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IS KILIMANJARO DYING? NOVA CLIMBS AFRICA'S HIGHEST PEAK TO SOLVE THE MYSTERIES OF ITS VOLCANIC DESTINY AND DISAPPEARING GLACIERS

NOVA PRESENTS *VOLCANO ABOVE THE CLOUDS*

Tuesday, November 25, 2003, at 8PM ET on PBS

www.pbs.org/nova/kilimanjaro

In 1980 Mount St. Helens in Washington State suffered a catastrophic landslide that released seething volcanic gases and rock fragments in a cataclysm that destroyed hundreds of square miles of forest. Could Africa's fabled Mount Kilimanjaro be heading for the same fate? NOVA accompanies an expedition up Kilimanjaro to learn what the future holds for the world's tallest volcano, on *Volcano Above the Clouds*, airing Tuesday, November 25, 2003, at 8PM ET on PBS (check local listings).

An added mystery is why Kilimanjaro's distinctive summit glaciers are shrinking. Expected to disappear totally by 2015, the vanishing ice has been cited as an icon of global warming. But could there be another explanation?

The roster for the ambitious climb is as unique as the mountain itself and includes African-born naturalist Robin Buxton, an expert on the ecology of Kilimanjaro who has been permanently disabled from polio since age two and whose first effort to summit Kilimanjaro borders on the heroic. Also on the expedition are German geologist Volker Lorenz, a world authority on volcanoes; British geologist and team leader Kevin Docherty; and Tanzanian park ranger and naturalist Michael Ngatolowa.

Like most Africans who live in the shadow of Africa's highest peak, Ngatolowa has never had access to the expensive equipment needed to make the arduous trek to Kilimanjaro's 19,340-foot summit. His personal goal: to see snow, a substance that he has only glimpsed from afar and that clings like perpetual clouds to the mountain's lofty top.

Towering high above the Masai Steppe just a few degrees south of the equator, Kilimanjaro was created by the eruption of three separate volcanoes that formed from three hundred thousand to eight hundred thousand years ago.

Though considered long dormant, Kilimanjaro shows evidence that it is ripe for a Mount St. Helens-style explosion, an event that would be devastating to those who farm the region surrounding the mountain, where a distinctive style of agriculture called tree gardening is practiced. The technique uses the shade of larger trees to protect crops such as coffee and bananas from the hot equatorial sun.

While geologists Lorenz and Docherty are focused on Kilimanjaro's slumbering volcanic forces, naturalists Buxton and Ngatolowa investigate the source of Kilimanjaro's vital water supply. Are the mountain's melting glaciers a significant factor in nourishing crops? And when the glaciers are gone, how will agriculture be affected?

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These projected dual calamities—volcanic eruption and disappearing water—are the reasons Kilimanjaro is sometimes said to be dying. It's an apocalypse that's hard to picture during the spectacular climb up the mountain, which reveals a succession of different biomes—from village to rain forest to cloud forest to alpine to arctic, all of which host an amazing variety of plant and animal life.

And in the thin air at the top is an eerie moonscape, spotted with smoking volcanic fumaroles, slowly melting 100-foot-high glaciers, and, most amazing of all for one team member, snow.

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