

Cp Cp, Pole Pole
Reflections on my experience
Summiting Mt. Kilimanjaro – The Roof of Africa
February 4 – 11, 2017



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Kilimanjaro: A destination

- The following pages constitute my reflections on a life inspired by a defining experience: trekking and summiting the towering Mt. Kilimanjaro, between February 4 and 11, 2017, with a great company – Dr. Kamel Abdallah, Bilal Abdallah, and Toby Harward with the help of a dedicated, patient and supportive crew of Tanzanians.
- Kilimanjaro summiting was a challenging, but rewarding, adventure. You push your limits beyond your imagination. Regardless of the reason you have for undertaking this adventure, having a purpose helps you focus your energy and attention.
- The overall statistics show that less than half of all Kilimanjaro climbers reach the summit. I hope to help fellow future trekkers look at this experience in a different perspective that can make it safer, more successful, fun, and, maybe, more meaningful.
- There can be second phase of this project - adding examples and ideas, and inserting cartoons that can have relevance to personal and organizational life. I welcome any suggestions in this regard. Credit will be duly given.

The mystic snow-capped colossal volcano

- Mt. Kilimanjaro is the largest freestanding mountain on earth and the tallest mountain in Africa - 5,895 m (19,340 feet) above sea level, 3° South of the Equator . It is a dormant volcano whose altitude ranks forth in the world after Mt. Everest in the Himalayas (8,848 m), Aconcagua in the Andes (6,960m), and Mt. McKinley in Alaska (6,194m). It certainly is one of the world's iconic peaks.
- Kilimanjaro hikers enjoy various ecosystems - the lowland plains, the humid rain forest, the unusual trees of the Heath zone, the grassy Mooreland, the Alpine desert, and the Arctic . Our experience was like walking from the equator to the North Pole in a mere six days.
- While literature may describe it as “a walk” because you do not need special equipment, it is never easy. Kilimanjaro's upper slopes are classed in the extreme altitude range. It is not dangerous, however. The steep trails forces you to push yourself to the limit as they seem to linger forever.

Pre-Journey: Things To Consider

- **Weather**

Kili is a hard climb so choose the weather of your climb. Generally February/March, and August are the best months to trek. It can make a big difference in your experience. The seasonality determines the chances of rain in the forest, the chances of mist/drizzle in the heath/moorland, and the likelihood of snow in the Alpine summit. The temperature drops 10 ° C for every 1,000 meters (5 ° F for every 1,000 feet).

- **Altitude**

While general medical fitness helps you reach the summit, your body ability to adjust to altitude is important. As you ascend the atmosphere, the barometric pressure decreases. There will be a decrease in the density of air – less air to breath in (thin air), hence, less oxygen molecules for a given volume of air that you breath in. We started feeling the difference once we crossed the 4,000 m altitude. People bodies adjust differently. Our breathing quickens as we try to inhale more oxygen; Some of us also experience mild headaches. We were warned that we might vomit, or even faint, but fortunately the whole team adjusted well.

Pre-Journey: Things To Consider

- **Acclimatization**

As you ascend, your body needs to deal with the reduced amount of oxygen available in every breath. These changes that your body makes are the process of acclimatization. The main changes that occur in the body are:

- The depth of breathing increases.
- Pressure in the pulmonary arteries increases – making blood flow into parts of the lungs not necessarily used at lower latitudes.
- The body produces more red blood cells (the protein Hemoglobin being the oxygen carrier which resides in the red blood cell).
- Production of more of a certain enzyme that facilitates the release of oxygen from Hemoglobin to the body's tissues.
- You urinate more (altitude diuresis where the kidneys release more water from the body).
- Failure to acclimatize properly leads to certain symptoms – signs that your body is not adapting, or has not yet adapted, to the change in altitude.

Pre-Journey: Things To Consider

- **Kit List**

There are a number of checklists online that detail all essential, and supplementary, items. As much as you should check off all those items, the total weight of your equipment should not exceed 20 kgs. For us, having sleeping bags that can tolerate - 15°C weather, lots of wet wipes, and a camel water bag ranked highest.

- **Packing**

Packing smartly and lightly is a vital component to your experience. You can learn it by viewing the many relevant tour operator advices or those of previous trekkers on YouTube. Remember you are on a seven days journey where the weather changes as you climb higher, and where your stuff is carried on a porter's back or head, so think it through.

- **Preparatory Training Program**

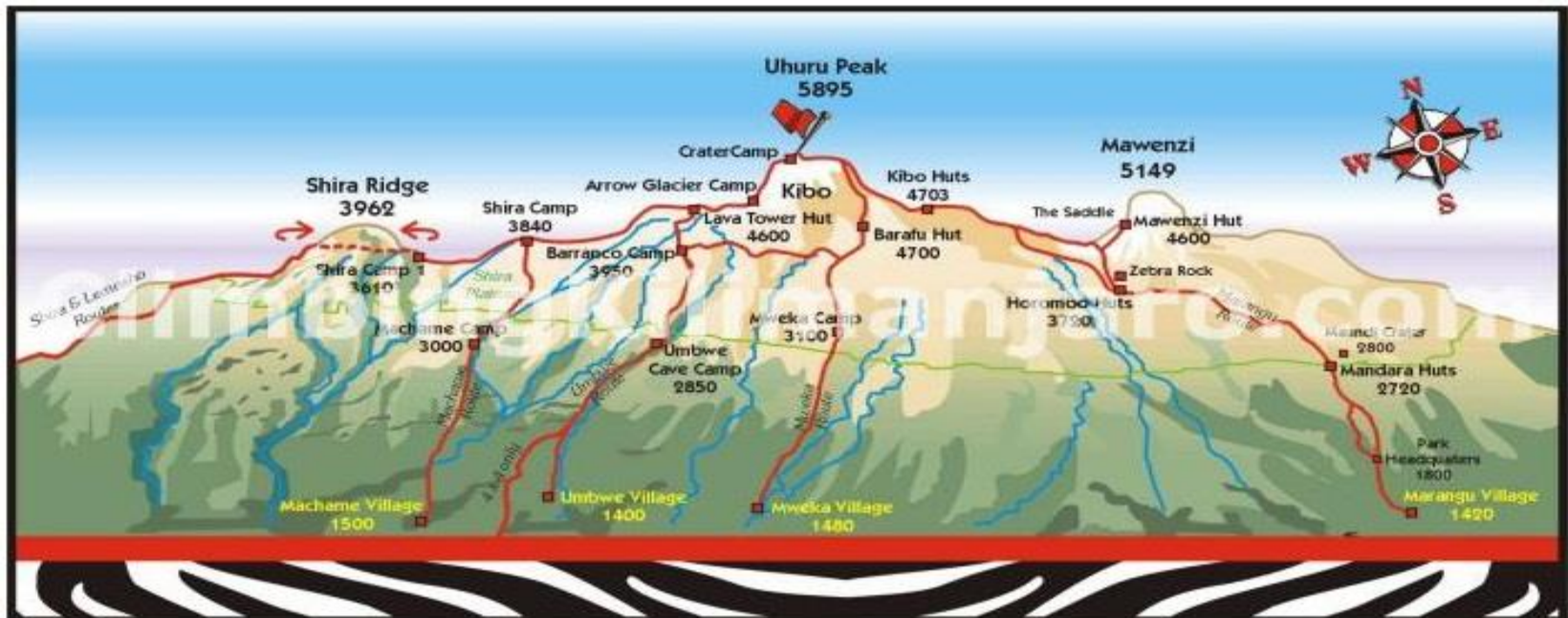
There are a lot of pre – climb training programs available on websites that increase your aerobic ability. Choose the one that suits you best, but do it. Overall, two months pre traveling is the start date with around three times a week, moving into more accelerated program should do it. Having said that, we, and many trekkers we talked to, ignored this vital advise.



Pre-Journey: Kilimanjaro Route Choices

There are seven official trekking routes by which to ascend and descend Mount Kilimanjaro. Climbs take anywhere from five to nine days, depending on your route of choice and how much time you need to take to acclimatize to the altitude.

Of all the routes, our guides chose Machame which is considered the most scenic, yet longer and steeper. It covers more ground and more ups and down. It wears you out more and takes more energy, but offers better acclimatization.



Machame Route – Day 1

Machame Gate (1,830 m/6,000 ft) – Machame Camp
(3,030 m/9,940 ft)

- Hike distance: 11 km/6.8 miles
 - Hike time: 5 hours
 - Altitude gain: 1,200 m/3,940 ft
 - Habitat: Montane forest
 - Night temperature: Freezing point
- We came the night before and slept at a decent hotel. This is recommended as you will be sleeping in tents, and not be taking full showers throughout the trip (loads of wet wipes to the rescue!).
 - Depending on your Route, you have to register at the Park Gate Registration area.
 - We waited for couple hours. Almost all trekkers were in a festive move. We were told later by our guides that during those hours the team does a mental assessment on whom they think will make it all the way.
 - While we could not wait to start and were full of energy, within two hours of hiking, we realized that this will be much harder journey that we initially thought.
 - We took longer then expected to reach first camp arriving at sunset, and were so joyful that we survived day one.



Machame Route – Day 2

Machame Camp – New Shira Camp (3,850 m/12,630 ft)

- Hike distance: 5.5 km/3.5 miles
 - Hike time: 6 hours
 - Altitude gain: 820 m/2,690 ft
 - Habitat: Moorland
 - Night temperature : dropping to well below freezing
- Day two was different to previous day as we gained more confidence
 - While distance was shorter (almost half) the climb was steep and it took us as much time as the day before
 - We got the hang of it: walked slower, drank more water, rested as needed, and started to enjoy the hike.
 - Nonetheless, we became more aware of the challenge we are undertaking, and understood why less than half of the trekkers make it to the top.



Machame Route – Day 3

Shira Camp via Lava Tower (4,640 m/15,220 ft)

– Barranco Camp (3,985 m/13,070 ft)

☐ Hike distance: 10 km/6.2 miles

☐ Hike time: 7 hours

☐ Altitude gain: 135 m/440 ft
(790 m/2,590 ft to Lava Tower)

☐ Habitat: Semi desert

- Day three was very hard and challenged our physical abilities.
- We started our oxygen altitude adjustments by going up to Lava Tower at 4,640 m (a volcanic structure) and then descending over 650 m to the camp site.
- We experienced the changing and adverse weather conditions, and the impact on our bodies being at high altitudes. We took it well.
- Lunch was served on-the-go at Lava Towers.



Machame Route – Day 4

Barranco Camp-Karanga Camp 4,040m/13,255 ft)

- Hike distance: 5.5 km/3.5 miles
 - Hike time: 5 hours
 - Altitude gain: 55 m/185 ft
- Our day started climbing a very steep rocky mountain often times using our hands and gear.
 - While went up and down, we ultimately ended up hiking only 55 m by crossing from one side to the other side of the mountain.
 - This was the most crowded part of the hike as the trails were narrow with many bottlenecks.
 - Our confidence was at its highest on arriving as all of us believed we can reach the summit. We were all smiles when taking the picture at arrival camp.



Machame Route – Day 5

Karanga Camp – Barafu (ice) Camp
(4,680 m /15,350 ft)

- ❑ Hike distance: 3.5 km/2.2 miles
- ❑ Hike time: 5 hours
- ❑ Altitude gain: 640 m/2,100 ft
- ❑ Habitat: Alpine desert

- Day Five was another day with steep hiking in tough weather conditions.
- Though only five days into the trip, we felt so detached from the rest of the world.
- Our minds did a reset, and were energized mentally, though naturally physically fatigued.



Machame Route – Day 6 (Summit Day) - 14 hours of hiking

- ❑ Hike distance: 5 km/3 miles ascent + 10 km /6.2 m descent
- ❑ Hike time: 5 - 6 hours + 1 – 2 hours up, & another 8 hours down.
- ❑ Altitude gain: 1,072 m/3,517 ft (Stella Point) or 1,215 m/3,980 ft (Uhuru Peak)
- ❑ Descent: 2,075 m/6,807 ft
- ❑ Habitat: Stone scree (rocks and gravelly sand) and ice – capped summit
 - With only three hours of sleep we started our summiting past midnight and in sub-zero temperatures.
 - No words can describe how deep we sank and how high we reached as we summited.
 - The level of camaraderie among trekkers was exemplary with strangers encouraging and supporting each other.
 - Unfortunately on the hike we saw several people who had to quit and be escorted back to base.

Summit arrival via Stella Point (5,752 m/18,871 ft) to Uhuru Peak (5,895 m/19,340 ft) and descent via Mweke Route to Mweka Camp (3,820 m/12,530 ft)



Machame Route – Day 7

Mweka Camp – Machame Gate (1,641 m)

Hike distance: 20 km/12.5 miles

Hike time: 5 hours

Descent: 1,990 m/6,530 ft

Habitat: Forest

- Last day of Hiking; Interesting enough it is still tiring as going down a rocky mountain hurt the knees and toes from continuous pressure.
- The mood is festive. Our guides and teams have received our thanks along with a generous cash contribution. We feel on top of the world having accomplished the summiting with success and without any injury.



Cp Cp, Pole Pole

- They are the two golden rules that can help get to the summit:

In the local language Cp Cp (pronounced "sippie sippie") means regularly sipping water. At lower altitudes, it helps the body keep hydrated. At higher altitudes, water's oxygen component (H₂O) makes up for the lack of oxygen.

Pole Pole, also in the swahili language, means slowly and steady. One step at a time, literally, can get you to the summit. Here you appreciate the meaning of the proverb "slowly but surely".

In the first couple of days our guides kept on reminding us of Cp CP, Pole Pole but we quickly learned to be proactive as without those rules we will not be able to continue, let alone summit...

This brings another rule: Without proactive guides, there is little chance to make it to the top. They guide, coach, cheerlead, and assist in every possible way.

So Excited, and Can't Hide It



Reflections – On bracing yourself–

- The quality of your experience is determined by what you take out of it, not by the tour operator you choose.
- Half the battle is determined before you even start . Knowing why you are doing the journey helps in making it a reality.
- Train, train, and train prior to your endeavor. It pays considerable dividends later on.
- Place one foot in front of the other - Pole, Pole, but stay focused and that will surely get you to your goal.
- "Watch every step" literally, and not as a figure of speech, but keep your eyes on the larger perspective.
- Every day has its challenges and requires different skills. Correction - every hour has them.
- When you think that you have been through the toughest, you will hit another steep track ahead.

Reflections – On Pain –

- When you doubt your ability to continue, about to quit, and you can not take it any more , let not mental weariness get to you and remember your goals, aspirations, and dreams. That will give you a second wind to persist. Consult your guide as he can play a vital role in keeping you focused.
- While your muscles ache and you are breathless, stop to recharge, enjoy the scenery, and go at it again.
- Going up then down, then up and down again is not necessarily a bad thing. It is part of the acclimatization process that helps you reach your higher goals.
- Going down is as painful as going up. Make sure to have the right socks and adjust you walking poles.
- Your weakest link breaks your whole experience – be considerate and supportive to your partners.

Reflections – On the Course –

- The camp is not as near as it appears. You have not arrived until you unload your back pack into your tent.
- Since the last quarter hour is really tough (and there are many of them every day) think about the first quarter hour after your arrival to the camp.
- Watch the sky and beat the clouds/fog before they get to you.
- Avoid ink at high altitudes. Use a pencil.
- The mountain will always be there. – if, for whatever reason, you can not summit the first time, or any other time subsequently, you can always come back for it. Just get yourself ready and it will wait up for you.
- You do not notice how tiny you are in the gigantic mountain until you see fellow trekkers in the far distance ahead of you.
- It is hard to tell how big the mountain is whenever you are on its slopes.
- The twinkling headlamps of other hikers ahead of us provide us an assurance that we will be there, ourselves, in an hour or two.

Reflections – On the Crew –

- Trust your guide and appreciate his wisdom though he may be much younger, less articulate, and less privileged than you are.
- Follow every step of the guide while keeping the big picture into perspective.
- If you think you had it rough in life, just judge how fortunate you are compared to your crew.
- If you think you have a tough job, just think of that of the porters.
- Appreciate the piercing smell of your crew. It is what will help you through the demanding days and get you to the summit.
- Do not hesitate to hire an extra porter to carry your back pack. You have got enough challenges at hand than to worry about the extra weight on your back.
- You need to discipline yourself and to follow every single step after the guide. Improvising and taking "The Road Less Traveled" is, sometimes, costly beyond repair.
- A good guide sets the pace based upon the abilities of his clients, not his.

Reflections – On Discovery –

- When you focus on the essentials, trivial issues fade invariably.
- Ridding ourselves from the accustomed vanity is not as impossible as it seems, after all.
- You can compromise your routine hygiene into many other acceptable forms.
- It is not a bad experience to step beyond your comfort zone. As a matter of fact, it sharpens your saws.
- We can survive a full week with no connection through the cyber world. We realize that we do not miss out as much as we are anxious about.
- Stepping out of the cyber world leads you to connect to the environment, your inner world and that of your fellow trekkers. It poses a great opportunity to value every moment as it comes about.
- On such experiences, you will get to learn more about your body, spirit, and will power.
- Learn to summit in your mind prior to embarking upon your endeavor.

Reflections – On Tools –

- The weather can change many times in a day from one extreme to the other. Learn what to carry in your limited back pack.
- Do not compromise your gear. It keeps you safe and warm.
- The same tools (e.g. walking poles) that help you go up can help you go down safely as well - just adjust the length.
- When using your walking poles, mud is safer than slates.
- Learn to pack smartly and efficiently. It pays off.
- Learn to balance the weight in your back pack and to diffuse the load off your back on your waist and chest.

Reflections – On Summiting –

- While “a picture is worth a thousand words”, no pictures or words can precisely express the emotions and feelings upon summiting the gigantic mountain.
- Summiting Kili is actually conquering our limitations and apprehensions.
- Summiting Kili was a testimony that we can really achieve results beyond our perceived abilities.
- It is an example of how ordinary people can do an extraordinary thing.
- It was rather an unusual experience to loom above the clouds.
- I was so focused on “the task”, I wish I had dedicated time to enjoy the full moon, the gorgeous view of the stars in the black clear skies, and the magnificent scenery at sunrise.
- To me, it was the grandest wilderness adventure and the toughest physical and mental challenge I had ever faced (so far)!
- I never doubted my ability to make it to the top. Not summiting was not something I ever considered.
- Your body can resist far more than what you think it can. Just put your mind to it.
- Do not over exert yourself. Just listen to your body but push yourself a little then a little more, and listen to your guide.
- It is true that most all trekkers were of the age of my kids, but I did not feel out of place.

Appendix I: Mt. Kilimanjaro Statistics

- The success rates as reported by Kilimanjaro National Park are as follows:
 - All climbers, all routes 45%
 - All climbers, all 5 day routes 27%
 - All climbers, all 6 day routes 44%
 - All climbers, all 7 days routes 64%
 - All climbers, all 8 day routes 85%
 - All climbers, all 9 day routes (no data)
- “The awkward truth is that each year about 10 people die attempting to climb Kilimanjaro, and several thousands have to be carried down the mountain before making it to the top. The majority of deaths and evacuations result from altitude sickness”.

Source: <http://greatist.com/fitness/i-climbed-kilimanjaro-and-all-i-got-was-life-changing-experience>

Appendix II: Kilimanjaro "Anthem"

SWAHILI

Jambo! Jambo bwana!
Habari gani? Mzuri sana!
Wageni, mwakaribishwa!
Kilimanjaro? Hakuna matata!
Tembea pole pole. Hakuna matata!
Utafika salama. Hakuna matata!
Kunywa maji mengi. Hakuna matata!
Kilimanjaro, Kilimanjaro,
Kilimanjaro, mlima mrefu sana.
Na Mawenzi, na Mawenzi,
Na Mawenzi, mlima mrefu sana.
Ewe nyoka, ewe nyoka!
Ewe nyoka, mbona wanizunguka.
Wanizunguka, wanizunguka
Wanizunguka wataka kunila nyama

ENGLISH

Hello! Hello sir!
How are you? Very well!
Guests, you are welcome!
Kilimanjaro? No trouble!
Walk slowly, slowly. No trouble!
You'll get there safe. No trouble!
Drink plenty of water. No trouble!
Kilimanjaro! Kilimanjaro!
Kilimanjaro, such a high mountain.
Also Mawenzi, also Mawenzi!
Also Mawenzi such a high mountain.
Like a snake, like a snake!
Like a snake you wrap around me
You wrap around me, you wrap around me
Trying to eat me like a piece of meat

Appendix III: Kilimanjaro Select Flora Observations

- Plants at Mt. Kilimanjaro have invented ingenious tricks to withstand the extreme weather variations:

☐ Nobilia: In extreme temperature variations between day and night, Nobilia wraps itself up to protect its leaves from the biting frost then unfolds the next morning to absorb the warmth of the rising sun.



Annex III: Kilimanjaro Select Flora Observations

- ❑ Mackinder's Gladiolus: Soft, beautiful, and tender, yet tougher than what they look.



Annex III: Kilimanjaro Select Flora Observations

- Plants at Mt. Kilimanjaro have invented ingenious tricks to withhold the extreme weather variations:
 - ❑ Giant groundsel: They live over a 100 years because they can shield themselves from the cold. When their long, green leaves die, they do not fall off. Instead, they wrap themselves around the branch, thus insulating the tree like a layer of fur.





Friday , February 10, 2017 at 08:57 a.m.
Temperature -19 °C, Wind Chill factor bringing it close to -23°C.