



# Carstensz

# Pyramid 2009



Descending the fixed ropes © digilbert





*"Tomorrow we enter a different world" Jimmy to Di speaking about flying to Sugapa*

### Introduction

I was working for UK based company, Adventure Peaks, as their Expedition Leader for their September Carstensz Pyramid Expedition 2009.

We were a 5 person team: Peter Ellis, Dave Woodman, Stu Long & John Bates & myself. We would be accompanied by local guide 'Jimmy'.

### Actual Itinerary

Day 1: UK – Dubai – Jakarta  
Day 2: UK – Dubai – Jakarta  
Day 3: Jakarta – Makassar (South Sulawesi) – Biak (Supiori) – Nabire (West Papua)  
Day 4: Nabire  
Day 5: Aborted flight Nabire - Sugapa  
Day 6: Nabire - Sugapa  
Day 7: Sugapa (1993m)  
Day 8: Sugapa – Enarotali - Nabire  
Day 9: Nabire – Staging Zone 81 – CP Base Camp (4151m)  
Day 10: Base Camp - Acclimatisation  
Day 11: Summit  
Day 12: CP Base Camp – Staging Zone 81 – Nabire - Biak  
Day 13: Biak – Makassar - Jakarta  
Day 14: Jakarta  
Day 15: Jakarta  
Day 16: Jakarta  
Day 17: Jakarta – Dubai – UK  
Day 18: Jakarta – Dubai – UK



Note: all heights were taken using my GPS.

International flights were arranged with Emirates and domestic flights arranged through various smaller airlines.



### Accommodation & Food:

As a general rule, the further you travel away from Jakarta the accommodation gets more and more basic. Our final hotel in Nabire – the best in the town – was clean, tidy and had plenty of mosquito's to keep you entertained in the evening. The staff were friendly and the beds were comfortable. Our accommodation in Sugapa had a 'bring your own mattress' policy, a toilet which came with a very big public health warning sign and there was no running water.

There is a supermarket in Nabire which has basic supplies. There are street sellers around after dark who sell lychee's, things that look like new jersey royal spuds but taste like bitter lychee's and that really stinky fruit which apparently tastes nice (it doesn't!).

There is a nice restaurant on the seafront that has a good menu of rice, chicken, vegetable and fish dishes.

We were in-country during Ramadan so alcohol was off the menu – unless you knew where to look.

It was ridiculously hot from Jakarta to Nabire – wouldn't like to guess but hot enough to be constantly sweating at 0800.

### Flights:

Carstensen Pyramid is all about flying and airports. We actually only had one aborted turn around when trying to fly to Sugapa. They do not have any way of getting weather on route so often take a gamble that the weather will be good enough over the mountains.

### Local Tribesman:

If you fly into Sugapa, you will be met by members of the 3 tribes – the Dani, the Mani and one other. Negotiations are complex and time consuming and require talks between the leaders of the tribes, the police and the local government. Negotiations are normally concluded through the local government (who distribute money evenly to the 3 communities) but these unfortunately do not have any control over the various separatist movements. Unlike David Hamilton who was lucky and managed to trek in from Sugapa no less than 2 weeks previously, we were not so lucky with separatists demanding outrageous amounts of money.

We were unfortunately enough not to experience the Dani tribe and the culture that goes hand in hand with it. With trekking now not an option, we opted for the only other method of travel into base camp – helicopter.



### Mining:

This is the one issue that creates all the problems for Carstensz. Grasberg (also known as Freeport) mine is the world's biggest Gold mine – taking in apparently over 100kg per week. The interesting thing is that the Gold is the cream since the mine is also the third largest copper mine in the world. The local tribesmen do not comprehend that climbers are not interesting in their gold – just the mountain.

According to the Jakarta Globe, since “mid July, ambushes near the gold mine have left three dead... and more than a dozen wounded.” You only have to google Freeport mine to see the issues associated with this mine.

### Helicopters:

We chartered 2 x Bell 212 helicopters. One would carry fuel so that we could refuel half way to base camp at a place called Staging Zone 81. The Bell's have a ridiculously low payload – a mere 280kg.

### The Mountain:

When we arrived at Base Camp there was evidence of rubbish left by previous expeditions. We managed to burn a lot of rubbish and removed the majority of the left over's.



before



after



Grasberg Mine © digilbert





There are no maps as such for Carstensz and only general tourist maps for Indonesia.

However, route finding is no concern. There is a good track (with cairns) leaving Base Camp to the start of the climb which is very well equipped with fixed ropes all the way to the summit.

Roughly 1.5 km from Base Camp to the start of the climb at 4338m – approx 1 hour mellow walking.

We departed on summit day at 0200 and were soon on the fixed ropes. Generally, all the ropes and anchors were good with the rope showing the route. When the rope wasn't in place, the route was easily identified by the worn track and random cairns.

I reckon this route is mainly Alpine Grade II with a short steep slab at III and a little steep wall just before you gain the West Ridge which boasts very good holds. After you hit the Ridge, turn left and after 10 minutes you'll reach the first gap – this is pre-equipped with about 4 ropes for a tyrolean traverse (10m). Once over this, you quickly reach the 2<sup>nd</sup> gap which is a short down climb (3m) and step over and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> gap (2m down climb and 'dry hump' or as the French would call it 'au cheval' the boulder). The difficulties end here and fast progress leads to the summit. We took 5.5 hours to ascend in perfect conditions.

We returned the same route – 5 hours with lots of stops admiring the views. Looking at my World Mountaineering book, they gave the Original Route on the North Face 800m at AD standard.

This route can easily be climbed in wet weather but I could imagine the water pouring down the obvious watercourses not being very pleasant ☺

#### General Logistics:

Carstensz is a very hard mountain to climb but not because of the climb itself. You need to come prepared for lots of sitting at airports, travelling and watching the world go by. Take some good books, an idod and a deck of cards. This truly is a unique experience when plans change constantly and your attempts to second guess the next move is always wrong. To be honest, I wouldn't like to organise this expedition without the support and infrastructure of a major expedition company. No surprise here, but I would recommend [www.adventurepeaks.com](http://www.adventurepeaks.com) who have a 100% success rate for Carstensz Pyramid.

### Equipment:

I used the Adventure Peaks equipment list as a guideline. With our limit on baggage we had to go fairly lightweight which wasn't a big issue.

Generally equipment is straight forward – just pack for an alpine day at AD standard (less the nuts & cams) + a jumar + camping equipment for a few days (depending on how long you have at Base Camp).

There would be numerous days to do from base camp to explore nearby peaks and summits. The second highest peak (?) has a small glacier on it.

### Thanks:

Thanks to Dave Pritt at Adventure Peaks who, once again, came up trumps with another excellent expedition for Di to get her teeth into and David Hamilton who had just returned from the mountain a few days before I left and provided some pearls of wisdom. Most importantly thanks to the guys who provided hours of entertainment and giggles when faced with doom and gloom. I now have more smutty words than I know what to do with them ☺



Summit success © digilbert

Di Gilbert Mountaineering