

NDOTO LOGISTICS

Advice to climbers headed for the Ngurunit Valley and beyond.

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The Ndotos as seen from half way up Doing a Dirty Eastern Groove on Mt. Poi. There are a few cliffs of 400 meters in the background that are unclimbed; many of the crags are hidden behind the central mass of hills. *Felix Berg*

The major cliffs vary in their distance from the village of Ngurunit. This is important because Ngurunit provides your supply of food and water. The closest cliff is about a two-hour walk from the village and the furthest (Baio) is about 20km from town. The essential problem here is this: It is a hard walk to the base of any cliff (a few hot hours with no trails), so carrying gear up to your base camp is already a struggle. Carrying all the water and food you need for an expedition would be a monumental task, and I don't know where you would find so many water containers. So you are left with needing porters to come to your camp every few days with fresh water. The closer you are to Ngurunit, the easier getting food and water will be.

GEAR STORAGE

You can find someone with whom to leave gear in Ngurunit. Make a list of what you are leaving and be prepared to pay for the storage. Small but useful things like cutlery, lighters, and torches are likely to go missing, so you had best hang on to those. Be prepared to have all of your porters and all the people you meet asking you to give them your gear (especially camping gear and climbing ropes) as gifts. These people do not have much money and they can't believe how comparatively wealthy we are. This situation has been compounded by many of the foreign expeditions paying the porters very high rates and giving them all their sponsored gear at the expedition's end.

ORGANIZING FOOD, WATER AND PORTERS

When you get there you will need to make contact with a person who speaks both English and the local languages (Samburu and Rendil-e). He will be your middleman for organizing food, water, and porters. Treat this man well for he holds the keys to your pleasure and pain. I recommend Petro Lakada from Siangan village. He was a reliable man for us, and is also a very good cook. I paid him 1,50 Kenyan shillings (\$2) a day for his translation and organizational services. The standard price for a porter in Kenya is about 600 to 800 shillings (\$8-\$10) for a full day's work. You will also want to employ a guide to show you any secret paths that might get you to the base of the cliffs. This man should be paid slightly less, unless he is carrying luggage for you. Water should be free (you just need to pay its transportation) and food is very cheap. 2,000-3,000 shillings (\$25-\$40) for a goat.

The hardest thing about these expeditions is the interaction with the people you employ. If you do not make written agreements with them before you start it is very likely that they will ask for more money at the end. They will expect a tip when your expedition is finished. This is reasonable, but make sure that all of your terms are clear before you start. I found that women made the best porters. They complain much less than the men, and are by far the tougher sex. The men will tell you that the bags are too heavy, and that their bodies hurt, and that they need water and food, etc, etc, but the women will do their job and that is it.

You may well be charged for camping or leaving your car in a village. The going rate for camping in Siangan in 2003 was 250 shillings (\$3) per person per night. People live by barter in Kenya, so expect all prices asked to be about double what they are worth. The average Kenyan makes much less than 700 shillings (\$9) per day; as cheap as this sounds by Western standards, be aware that you are actually paying them very well.

OF LOCALS AND CLIMBERS

The locals are okay climbers if we are polite to them. They like us because we bring a high income to their area and we are something of a curiosity. Be careful with scaring their livestock or walking through private compounds. Most of the people in the area are really friendly and very curious about foreigners. You will get a thousand offers for assistance. Unfortunately, on the drive to Ngurunit you may cross bandits and gunmen. Travel in a convoy of a few cars. Don't make visible fires while on the roadside at night, and if someone does hold you up be very polite and compliant.