

Shadow in the Night – My Climb Up Mt. Kilimanjaro – August 2011



I recently had the good fortune to be sent on one of the most exciting adventures of my life – climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro. The Africa Adventure Company is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year (2011); and to commemorate it they have put together a few special trips including this “Kili Climb”. I have always found that when a trip requires more than me just sitting and listening to a guide, I feel like I have gained something more than just knowledge.

When traveling by foot you notice more of your surroundings, such as the sound of winds blowing through the forest to the magnificent vistas normally taken for granted when traveling in a plane or land vehicle.

While I did do a few days of safari beforehand in the beautiful parks/conservation areas of Lake Manyara and Ngorongoro, the focus and highlight of the trip was definitely the multi -day climb. I would recommend a few days of safari before the climb because it allows your body to start adjusting to local time and higher altitudes - like at Ngorongoro Conservation Area that ranges between 4,400 to 11,800 feet.

A few fun facts

Mt. Kilimanjaro is one of the “Seven Summits,” which comprise the tallest mountains on each continent. While Kilimanjaro is the tallest mountain in Africa it also holds the record for the tallest freestanding mountain in the world.

This is not a “technical” climb: no ice axes, crampons or ropes are needed. The most hazardous aspect of climbing is altitude sickness. So while it is one of the “easier” climbs as far as mountaineering goes, it would not be prudent to think that this is an easy stroll in the (national) park. It is a gorgeous walk and with the right preparation and expectations this will be one of those great experiences that will remain forever etched in your mind.

My trip was in early August when the weather is supposed to be colder, but a great time to climb. This is true, but you also learn quickly that the weather is as fickle as today's stock market, and you need to be prepared for whatever comes your way.



There are five or six routes up the mountain and I selected the Rongai Route for my ascent. This is the most remote and one of the “less traveled” ones when compared to the Marangu (aka Coca Cola) or the Machame (aka Whiskey) routes. The least traveled is the Umbwe Route as it is the most difficult and allows the least time for acclimatization. In general the Rongai is a little longer than the other routes, but it is also one of the gentlest ascents of the options available. Acclimatization hikes are a part of this program which allows your body to adjust to the high elevations reached. This is also a very scenic route because you go up the mountain one way, and down another.

Ready, Set, GO!

The day before the climb we stayed at the perfect casual trekker venue - Kilimanjaro Mountain Resort. That first evening, after settling into our rooms and enjoying a nice buffet dinner, we were briefed by our local trip coordinator. We were told how much weight we could bring (33lbs) and were given a hand scale to check the weight of our gear. We were also given maps and an overall briefing of the climb. If any of us had rented gear like sleeping bags, mats, walking poles, etc we also collected at this time.



Later, at the bar, we noticed a group of about 20 people (mostly in their 20s and 30s) celebrating their return from the mountain. Interestingly, it wasn't the wild party atmosphere that you would expect from this demographic, but more of a relief and enjoyment of reliving the stories created on the mountain.

It felt like I was about to go on that really fast and high rollercoaster where everyone waiting in line is slightly nervous but excited, while those getting off have this satisfied and wide grin plastered on their face and a sense of relief.

I did not want to ask anyone about the actual climb as I did not want to have any expectations. However, I did meet a girl from the UK and couldn't help but noticing how her neck and hands were badly peeling from a combination of the intense sun and wind. Note to self: **Don't forget the sunscreen.**

Day One – Nalemuru Gate to Rongai Camp One (aka Simba Camp)

This morning we were met by our coordinator, Ngaya, in the lobby. After storing any extra baggage and getting some Tupperware whose contents would be our lunch later that day we headed to the gate (1.5hr drive) to collect our climbing permit, meet our guides and porters and begin!

Our private group consisted of a motley crew with an age range of 49 years from the youngest to oldest.



L to R: Francis, Trenton, Barry, Florence, Dana, Elia, January, Justice and Ian

Here's the cast of characters (from youngest to oldest):

1. **Trenton** – A 21 year old college student from Kansas University who was obviously in the best shape of all of. He trained by running several times a week, and did a “test run” up Pikes Peak in Colorado (14,115ft)!
2. **Ian** (me) – I am a 32 year old father of two who was ready to temporarily trade the diapers and sippy cups for gaiters and walking sticks.
3. **Francis** – A 35 year old from Canada who was ready to make this climb as a symbolic effort for others in his life. He spent a lot more money on gear for the trip than he originally admitted.

4. **Dana** – A tall 62 year old Texan who sounds a lot like Bill Clinton, is easy going and has the perfect punch-line for any scenario. He packed every gizmo, gadget and supply imaginable.

5. **Barry** – He is a true testament that age isn't anything more than a number. At 70 years old he was the strongest of the group, climbing without headaches or other problems and only took Diamox (altitude sickness medicine) on the last day as a "precaution".



We set off on an easy 3 hour day of hiking through farmland and forest stands. Our picnic lunch was tasty and our arrival into camp was heralded as a success. This is where we first got to see all our accommodations, mess tent and lavatory for the trip (see below).

Before sitting down for our dinner we headed further up the trail on a brief acclimatization walk. It was an easy half hour hike without any gear (except some water). At the top of our walk we rested for about 15 minutes before heading back down for popcorn and tea (or hot chocolate). Our dinner came soon after which was a three course delicious meal.



Total Time Walking: 3.5hrs

Distance: 4.5miles (7.2km)

Elevation Min/Max: 6,568ft/8,858ft (2,000m/2,700m)

Elevation Gained: 2,290ft (700m)

Weather: Walking during the day was in the 60s. Evening at camp in the 50s. Temperatures dropped into the 40s overnight.

Difficulty: Easy



Day Two – Rongai Camp One to Kikilelwa Camp

This morning we were woken up at 6am and brought a choice of hot beverage to our tent within a few minutes. Fifteen minutes later a large bowl of hot water was delivered for us to use for washing up before breakfast. This was our second cooked meal and we were quickly seeing that meal times were extravagant affairs. Today's Special: Porridge, scrambled eggs, bread (no butter ☹), bacon and fruits.

By 8am we were on our way.

Day Pack contents:

- 2-3 liters of water (camelback and two Nalgene bottles, 1 -liter each)
- Rain pants
- Gore-Tex jacket
- Warm hat
- Phone (yes, there's reception) – using Google Latitudes to show progress to those at home
- Spare batteries and camera
- Multi-tool (SOG)
- GPS: Garmin Dakota 20
- On-the-trail first aid kit: lip balm with 15 SPF, Sunscreen, Saline nasal spray, Imodium, Advil, Aleve, Diamox, toilet paper, wet naps, hydrating powders, Steripen, water purifying tablets, and more



Dakota 20



Google Latitudes



Camelbak



Steripen



SOG Multi-tool

This morning we were greeted by crisp and clear weather with stunning views of Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mawenzi Peak. The trail was wide enough to walk side-by-side. Each day of the walk was in a different climate zone providing for constantly changing view. We started in the rainforest and slowly moved into the Heath Zone, characterized by more shrub-like bushes that are lower to the ground.

Today's walk was on more of an incline and about an hour into our walk clouds and mist slowly replaced the sunshine. Visibility was about the length of a football field. On our walk we passed Mawenzi Caves where we ran into a heart surgeon from Austria who had a neat gadget called a Portable Finger Pulse Oximeter for monitoring blood oxygen. While there are no medical studies proving a link between low blood-oxygen ratio, you can be sure that if your oxygen levels start dropping it will coincide with you not feeling so well. Also, you will make a lot of friends on the trail if you have one of these gadgets.

The group kind of walked together and in pairs with different people, but after our lunch Dana and Barry were in the lead trailed by Trenton and me. Francis kept falling back behind but was always with a guide. We knew we were setting our own paces, and that we were all walking at paces we felt comfortable with.



Mawenzi Peak



Mt. Kilimanjaro



In the Clouds

After lunch we continued hiking for several hours, enjoying the conversation. This is when I started feeling the headaches. They came and went like the wind, and in varying degrees, but the important thing was that they always went away. At this stage no one in the group was taking any altitude sickness medication (Diamox). Our guide recommended that we allow our bodies to adapt to the high altitudes and take it once we are feeling the effects of altitude sickness.

Barry and Dana arrived to camp about 15 minutes prior to Trenton and me, and we were ahead of Francis by about 25 minutes. We were slowly figuring out our routine: Get into camp, drop your gear, set up shop (lay out sleeping bag), change into non-hiking clothes, wash up with warm water, and head to the tent for either peanuts or popcorn. Thirty minutes later our dinner would always arrive like clockwork, and lots of it. I started to understand why the five of us needed an entourage of 20 guides, cooks and porters – to bring up all the food we would be eating!



Our teammate Francis arrived to camp looking winded and was apologetic about not being able to keep up. He said he was definitely feeling the effects of AMS (Altitude Mountain Sickness). His headaches weren't disappearing and I believe he was having some respiratory issues. He started taking Diamox, but said he wasn't feeling any change yet. He forced some food down, and headed to bed early.

By dinnertime the temperature was down to the 40s. It was during the middle of the night that Francis was feeling ill and our chief guide made the call to send him down the mountain that night. The logistics involved were quite impressive as his big bag had to be packed, tent broken down, and meals coordinated for his descent. He went down with Assistant Guide Justice and two other porters. From his account he walked through the night for many hours before resting and then continuing onward to the gate where he was met by an "ambulance".

For the remainder of the climb he was at Kilimanjaro Mountain Resort and under the supervision of Justice who took him to see the real sights of Moshi, his hometown. These sights included rice fields, the school where his mom teaches, his local hangout and more. The next time we all saw Francis was at the end of the climb, where he greeted us with a cold six pack of Kilimanjaro Beer!



Francis and Florence

Total Time Walking: 6-7hrs

Distance: 7.38miles (11.8km)

Elevation Min/Max: 8,858ft/11,811ft (2,700m/3,600m)

Elevation Gained: 2,953ft (900m)

Weather: Walking during the day was in the 50s. The walk was done mostly in overcast conditions with a fine misty rain. Evening at camp in the 40s. Temperatures dropped into the 30s overnight. There was frost on the ground and tents in the morning.

Difficulty: Moderate. The terrain was pretty good, but it was mostly the distance and time spent walking that gave this day a Moderate rating.

Day Three –Kikelelwa Camp to Mawenzi Tarn

One man short, we started out at about 8:30 a.m. for a shorter day of hiking – less than half the time spent walking the day before. The big difference was that the gradient of the terrain was much more inclined and every day we went higher and higher. At these altitudes your body works harder to acclimate to the lower levels of availability of oxygen in the blood.



Room with a view



Frost on the ground



Today's destination: Mawenzi Peak

This was my day to fall under the powerful grip of AMS. It came in the form of headaches that were a constant throbbing in my head, accompanied by nausea. The only thing that seemed to help was drinking water, Advil, but mostly keeping my mind preoccupied by listening to other people talk so I didn't have to. When that wasn't happening I tried to think about others, and how my own problems/pain are insignificant compared to theirs. This seemed to work for the most part.

We arrived to our waterfront camp (see pic below), dropped our gear, had lunch and then decided we would take our second and final acclimatization walk. This one wasn't an easy 25 minute stroll, however in a relatively short amount of time we climbed roughly 1,000 feet to Mawenzi Peak. Needless to say, by this stage the headaches had consumed my every thought. I thought there was no way I could continue up the mountain feeling like that. I told Florence, and he suggested I drink more water. I told him I was already feeling nauseous and that it probably wouldn't help. He insisted, so I drank and my suspicions were correct as I "popped" at the top.

I immediately started feeling better and the headaches subsided. Instead of staying at the top of the mountain for 25 minutes, as originally planned, we headed back after 10. The walk down was nice as it was my first headache-free part of the day. However, once we arrived in camp and stopped descending the headaches continued where they left off. I laid down in my tent with my feet hanging out because I couldn't be bothered taking my boots off. A few minutes later, Florence popped his head in with some "Magicky" pills. He had ibuprofen and suggested I start taking Diamox. I still don't know why this thought didn't occur to me until he mentioned it. Needless to say, 20 minutes later after popping those pills I understood exactly why he called them the magicky pills... life was good again!

That night after dinner Dana, Trenton and I continued our nightly tradition of me consistently beating them at Spades. I was back on top and confident about continuing my climb. To be honest I wasn't thinking of summiting; I was really taking it day-by-day.



Total Time Walking: 3-4hrs

Distance: 3.2 miles

Elevation Min/Max: 11,811ft/14,161ft (3,600m/4,316m)

Elevation Gained: 2,350ft (716m)

Weather: Walking during the day was in the 50s. The walk was done mostly in overcast conditions with a fine misty rain. Evening at camp in the 40s. Temperatures dropped into the 30s overnight. There was frost on the ground and tents in the morning.

Difficulty: Moderate. Most incline to date as you climb steadily for the few short hours of hiking.

Day Four – Mawenzi Tarn to Kibo Camp

By this time “sleep” is more resting than sleep because at higher altitudes it is a sacrifice your body makes to compensate for the low levels of oxygen. You manage a handful of hours of actual sleep, but it is more about letting your body and mind recharge for a few hours. I brought an iPod with me and a lot of people asked why. I never turned it on when we were hiking, but at the end of the day when you’re laying in your tent, there is something nice about turning on some music that is familiar. It allows your mind to drift off into melodies and lyrics you know so well. Rest.

We were forewarned that this day was going to be another one of those long days of hiking, but fortunately it was easy walking. We had a short incline and a long sloping walk that descended before gradually coming back up. This stretch of walk between Mawenzi and Kibo is known as the Saddle, because that’s what it resembles. At this altitude we had passed the Heath and Moreland Zones with their low lying shrubs and officially entered the Alpine Desert Zone. Except for a few randomly scattered bushes lying about, it was all dust, rocks... and a fallen airplane?!?

A small charter plane apparently crashed there a few years ago. As we approached you could see debris scattered about. The story goes that a few tourists asked their pilot to get closer to the mountain for a better look so that they could snap a few pictures. As they got close some clouds quickly moved in, making it difficult to see, and caused the plane to crash. My first thought was, “Why hasn’t anyone taken it off the mountain,” but when you think about it, I can’t really blame anyone for not wanting to carry a plane off a 19,000+ foot mountain, plus all the gear you are already carrying and do it for free!



While we could see the camp from afar, we did not get a sense of how high it was until we reached it. It felt like we had found the long lost and fabled, albeit, tent city of Shangri La. This place was a bustling hub of activity because a few of the trails come together there as the base camp for the summit assault. We arrived to a throng of porters, tents and people wearing North Face jackets, four-day old beards and a steady wind of about 25 miles an hour. We were directed to a hut where we had to check in by logging our details in a registry. From here our guides noticed our confused looks and led us to where our tents had been set up... away from the crowds and out of the wind. I have no idea how they managed it, but we were extremely grateful they did.

We arrived tired from the walk. We sat down for lunch without much appetite around 12:30 p.m.. We were told to rest until dinner served at 5:30 p.m., after which we would have our daily briefing. This was one we were eager to hear as it was going to be our summit briefing. We went back to our tents and did just that. On went the iPod again and I closed my eyes for a few hours.

By now we were definitely in the Alpine Desert Zone where we would only see the odd little shrub scattered about. Everything was rock or sand, and apparently when Hans Meyer made his ascent in 1889 there was still glacier on this part of the mountain. According to our guide, “they” predicted that by 2025 the glacier will have disappeared forever from the mountain.

At this altitude there was no surface water anywhere to be found, and any water we used for drinking, cooking or washing up was brought up from Mawenzi Camp.



We awoke for dinner where we tried feeding ourselves the food that was served. It is easy to identify how the altitude is affecting our bodies. Just a day or two ago we had voracious appetites from all the exercise, but now we could hardly manage a small serving.

After dinner Florence came in the tent and formally introduced us to our summit porter, Dayo. We were told that we would be “woken up” at 11:00 p.m. for a quick meal of porridge and to get our stuff together to start our trek at 11:45 p.m. If we were taking Diamox, we needed to take some before we actually started the climb. We were also told that we should only bring the following essentials:

- 3 liters of water
- Chocolate or trail mix
- Sunglasses, sunscreen and lip balm
- 5-6 layers for your top half (including Gore-Tex)
- 4 layers for your bottom half, plus gaiters (for keeping rocks and scree out of your boots)
- 2 pairs of socks
- 2 warm hats, 2 pairs of gloves and hand-warmers
- Trekking poles
- Headlamp, camera and spare batteries for both

The reason for all those layers is because once we are up high if we get cold it would be much harder to warm up. If we started warm and stayed warm we would be ok, but if we got to the point where we were shaking uncontrollably from the cold... that’s an automatic one-way ticket back down to camp.

Group Check-in: Trenton was getting AMS and started taking his Diamox as his headache was persistent most of the day. Dana also started taking his altitude pills as he had a rough night the night before. Barry was ready to charge - no headaches and no signs of slowing down from the altitude. He decided to take Diamox before the midnight departure as a precautionary more than anything else. He had proved to be the strongest climber with the least amount of problems. I was doing ok at this point, just taking it step - by-step.

We all headed back to our tents early that evening to start any kind of “getting ready” ritual and laid down for a few more hours before our summit attempt to the Rooftop of Africa.

Total Time Walking: 5hrs

Distance: 5.2miles (8.5km)

Elevation Min/Max: 14,161ft/15,437ft (4,316m/4,705m)

Elevation Gained: 1,276ft (389m)

Weather: The weather was the most stable today. The sky was mostly sunny until we arrived into camp. The average temperature during the walk was in the low 50s. On arrival into Kibo Camp the winds really picked up and quickly became over cast with the temperatures

Difficulty: Moderate. It was an easier day in terms of elevation gained, but at this altitude you are starting to feel some of the toll it is beginning to take on the body. It is a long day of walking.



Day Five – Kibo Camp to Uhuru Peak to Horombo Camp

After dinner I headed to my tent and got partially dressed for both warmth and so that I wouldn't have to get dressed in the middle of the night. These were the kind of things that no one taught us, but learned quickly after a morning of getting out of that warm and comfortable sleeping bag in the tent and dressed in below-freezing temperatures.

Having laid down and rested somewhere between sleeping and waking states most of the time, I started hearing porters moving about. I looked at my iPod: 10:30 p.m. By the time someone came by my tent I was fully alert and already throwing the layers on and double checking my gear to make sure I don't forget anything vital like my camera.

We met up in the mess tent and look at the porridge in front of us with disdain. What seemed like a pretty tasty meal just a few days ago was looking as appealing as last week's leftovers. Before we started out I checked my pulse to see what my resting heart rate was: a steady 102 beats per minute.

I managed to get some food down because I knew my body would need the energy later. After that we were all suited up with more layers than I'd ever worn. I was dressed in a thin Merino wool t-shirt, heavy merino wool thermal top layer, thick North Face fleece, very thick hooded sweatshirt and Gore-Tex jacket over that. With that, my warm hat, thick-fleeced hoodie, thick neck warmer, and two gloves. At this stage I felt more like the Michelin Man than human.

We actually started our walk close to 12:15 a.m. as we had some people who were having technical difficulties with their gear. Once we started out we could see that others had already started their trek by the trail of headlights. A group of 10-12 headlamps were winding up the switchback trails and looked like a serpent of lights in the night. The temperature was just above freezing.

Earlier we had made the decision as a group to try and summit together. The pace was excruciatingly slow. We were easily walking about 1mph or slower. Our guide purposely set the pace this slow to keep our heart rate down as much as possible to allow for slower breathing, but also to slowly acclimate as we went up the mountain.

As we climbed, Florence was like the pied piper as he sang some obscure tune that he looped over and over, never-ending, but guiding us up the mountain, keeping our minds off the task. We slowly wended up step after step. After about an hour or so we stopped for a quick break. It felt like I could just stop and rest there for a long time, but our guide, the ever-watchful professional, made sure that we didn't stop for too long and cool down too quickly.

For a few hours all we saw in the dark was the person's pack in front of us, their shoes and the trail. If you did ever look up, you were quickly reminded of the daunting task that lay ahead. Those other climbers we had spotted earlier seemed like they were directly above us.

As the night wore on and the temperatures continued to drop we noticed that when we stopped our water was slowly turning to ice. My Camelbak was slowly freezing over. Even the Nalgene bottles of water I had were turning into slushy ice water and the caps were freezing to the tops of them. Dana also had a Camelbak, but with an insulated tube, and had no issues with it. (I highly recommend this as you don't have to stop to take a drink; and prevents the water from freezing).

We continued into the night and whenever I looked up I saw The Mountain as something dark in the night, a shadow looming over us.

The "landmarks" we passed – Williams Point (5,000m), Hans Meyer Cave (5,150 m), and Jamaica Rocks (5,500m) seemed no different from each other in the dark. They were just a chance to rest for a bit before continuing on. During this long trek we began to see that this part of the hike as 80% mental and 20% physical. Tired and cold, all you have to say, "I've had enough, please take me back down," and that was end of your climb (if you wanted it to be). Florence and the other guides were continually encouraging us: "Never give up!"

I counted about a half dozen climbers escorted down due to either altitude sickness, exhaustion or they they'd had enough: enough to end the summit attempt.

When the sun finally broke the night, I could feel my spirits rising up with every moment. I reminded myself that at this altitude with every step up I took I was setting my all-time record for highest I had ever been on foot. Every time I wanted to stop or give up I kept thinking... just one more step so I can set a new record for myself. Step after step.

I think we were all feeling the same thing once the sun came up because we started talking again. By the time we reached Gilman's Point (5,686m), we achieved a huge milestone. I can honestly say that anyone who reaches this sign should be proud of what they accomplished because this is definitely the hardest part of the climb. We were all ecstatic to reach this point, but were tired enough to find the closest rock to slump on. Dayo came by with some hot tea and a bar of chocolate.



We were reevaluated both by ourselves and by the guide. I noticed that when the guide had checked us for altitude sickness before, he checked the color of our tongues and our eyes. When he came over I stuck my tongue out and took off my glasses. It was almost as if I was looking for an excuse to be told I couldn't go on, but in the end he cleared me to go to the top and reassured me I could do it. "Never give up."



Barry the Bionic Bear was ready to charge. Dana had to convince the guide that he was good and after standing on one leg without falling down the mountain he was cleared. Trenton, on the other hand, had already made the decision that he had had enough and was going to head back down. However, if the three of us were going to summit then we weren't going to let him off that easily. It didn't take much convincing before we were gathering our gear for the final push. It was also around this time that we started noticing people coming back from their summit hike and noticed they were covered in snow, beards frozen over. There was even a girl who had icicles hanging from her eyelashes!

As soon as we crossed over the lip of the peak the reason was apparent. It felt like gale force winds were blowing at the top. We were walking with our heads down as snow flurries were whipping by. The wind was blowing so hard that our walking poles (an item that anyone attempting to climb should not do without) were being blown in the wind. Barry said he plays golf back home and it wasn't unusual to have 40 mph winds, and he reckons that these were between 50 -60 mph.

These conditions continued for the next two and hours as we made our ascent. Luckily by the time we had reached the summit the winds had died down. Then I heard someone utter the words, “There it is.” Without looking up I knew what I was about to behold from the hundreds of others’ pictures of their Kili climbs was the place where they came for that ultimate souvenir: a sign stating you are at the Rooftop of Africa, the highest place on the continent. The sign reads, “***Congratulations! You are now at Uhuru Peak, Tanzania, 5895m AMSL. Africa’s Highest Point – The world’s highest freestanding mountain. One of the world’s largest volcanoes. Welcome!***” It’s covered in old stickers promoting restaurants, companies and other destinations around the globe, and looked as weathered as the mountain.



We were up there for about 25 minutes, but it felt like a blip as we snapped pics and congratulated each other, some with a swig of Bombay Sapphire’s finest. By this time I could feel my brain starved for oxygen and so the only driving thought in my head was to get off this mountain... quickly!

Interesting fact: Did you know that there is 50% less oxygen available at this altitude than at sea level?

With every step I took back down the mountain I could feel a difference. I quickened my pace to a slow trot and only stopped long enough to take in the first magnificent view since the sunrise... the looming glacier, the last remnants of it at least. Within a few moments the clouds were rolling back in, protecting it in a blanket of snow. In retrospect I wish I would have taken a picture but the effort involved in stopping, unzipping my jacket, taking off my gloves and taking that pictures was far too great at that time.

I got back to Gilman’s in record time where Dayo and I waited as the others caught up. From here we started the descent down the scree for what I call a little Scree -skiing action. For the next hour and a half we skied down on our feet using the poles. About an hour into it I wished I’d been wiser in conserving energy coming back from Uhuru.

For most, this would have been enough physical activity for a week, let alone a day. However, after an hour rest and lunch, we were packing up our gear and ready to start another 3 -4 hour hike to Horombo Camp. There’s no two ways about it, this... was... a ... very... long... day.



The walk down from there was relaxed and we were all joking and enjoying the scenery. We came down the Marangu Route as this is an Up and Down route whereas the Rongai is Up only. We arrived at camp tired and hungry. We ate, played cards and all had the best night's sleep imaginable. I don't imagine the Sultan of Brunei would have had a more comfortable night's sleep than any of us did that evening.

The next morning, while still cold, after a hearty breakfast we packed up our bags for the last time on the mountain. Then we had the absolute pleasure to witness what they call "The Tipping Ceremony". All the porters, guides and cook stood together and sang the Kilimanjaro song that would put any gospel choir to shame. They were so happy and some almost even seemed possessed. Afterwords, I said a few words thanking them for everything because without them we wouldn't have come anywhere near that peak.

Total Time Walking: 13-15hrs

Distance: 12 miles (19.3km)

Elevation Start/Max/Min: 15,437ft/19,341ft/ 12,204ft (4,705m/5,895m/3,720m)

Elevation Gained: 3,904ft (1,190m)

Elevation Loss (total): 7,137ft (2,175m)

Weather: The night walk started off calm. The temperatures dropped well below freezing into the night, and was coldest just before sunrise. The sunrise was clear and crisp. At the summit steady and strong winds blew blustery snow, and calmed down towards the peak. The walk from Kibo to Horombo was clear and temperatures rose steadily into the 50s until the evening.

Difficulty: Difficult. It was not a technical climb, but between the altitude and the overall duration of walking in a 24 hour period that I would rate this as the only difficult day of the trek.

Day Six –Horombo Camp to Marangu Gate

The last day we continued on another 5½ hour hike motivated by the thought of a hot shower and proper bed. We passed other climbers heading the opposite way. They looked so fresh and clean and full of optimism, heading into what was going to be an adventure they would never forget. As for us, we were coming off the ride relaxed and filled with so much good energy that it almost... ALMOST felt like we could've turned around and climbed back up.

Good luck to all of you who attempt it, and remember, it's 80% mental... **be prepared!**

Total Time Walking: 5-6 hrs

Distance: 12.8 miles (20.6km)

Elevation Max/Min: 12,204ft/6,045ft (3,720m/1,143m)

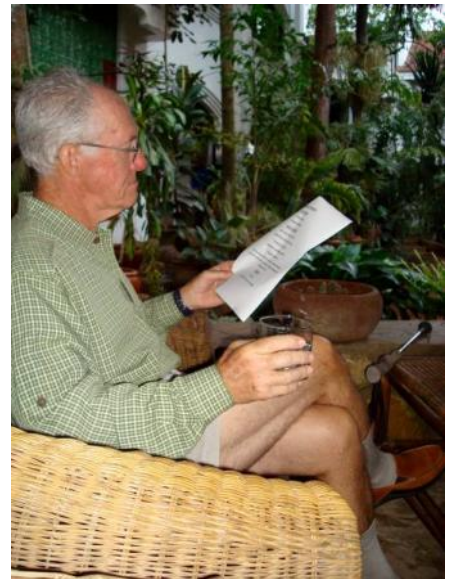
Elevation Loss: 6,159ft (2,577m)

Weather: As we descended into the tropical weather we were met with typical rainforest climate in that it was cool and a misty rain. There is a lot more moisture in the air and I was hiking in a t-shirt until it rained a little bit.

Difficulty: Easy. Long walk, all downhill. Again, remember to pace yourself for a long day of walking, but compared to the previous day, it was a breeze.



The 25th Anniversary Kili Crew



Barry the Bionic Bear