Left & previous pages: Kevin Benstead

Four in the morning: a late start for climbing a mountain as high as Kilimanjaro. My head throbbed and the desire to vomit spoiled any urge to eat breakfast. I thought of the long scree slope ahead of us. Our ride to the crater rim would be extra challenging, given Steve's limited sight and my own inability to walk.

Steve Bate and I are long-time friends and Paralympic cycle teammates. We had shared years on the medal-chasing treadmill and both won Paralympic golds. But at times we had lost connection with things that really mattered to us. Wild places. Perspective. Adventure.

We had taken one big trip together after the Rio 2016 Paralympics, cycling the rough trail of the Carretera Austral, 1,200km through Patagonian wilderness. It was a post-Paralympic depression

KAREN DARKE

Karen is a Paralympic gold medallist, adventurer, coach and author. She has also handcycled across the Himalaya and the Tibetan plateau

antidote. Now, perhaps, we were both seeking another remedy of sorts. Steve was attempting to mountain bike up Kilimanjaro and I was trying to do it on a hand-cranked trike.

MOUNTAIN CYCLING

The first people to reach the summit of Kilimanjaro on mountain bikes were the Crane cousins in 1985. If I had researched more thoroughly, I may have found this Cycling UK forum comment: "Saracen sponsored Nick (yes, him off the telly) and Dick Crane to ride (more like carry) some Saracen MTBs up Kilimanjaro in the '80s…" And I'd have focused on the world 'carry'.

My optimism came from the knowledge that various paraplegics had summited the mountain. In 2009, American Chris Waddell became the first paraplegic man to reach the top of Kilimanjaro on a handcycle. The same ▶

The vast volcanic cone of Kili was clear of cloud, high above and luring us onward

Previous pages: The whole team taking a break. Given the high altitude, progress needed to be slow and steady
Above: Fat-bike tyres and huge ground clearance enabled Karen to keep riding over extreme terrain