

Study explores mysteries of Kilimanjaro

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Kilimanjaro is Africa's highest mountain with some intriguing mysteries that are just now being solved after more than 100 years of scientific study.

Andreas Hemp of Germany's Bayreuth University, who has conducted extensive research on Mount Kilimanjaro, says the forests of the Tanzanian mountain are unusual for two reasons. One is that there is no bamboo zone, unlike other East African mountains. Another is that it was thought there were only a few rare plants in the Kilimanjaro forests.

Hemp says the missing bamboo is caused by a lack of elephants, which are needed to create disturbances that encourage bamboo regeneration.

"There are elephants on the dry side of the mountain" says Hemp "but the valleys are too steep and deep for elephants to traverse to the wet side where the bamboo could grow."

He said rare plants were found in forest relicts in the deepest valleys of the cultivated lower areas, suggesting a rich forest flora once covered Mount Kilimanjaro. The plants include a forest tree more than 131 feet high that is new to science.

Hemp details his discoveries in the *African Journal of Ecology*.

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