cones, namely Shira, Mawenzi and, the largest central cone, Kibo. Shira and Mawenzi are long extinct whilst Kibo is considered to be dormant, with the most recent eruption around 360 000 years ago. The mountain is surprisingly young, having risen up from the floor of the rift valley within only the last 750 000 years, a mere blink of the eye in geological terms. In the case of Shira, where they now stood, the cone had long since collapsed back in on itself, leaving behind a large plateau on which was perched the second camp.

Around the dinner table, one of the guides, Malek, discussed the various disputed derivations of the name Kilimanjaro, along with some of its early history.

Europeans are first purported to have laid eyes on the mountain back in the 1848, when German missionary Johannes Rebmann ventured into the interior on an exploratory mission from Mombasa. He came back and reported, to the disbelief of many in Europe, that they had discovered a snow-capped mountain in the interior of Africa, not far from the equator. Many established scientists of the time rubbished the claims, and it was some years before he was finally vindicated.

The Shira Plateau sat at a frosty 3840 m and as the sun set over the shrouded peaks above, the bite in the air threatened to verify Rebmann's claims, of snow in central Africa.

Day 3: Shira Camp to Barranco Camp (3840 m-3950 m)

On the third day, the mists had cleared, and, for the first time, there was a decent view of the mountain which they had been climbing for two days.

It was a sobering experience as Kibo, the main rock and ice-clad volcanic cone, towered more than two kilometres above, the top still shrouded in icy cloud. The third day was different with the focus shifted to acclimatisation. The plan was to ascend 800 m to a rocky feature called Lava Tower, at 4600 m. and then to descend 700 m to the next camp at the base of the Great Barranco Wall. The objective was to expose them briefly to the higher altitudes to make the final push to the summit easier. It would also allow an assessment of their fitness and the safety of the final push for the summit.

After a good start, the altitude started to catch up, creating headaches which didn't go away. Despite drinking lots of water, the headache remained. However, the symptoms were mild, and they marched on reaching Lava Tower by late morning.



Kibo now rose precipitously above their heads, giving the first glimpses of the snow and glaciers which lined the peak. Below lay a blanket of clouds, stretching out into infinity, broken by the peak of Mount Meru poking through in the distance.

As they were leaving Lava Tower, the clouds gathered overhead and it started to hail. The temperature dropped rapidly and soon they were forced to pull out jackets and raincoats to continue onwards. In the lower half of the valley, there was a wonderful sight as a small forest of weird and wonderful plants came into view.

Kilimanjaro has fascinating botanical gems, including Giant Lobelias and Giant Tree Senecios which can be found in the upper reaches of the Heath and Moorland Zone adapted perfectly to this otherwise cold and inhospitable environment.

A short while later they reached the Barranco camp and gratefully gulped down hot tea and popcorn.

Day 4: Barranco Camp to Barafu Camp (3950 m-4600 m)

From Barranco camp the path was virtually straight up the mountain with no more long stretches of comfortable contouring. Based on their high-altitude performance they were allowed to shorten the hike by one day of acclimatisation. Despite the potential disadvantage higher up the mountain, they felt confident they had what it took to reach the summit.

The longest day of the trip had now begun and, they felt ready for the challenge. The first task was to conquer the impressive Great Barranco Wall. On the way up the wall, the path is quite steep and required the sketchiest bit of climbing of the trip, namely the kissing stone.

At this point, the path narrows significantly, forcing you to hug the mountain as you briefly skirt the cliff face, you are encouraged to give the mountain a little kiss, hence the name. Within an hour they crested the Barranco wall and stood on top taking in the impressive views.

Despite being so high up, Kibo still looked as imposing as ever. The final push was not going to be a walk in the park.

As they climbed, the vegetation thinned out and they entered our next climatic zone, the Alpine Desert Zone, located between 4000-5000 m. In all directions were scattered volcanic rocks of many shapes and sizes, remnants from a previous eruption. Plants and animals were rare, and lichen clung to the rocks in terrain that looked more at home on Mars than on earth.

In the afternoon they arrived at the final high-altitude camp, Barafu, at 4600 m. The last water stop was behind in the valley below, so, from here on out, all water would need to be carried. By this stage, all were starting to feel a little queasy and headachy as the effects of the altitude took hold, and it was difficult to take in much food at supper time.

Day 5: Barafu Camp to the summit, and down to Mweka Camp (4600 m-5985 m-3100 m)

Just before 11pm, their guides roused the group with a cup of coffee. The temperature was well below zero and they dressed up in all their layers before exiting the tents, looking like a pod of nervous Michelin men, as they gathered for the final briefing.

Just two guides and two porters accompanied the group for the climb. One guide set the pace, while the second remained at the back to take care of any stragglers. Around midnight they set off into the darkness, the only light coming from their head torches, shining on the path ahead.

The lead guide set a brisk pace and the climb to the summit was now tedious and uncomfortable hour after hour of endless trudging in complete darkness, while fighting off a combination of fatigue, headaches and nausea.

Above 5000 m they entered the Arctic Zone, the final climatic zone on the mountain. Almost entirely devoid of life, the Arctic zone is characterised by loose scree, dirt, rock, ice and snow.



At night, temperatures can drop to -30, while during the day the sun's UV light cuts through the thin atmosphere like a hot knife through butter. The group found it fascinating to be walking through such a landscape not 200 miles from the equator, a most unlikely scenario.

The air became so thin that one was forced to stop and take an extra deep breath every few paces to keep oxygen levels up. Sandy, despite all initial appearances, was, in fact, an experienced alpine climber and while Rob, Dave and Derek shuffled up the slope, she bounded up, offering encouragement and energy as she went along. The men were grateful to share this experience with such an experienced mountaineer.

The darkness finally subsided, and the faint glow of dawn appeared on the distant horizon. The crater rim was in sight, and they were going to make it just in time for sunrise.

Seven hours after setting off, they emerged onto the narrow crater rim of the Kibo volcano. They were still a couple of kilometres from the top, but the heavy climbing was finally over. It was now a relatively short walk around the crater rim to the highest point of the mountain named Uhuru Peak. Energy levels returned and when the sun poked its head above the horizon, they were treated to one of the most beautiful sunrises they had ever experienced.

Snow and ice stretched out in all directions, cut into jagged shapes by the wind, and the looming walls of glaciers cast shadows across the landscape. It was a truly beautiful vista.

After four and a half days, the little party arrived at Uhuru peak, the highest point in Africa, at 6:21 on the morning of the 29th August. Despite their various colds, headaches, lack of sleep, and dubious fitness levels, they rejoiced in the accomplishment.

After a few blissful moments at the summit, the long journey back down the mountain began, covering 30 km in that day bringing the total distance since the previous night to almost 40 km.

Any exhaustion was overwhelmed by the exhilaration they felt having reached the summit. The following morning at Mweka Gate, the end point of the adventure, they were treated to a final glimpse of the peak before it disappeared behind the clouds once more.

Despite the cold, fatigue and endless hours of trudging, the experience had been well worth it in every respect and, like Hemingway and countless others before, they had finally seen the Snows of Kilimanjaro.



Members' News

2024 is the Club's 130th year; the Club will mark this milestone in some suitable way at the December meeting.

Owls Transport Challenges: a Further Call

Some senior Owls are increasingly reluctant to travel home after an Owl Club meeting, particularly in winter, and so decide not to perch at all. Their company is thus lost to the Parliament.

If you are comfortable travelling homewards after an Owl Club meeting and might be prepared to offer a lift to Owls resident in your vicinity, please let the Secretary bird know, so that you can be put in touch with Owls near you whose absence from their customary perches is attributable to this.

Proposals of Membership

The Committee has received proposals of membership for :

- Helen Boonzaier (proposed Owls Hund & Amooore; Music)
- Babara Hughes (proposed Owls Duff & Peter Sutherland; Music)
- C Leighton Ashmead (proposed Owls Duff & Murray: Art)

And having confirmed that each had dined at the Club twice (in one case more often) and being of the view that each would be a worthy Owl, resolved to Notice them. Any Owl who has information about one or more of them that he or she believes that would be useful to the Committee he or she should contact the President or the Secretary Bird.

Owl David Earl

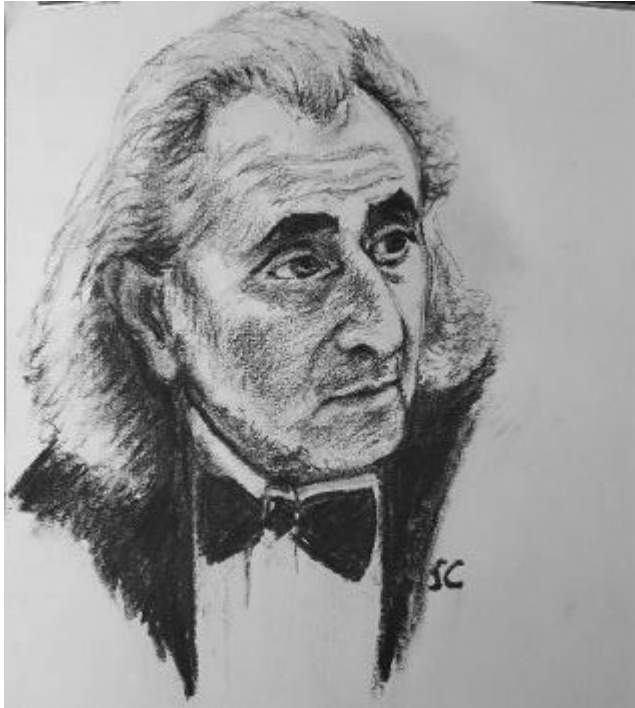
Owl Earl is one of the Club's long-standing members but is seldom seen at meetings as his chosen habitat is in the UK! But he was in Cape Town recently for a performance of his concerto for orchestra and clarinet by the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra on 26 September 2024. Owl Little has contributed the following:

The performance of Owl David Earl's clarinet concerto was notable for several reasons; the soloist was the Maria Tien-du Toit, the South African-born Dutch clarinetist extraordinaire, the conductor was Maria's husband Arjan Tien-du Toit and the composer was present at the rehearsals and performance.

Some 56 years earlier than the performance of his clarinet concerto, Owl David himself gave his debut performance aged 17 with the then Cape Town Symphony Orchestra, playing Felix Mendelssohn's piano concerto No 1 in G minor. He left South Africa to pursue further studies in composition and piano at London's Trinity College of Music, where still as a student he gave the first of a number of piano recitals at the Wigmore Hall which were broadcast live on BBC's Radio 3. Based in the United Kingdom, Owl David is a prolific composer, having composed several concertos, chamber music for various instrumental ensembles, ballet music and operas.



Seen & Noted at the October Meeting



(Clockwise from top left): Owl Leon De Wet. (drawn by Sheila Camerer), new Owl, Isabella Franzen (drawn by Tony Grogan). In the photograph below, Owl Chris Rodseth and Isabell Franzen.



Seen & Noted at the October Meeting



(Clockwise from top left): A parliament of Owls enjoying dining together: Andrew Girdwood, Al Lastovica, Richard Morris, Andrew Wilkinson (guest), John Freeth and Rory Gilmore. In the next photograph, guest speaker Justin Fox and finally, Derek Leisegang delivering his WPB.





The Owl Club
Tuesday 15 October 2024
The 1365th Meeting
President: Owl Ron Duff
Dinner @ 6.45 pm
Grace: Owl Mike Bruton

Dinner:

Toast: South Africa: The Owl President

A break for the tables to be cleared

The 1365th Meeting 7.55 following dinner:

Announcements: The Owl President

Club Flutter

Toast to our guests: The Owl President

Induction: Owl Isabelle Franzen

Talk: Justin Fox: "Ah, But your Land is Beautiful!"

Music: Part 1. Under Paris Skies featuring the Cadillac Trio

Bar Break

Music Part 2

WBP Owl Derek Leisegang My Kilimanjaro Expedition

**Toast: The Owl Club,
and a safe flight home**

The Owl Club
Tuesday, 15th October 2024

Starter

Mushroom soup

Main Course

Grilled sirloin steak

Served with new potatoes, seasonal vegetables and mushroom sauce

Dessert

Berry cheesecake

Filter Coffee

Grant us the grace to grow deeper in our respect for the Earth and all its bounty and the wisdom to sow the seeds of a new life for future generations.

Empower us to be the stewards of life so that we protect the world and not prey on it, that we sow beauty and not pollution and destruction.

Help us turn from the selfish consumption of resources meant for all and to acknowledge the impacts of our choices on the poor and vulnerable. Open our eyes to the wrongs we have done so that we can correct them and become instruments of a new, sustainable world.

Mike Bruton.