

My trek to Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, is now complete - here's a photo report of how it all went. If you have sponsored me already - thank you! If you haven't yet done so, it's certainly not too late - please visit www.k2010.org or go straight to www.justgiving.com/k2010

The summit of Kilimanjaro, Uhuru Peak, is on the rim of the dormant volcano known as Kibo, almost 6km above sea level, where the air pressure and oxygen content of the air are much lower than our bodies are used to. Time is needed to acclimatise, otherwise Acute Mountain Sickness causes symptoms such as severe headaches, vomiting and loss of appetite. More serious problems such as fluid on the lungs or brain can potentially be life-threatening.



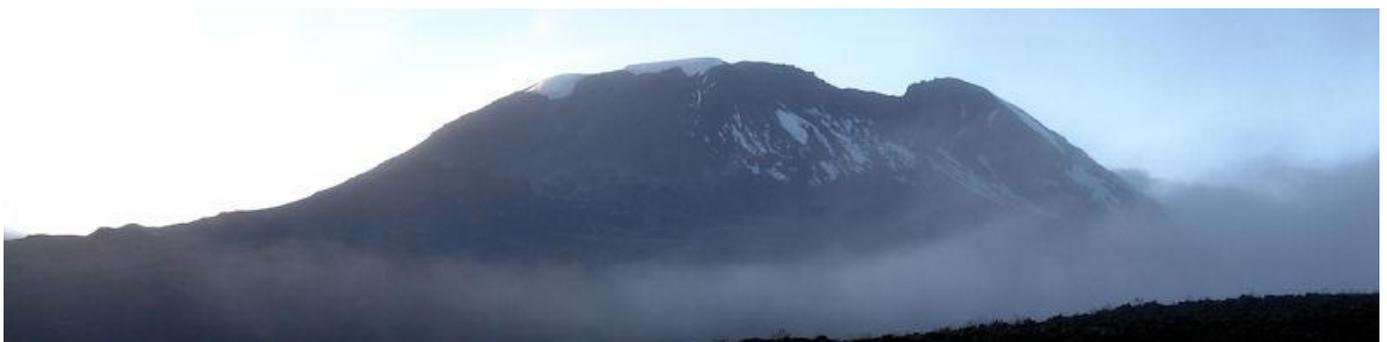
There are several routes up Kilimanjaro. Our route, the Lemosho route, is one which starts further from the summit, and we took 6 days trekking at ever increasing altitudes to give our group of 25 people the best chance of eventually reaching our goal.

The route started in the lush, humid rain forest, below 2,000m. A walk in the park compared with what was to follow.

Day 2 saw us leave the rain forest into heath land, where we camped at 3,500m on the edge of the Shira Plateau. Shira is an extinct volcano whose crater was filled in by lava from a later eruption of Kibo.

It was cloudy all day, but in the evening the weather cleared and we got our first closer view of our destination as it emerged from the clouds.

The mountain looked enormous and intimidating.



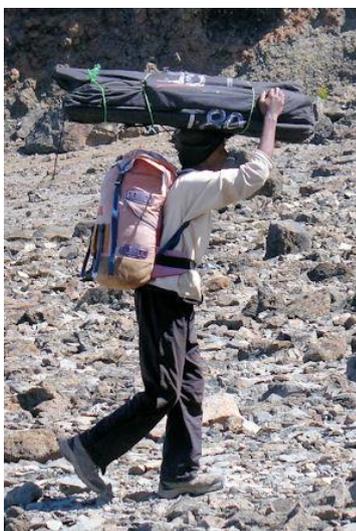
Day 3 was another misty day as we crossed the Shira Plateau, but the following morning was clear. We watched the sun rise over the neighbouring Mount Meru, and looked down on the clouds covering the African plains below.

By the fourth day, the heath land was behind us, and from now on we were in a barren desert of volcanic lava, with Kibo ever looming.

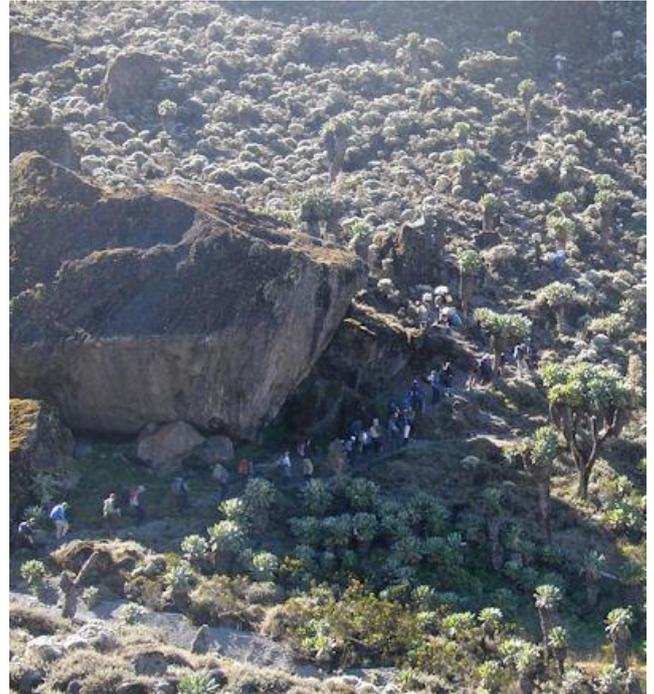


The path took us across the Southern Flank of Kilimanjaro, with an slight diversion to see the stunning Lava Tower at 4,550m.

Throughout the trek we were supported by a local team of 87 porters and guides, carrying the tents, cooking equipment, food, our main bags, etc.



We camped in front of Barranco Wall which we knew we needed to scale the next morning as we pressed on ever higher and closer to our eventual destination.



At the top of the wall we paused to take in the view of Kibo and the clouds swirling around it, before pressing on to Karanga Camp. The camp sites were now getting increasingly barren, rocky and uneven.



The next day, Day 6, was a relatively short, but steep, trek to the camp site at Barafu, at 4,600m, from where we were to make our attempt to reach the summit. We were in bed by 7pm as we were to be woken at 11pm for a midnight departure on the final upward push.

At last, after months of training, fundraising and preparation - this was IT!

By the light of our head torches and the moon, we slowly, slowly (“pole, pole” in Swahili) struggled up the slippery gravel path in sub-zero temperatures. Looking up from the stony path at our feet, we could see the torches of others impossibly high and distant. After 5½ hours, dawn came, but no relief from the lung-straining effort upwards. Finally, seemingly in slow motion, we reached Stella Point on the rim of the Kibo volcano, and suddenly could see into the crater, and follow its rim stretching to the left where Uhuru is located.



Spurred on by the sunlight and the view of the summit, the last 150m of ascent was relatively gentle and after about 45 minutes of trudging over snow and ice, we took turns to be, for a few moments, the highest person in the whole of Africa at the 5,895m [19,341ft] Uhuru Peak.

Pausing to enjoy the views of glaciers, and the clouds miles below us, we started over 2,000m of descent, our tired legs sometimes stumbling down the scree paths.

22 of the 25 people in our group made it, thanks to our careful acclimatisation. On the way up we saw some very ill-looking people being rushed back down by guides to the safety of lower altitude.



We all agreed that the 15 hours of walking in one day made up the hardest physical challenge any of us had ever undertaken, but the exhilaration of reaching the summit after those months of training and fund-raising, was overwhelming.

Having put in more effort than ever before on my 7 previous treks, I’m hoping to raise more money than ever before for Teenage Cancer Trust. **Thank you so much if you have donated already**, if not, please do so now before it slips your mind.

Six teenagers a day are told they have cancer, and although Teenage Cancer Trust units are now springing up around the country, we are still some way off every young person with cancer having access to these specialist facilities, treatment and support.

Nigel Turner