

Aspen Daily News

Locals to climb Mount Kilimanjaro for rhinos

by [Dorothy Atkins](#), Aspen Daily News Staff Writer
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As most locals spend today eating food and giving thanks, seven women from Aspen are on their way to undertake a nine-day climb to Africa's highest peak in an effort to protect rhinos.



From left to right: Whitney Justice, Taylor Justice, Ginna Kelly, Julienne Stroeve, Fallon Feast, Tara Sheahan, Cathy Cooper, Margot Moselle and Leilani Munter. The group is on their way to Africa to raise money for rhinos by hiking Mount Kilimanjaro.

The locals are part of a group of 14 women from across the country who are climbing Mount Kilimanjaro on behalf of the nonprofit called Climb for Conservation. The Aspenites will begin their ascent to the mountain's 19,341-foot peak on Saturday.

The climb is the result of years of planning, said Ginna Kelly, the vice president of Aspen's American Renewable Energy Day (AREDay), who is self-dubbed Aspen's "green girl," and is the founder of Climb for Conservation.

“Three years ago, I made it one of my goals to hike Kilimanjaro,” Kelly said. “Either by myself or with my friends because ultimately the environment is what I really believe in.”

Kelly began spreading the word out about her climb and attracted interest from a dynamic group of women including a scientist, a television producer, an artist and a high school student, she said.

The group chose the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary, located just outside of the Kilimanjaro National Park in Tanzania, as the benefactor for their fundraising efforts, Kelly said. The goal was for each participant to raise \$10,000, and after hosting four fundraisers in the past three years, a few of the girls actually met it, she said.

Kelly also recruited the help of Mariel Hemingway, actor, activist and granddaughter of Ernest Hemingway. She originally planned on making the trip with the group, but she had to drop out due to a scheduling conflict, Kelly said.

The sanctuary is run by renowned conservationists Tony and Lucy Fitzjohn and focuses on protecting the black rhino population in Tanzania from poachers who go after the animals’ horns.

In general, rhinos tend not to get the same support that other endangered animals receive, so they can use the extra help from conservationists, Kelly said.

“Rhinos just aren’t as cute and cuddly,” she said.

Hopefully money raised for the climb will be enough to provide better resources to the sanctuary to keep poachers out of the area, Kelly said.

Kelly said she hopes for the Kilimanjaro climb to be the first of many the nonprofit organizes. Whether it’s just one person climbing or a large group, the idea is for people to start doing climbs in honor of a conservation effort of their choice, she said.

“This is the first one,” Kelly said. “Ultimately we hope to have hundreds.”

The conservation group has at least two other climbs planned for the upcoming years, including a hike through the ruins of Peru’s Machu Picchu in 2013 and a trek to Mount Everest’s base camp in 2014.

To donate to the effort visit the organization’s website at climbforconservation.org.

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