

AEP Staff and Scholars Conquer Mount Longonot

August 2004

AEP Kenya staff members and scholars took on Mount Longonot on Saturday, August 28, 2004. The trip was one of AEP's group scholars activities designed to foster teamwork and build character.

Mount Longonot National Park is located in the Great Rift Valley in the Naivasha Basin, approximately 56 miles (90 kilometres) from Nairobi. It is a young volcano that rises 9,120 feet (2,789 meters) above sea level. The name "Longonot" is derived from a Maasai word "Oloongonot" which means "mountain of many spurs or many ridges."



Mount Longonot in the distance.

The day began bright and early with an 8:00 AM meeting time (7:00 AM for AEP staff). The group was upbeat and excited about the day's adventure that lay ahead. Five of the six AEP Annie L. Jeter Scholars, all AEP Africa staff and several AEP volunteers accepted the challenge to climb Mount Longonot. The group totalled eleven in all.

The group boarded a "matatu," a minibus used in Kenya for public transportation, and began their journey to the mountain. The ride to Mount Longonot took the group out of the fast urban life of Nairobi and into the tranquil Great Rift Valley with its many



The road from Nairobi to Mount Longonot.

escarpments and valleys. The view along the way was absolutely breathtaking. The tarmac road wended up and down and through the mountains until the group finally arrived at the foot of Mount Longonot. The group stood ready to conquer the imposing mountain. For most of the group, including all the AEP scholars, it was the first time they had ever seen Mount Longonot. The group eagerly began their mission with great fervour.

Within a short time, there were small bands forming within the group with the strongest leading the way at the front and the less strong, perhaps unfit, ones lagging at the back. After about forty-five minutes the group was refreshed as they came upon the first crater.



A crater at Mount Longonot.

The group was in awe as they walked around the narrow edges of the deep crater. Smoke rose from the sides giving a constant reminder that the volcano is still alive. The natural reactions that produced the heat caused the rocks along the crater to turn black. One member of the group admitted having butterflies as they peered over the edges of the crater.

Still, the top of the mountain stood above them in the distance. The group continued their quest to the top. Fatigue was obvious as the frequency of needed "time-out" recuperation breaks was increasing. But the sight of the top, which seemed so close, yet so far, gave the group the energy to persevere.



Almost there. The AEP group on their way to the top.

Three and a half hours later from the time they began the team was at the peak. The group felt on top of the world. They had never felt so close to the sky as at that moment. The group danced, sang, and jumped up and down at their victory.

The rest was easy. After resting at the top and properly celebrating their feat, the group began their descent. The group was rewarded with the sight of a magnificent Kenyan sunset. They stopped to appreciate the immense beauty of their country, simply gazing at creation at its best.

According to William Siwa, AEP Program Assistant, "The trip was the best thing that could have happened to AEP. A bond was created. The friendships went deeper. The AEP staff felt so close to the students. Eyes were opened, lessons were learned and a sense of gratitude was built, not just amongst the students but also for the staff."

All the students thoroughly enjoyed the trip and expressed that they would like to participate in similar trips more often. But they also admitted that they had been stretched to their limits by the mountain. This was exactly the point, according to Kat Simon-Agolory, AEP Executive Director. "We want our young people to liken their Mount Longonot experience and other AEP activities to their lives. Just like they conquered the test of the mountain, they can also conquer other challenges in their lives whether it's academics or other personal challenges. The Mount Longonot feat was immense but each one was victorious. And as such, we challenge our scholars to live victorious lives."

As the group climbed on a matatu to return to Nairobi, they were a sight to the other passengers with their dirty clothes and happy faces. The group was absolutely exhausted but satisfied at their wonderful accomplishment.



The great mountaineers at rest.