

I headed for Kenya in July to take part in “an adventure for a cause”. The cause is raising critical funds to support a program serving the needs of 400 AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children. The adventure was the Proper Walk 2012 – a long, long trek in the northern Kenya bush. This is my account:

The Proper Walk 2012 is completed in grand style! 151 miles over 10 days over rough terrain, up and down steep hills, fording flooding rivers, stumbling through volcanic rock fields, and ultimately reaching Lake Turkana -the Jade Sea!

The adventure began with a visit to the Makindu Children’s Center and a celebration of the children, the guardians, the staff, the Walkers and supporters back in the U.S. Many thanks were offered for the support of the donors back in America and for the hope, or *tumani*, the children have through the Center. There were many speeches, songs and dances. Little preschool-ers of the Winnie Academy recited the alphabet in English and Swahili. A young teen spoke passionately of the power of having a dream – to be a teacher, a doctor or a pilot. All the Walkers got to dance with the guardian mothers to the syncopated toots of a silver whistle and a plastic bucket drum. It all wrapped up with a feast of goat and rice and stewed veggies. A long satisfying day for all. (For all of the Walkers the memories of the time with the kids served as a boost during the more difficult days of the Proper Walk.)

The Children’s Center was co-founded by Winnie Barron or Brownsville Oregon. The result of community involvement the Center is an orphanage but a program to place children with guardian families - a model of “it takes a village to raise a child”. The Center has evolved to be completely Kenyan – board and program staff. By providing medical assistance, nutritious meals, education and family, MCP is giving the children hope for a better future.

### **The Proper Walk**

The rain poured the first five nights leaving us with wet tents to pack and damp socks to walk in. The clouds did give some protection from the hot sun most of each morning. The first day, after starting just south of Seguta Mar Mar, we waded across the Seiya River- swollen by the unusual rains. A squishy day walking in wet boots. The second day, after another river crossing, we started to climb uphill into the Lermerogi Mountains. The countryside was green and lush with many fertile looking small farms. Ragged looking, but smiling children stared and tried out their little English – “how are you? how are you?”. We eventually hiked up into the remainder of the mountain forest, a few grand cedar and cypress trees left, the rest long ago cut for lumber and firewood. We camped near 8200 ft altitude at the

end of day three, a 2500 ft elevation gain. The 18+ mile day even left the 22 camels pooped. We started down the north side of the mountains the next day to “Tortoise Camp” – so named for the huge land tortoise we discovered in the bushes close by our tents. He disappeared into the bush while we weren’t looking. Slow, but stealthy.

Two more days of challenging uphill and downhill trekking, through small villages, encountering armed tribal patrols (the Turkana, Samburu and Pokot vie for grazing land in an area of floating boundaries).

We celebrated my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday that night under a full moon. Kimau, the camel jockey-cook, created a birthday cake of sorts over the campfire; wood matches served well as candles. The camel guys tried out their new birthday kazoos. A little singing and dancing followed. The cake was very sweet in many ways. Hyena whooped in the dark distance - but close enough.

By day six we were out of the rain and just above the flatlands and looking out to the El Barta Plains. We hiked for most of a day in a lugga – a dry river bed – Naklyes River – to avoid the town of Baragoi; fairly easy going though the loose sand got to be a bit tiresome. We met many colorful Samburu digging makeshift shallow wells in the riverbed. By now we were down to 4200 ft though more ups and downs were ahead.

We headed for the Turkana village of Kowop to water the camels at their borehole well (funded by Starbucks Foundation according to the sign). We noticed that as the townsfolk came out to check us out that all the goats in the village were baby goats. It turned out that a group of Samburu warriors, armed with AK-47s, had taken all the adult goats by force the day before. Serious business. We left the camels and the camel guys to tend to watering while we walked on. Not far on we passed a group of Turkana men, armed with AK-47s and very grim looks. The camel wranglers told us later that just before they hit the trail again, all the adult goats returned, herded by another group of armed Turkana. And so it goes.

The ninth day was a long hot slog over volcanic rock strewn terrain, up and down hill again as we skirted the Nriyo Mountains to Parkoti where we camped near the little town. The Turkana villagers came out nicely decked out and danced for us; we danced too in spite of our tired, sore feet. A feast of very fresh lamb rounded out a very long day. (We could hear the people of Parkoti partying until 2 am!)

The final day we started well before sunrise and walked through the sleeping village by moonlight. Quite a unique, almost eerie, and memorable experience. Again we hiked through the energy-sucking heat; more up and down; even more rocks. There were rough volcanic rocks every step of the way – small, medium and large. They exacted a toll on a couple Walkers with several stumbles turning into spills and hard landings. As the day stretched on, we began to wonder if we would make it to Lake Turkana and some got used to the idea of seeing the promised-land without reaching it. But Amanda Parritt, our Kenyan leader/guide and owner of the camels, managed to distort the remaining distance into something less than reality and we bought it. There were some mighty determined faces (humans and camels) those last six hot rocky (did I mention the rocks?) miles.

Then at long last we arrived at Lake Turkana, home of 300 lbs Nile perch and 20 foot Nile crocs. (1240ft above sea level) We splashed and floated in the warm, salty water and sipped tepid Tusker's beer with the satisfaction of a tough journey completed and our donors' generous support for the children secured.

Walkers have the rest of the year to reach the \$100,000 goal; contributions now total \$84,000.

Visit [www.makindu.org](http://www.makindu.org) and [www.properwalk.com](http://www.properwalk.com)

Epilogue: The camel guys had to walk with the camels back to Amanda's family ranch, about 180 miles. Along the way they were attacked by lions and one camel was killed. After returning to the U.S., one Walker ended up spending a week in the hospital with African tick fever. Proper Walks are supposed to have an element of danger....