

SOUTH AFRICA
Between Highest Peaks
December 2009
By Karen Hauptfleisch

SUNRISE ON AFRICA'S PEAKS (SOAP): After Zambia it seemed to take forever to get going again on my mission to reach the highest point in every African country. I went for some fantastic hikes in the Drakensberg, but I was restless, and plan after plan to go to Angola fell through.

SUNRISE ON AFRICA'S PEAKS kidz (SOAPkidz): During October 2003, I attended a life purpose course in the Magaliesberg. I had visions of bleeding mountains – whilst the rest of the group had visions of building orphanages. I got on stage and informed them that they should hurry up and build their orphanages – and that I would come and take their children on nature outings to go and clean our mountains. In April 2005, I took the first group of children from the Abraham Kriel Children's home in Langlaagte on a hike. Since then, I have registered SOAPkidz as a Non-Profit organisation and have taken out more than 11 000 children during more than 100 events.

CAMELMEN: Travelling together in Africa is a good test for a relationship. After the 5th Roadblock in Zambia, Camelman II and myself, decided to finally end the three year relationship. Camelman III entered my life not long after the epic Zambia trip.

MY LIFE: Almost every aspect of my life was spiralling out of control.

- My working conditions has changed dramatically, with new management and other challenges
- The past two years' hard work on trying to make SOAPkidz sustainable was not bearing any fruit. I have become obsessed with SOAPkidz, and mistakenly thought that by working harder, I could make things better. I was busy arranging event after event.
- I was killing Camelman III with my demands. I would start talking SOAPkidz at 05h00 and in the evening, having a bottle or two of wine, I would continue.
- My family barely saw me – I was, after all, trying to save the vulnerable kids in Africa.
- My planned Angolan trip was met by one obstacle after another and last but not least,
- Adventure B was going nowhere: A dear friend and I have been planning this three month adventure for years, and I was hoping to finally do it in 2010. He was, however, unable to give me a definite answer on his availability and I was stuck without him.

I made a decision, If not Angola or Adventure B, why not Morocco? It would be a piece of cake. I invited Camelman III with, and he immediately bought some travel books. He wanted to do the Camino in Spain as well. My heart was more set on fitting in another African country, but he was adamant.

Two weeks later, Alan arrived in South Africa with some great plans for a West African trip. How many countries, I asked over a bottle or two of wine. "At least ten, maybe sixteen, if all went well", he replied.

The next morning, I informed Camelman III that I was off to West Africa in February for two months. Morocco will have to wait. It was an opportunity of a lifetime. I also informed my Adventure B friend that I have made a choice: I was going to West Africa for two months instead. It was one thing I was "certain" of and I only had to rely on myself.

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks - South Africa

Everything that could go wrong did go wrong.

- I spend Christmas on my own, washing and separating thousands of used bottle tops for SOAPkidz instead of hiking with Camelman III. He was not a happy man. I was not a happy woman.
- Alan experienced problems with his passport and had to return to Australia. We had to postpone the trip twice.
- Because of the world cup soccer being held in South Africa, no tickets were available in June, and the planned two month trip became a three month trip
- I worked 24/7 trying to arrange all the SOAPkidz events that would take place whilst I explore West Africa's mountains.
- At work, it was a nightmare to get my manager to sign my leave forms – especially since I kept on changing the dates.

A day before the trip:

- My family decided to come and visit. So much for a last romantic evening with Camelman III!
- There was a power failure – resulting in further chaos. No electric gate and the last minute packing had to be done by candle light – where I discovered that my sleeping bag's zip was broken. In between, food for everyone had to be arranged.
- My sister kept on taking pictures of me with every member of my family – saying it could be the last picture of me with the family.

D-Day:

- I finally got into bed at 03h00.
- I managed to give Camelman III a quick kiss before he left for work.
- I received a call from my new manager, and after shouting at her, I raced to work – to sort out some paperwork – before racing off to Johannesburg – to pick up a satellite phone – something my son insisted on me taking the previous evening, whilst I send my Dad to buy a new sleeping bag.
- When we finally arrived at the airport, I was close to a nervous breakdown. Alan's grumpiness about me taking a satellite phone and other valuables with, did not help.
- After shouting at my new manager, I was unsure if I would have a job when I returned.
- I was unsure if Camelman III would be waiting for me
- I was unsure of SOAPkidz and where everything was going
- I was unsure about the three month trip – and how safe it was going to be.

I thought all my problems would be solved once I got on the plane.