

Climb Mount KILIMANJARO

The trekking guide to Africa's highest mountain

Kilimanjaro: 7 Day CMK Unique Rongai Route overview

Day 1

Breakfast at your hotel is served from 0700. Please ensure that you have packed your bags before breakfast, have handed over to reception any extra luggage that you won't need on the mountain, and have deposited your valuables into the hotel's safe.

Transfer and Registration. You will normally be collected at 0730 from your hotel. In the event that we have to collect climbers from other hotels before collecting you, we may need to amend this to 0800. You will drive for two hours to Marangu Gate where you complete registration formalities.

From Marangu you transfer to Nalemuru (aka Nare Moru), north-east Kilimanjaro, a further 68km and 2 hours 20 minutes on bad roads (though the route is quickly being improved, so the journey time may have been reduced by the time of your trek). Climbers should have their passport numbers so they can register but are advised to have kept their passports and valuables in the hotel safe (excluding the amount they will budget for tipping their crew). Climbers under 16 years of age, however, are required to present their passports to the KINAPA gate staff as proof of their eligibility to climb on a concessionary permit. Failure to do this will result in a cash surcharge being imposed by KINAPA of US\$590 per under-16 climber.

Lunch is usually provided at the gate, though if your progress along the road is slow you may have it on the way, usually near the village of Tarakea. Please note that following any transfer it is customary to tip the driver (US\$5 - 10 per group is usual).

Around 1400 you start trekking from the Rongai Start Point at 1996m, located 600 metres south-west of the Nalemuru junction. Today you ascend to First Cave Campsite (aka Simba Camp) at 2626m, a trek of **6.7km**. It is usual to arrive in camp shortly before sunset but in the event of road obstacles, recent road damage caused by rains or unforeseen delays, climbers are advised to carry their headtorches in their daysacks.

Day 2

In the morning you travel from Simba Camp to the lunch stop at Second Cave (3482m), a distance of **5.8km** from Simba. A sheltered two- to three-course lunch seated at a table in a mess tent is the usual daily practice on our climbs, though in good weather we dispense with the mess tent and arrange the table and chairs in the open air. After lunch you depart from the main Rongai Route to trek a further **6.0km** to Kikelewa Camp (3679m), where you camp overnight. It is not uncommon to experience a mild headache today, though this usually abates within some 2 hours of arriving in camp. Please discuss with your guide if your headache becomes persistent or intensifies.

Day 3

Today you travel only a short distance of **3.7km** and gain only 624 metres in altitude from Kikelewa to Mawenzi Tarn at 4303m; nonetheless, you end the day 320 metres higher than on the corresponding day on the Machame Route. You set up camp close to the water feature, nestled between two spurs on the western side of Mawenzi. In the afternoon your guide or one of the crew members will lead you on an acclimatisation excursion over the spur to your west, from where beautiful views towards Kibo can be had in clear weather.

Day 4

This morning you leave the official routes altogether to surmount Mawenzi's north-west ridge and move around Mawenzi's western flanks, crossing the high eastern edge of the Saddle from where some of the rarest, clearest and most dramatic views of both peaks can be enjoyed. The highest point on this excursion is 4614m and you will have covered **3.6km** in distance to reach this point from your camp this morning. From here you descend a distance of **6.5km** to the campsite just above Horombo Huts (3714m), where you will stop for the night, thereby affording the greatest 'climb-high sleep-low' differential on any route on the mountain: exactly 900 metres. Compare this with the 658-metre differential on the Machame Route!

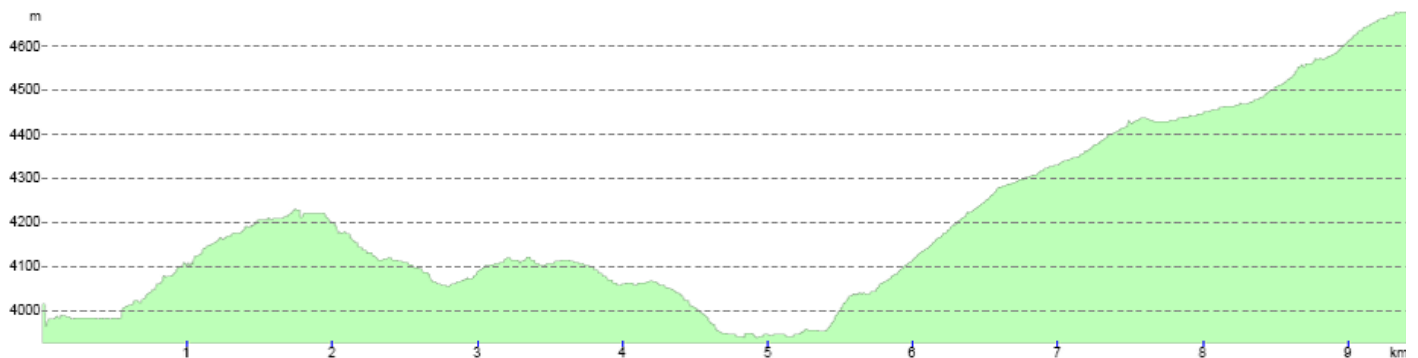
Spending the night at this lower altitude, in a significantly more oxygen-rich environment than last night, ensures that the body has sufficient time to be able to make the necessary adaptive changes. Tomorrow morning, even though you may feel quite tired, you will nonetheless be better prepared for your approach to the high camp, Barafu, than you would have been on any other route.

Day 5

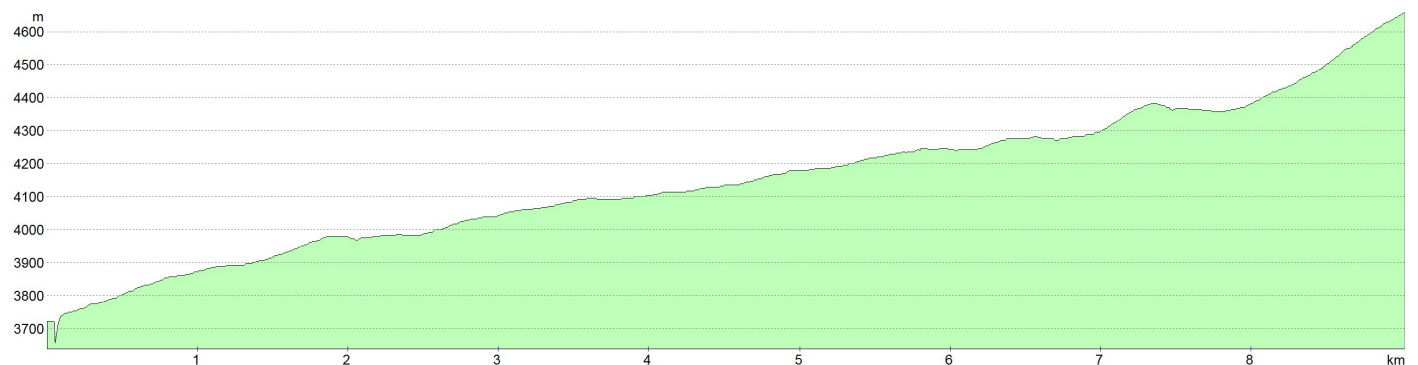
This morning you begin to follow a section of the Marangu Route that is used to approach Kibo Huts. However, after **1.9km** you turn to the west away from all other trail users, gaining the South Summit Circuit that is effectively exclusive to CMK and that avoids the crowding associated with the regular routes. From this junction a further **7.1 km** brings you to Barafu Huts (4681m) along the smoothest and most gradual approach by which it is possible to reach Barafu. Remember that you have already acclimatised reasonably well to the altitude by visiting 4614m yesterday.

The most optimal route choice today would be one that ensures that you arrive at the high camp with as little unnecessary effort expended as possible so that you are as fresh as possible for your night-time assault on the summit.

In order to demonstrate how this is achieved by this unique route variation, it is helpful to look at two profiles, the first being the rather severe and exhausting undulations found on the approach to Barafu from the Lemosho, Shira, Machame and Umbwe routes, over the spurs of Kibo's southern flanks; and the second being our own approach to Barafu on this Unique Rongai Route. It will be very easily seen from these GPS-captured cross sections that there are three significant inclines and two unnecessary and considerable losses in elevation on the other approaches to Barafu, accounting for wasted energy - at a time when you should be aiming to conserve this as much as possible!



The approach to Barafu from Barranco (this leg is common to Machame, Lemosho, Shira and Umbwe)



The approach to Barafu from Horombo via the South Summit Circuit (this leg is unique to the CMK Rongai Route)

Day 6

On the usual Rongai Route the assault would be via the loose scree slope above Kibo Huts. Assaults from Kibo Huts have a much lower success rate because the footing is so unstable and traction is lost with almost every step. According to KINAPA's 2004 statistics the proportion of people giving up and turning around at Gilman's Point, at the top of the slope above Kibo Huts, is a staggering 38%. The assault up such a loose surface is exhausting and many people find this demoralizing. Also, when reaching Gilman's Point on the standard Rongai Route approach there is still quite a lot of scrambling and plenty of undulations, before climbers finally approach the summit ridge to Uhuru. This deters many people and is a significant factor in the high failure rate of the standard Rongai Route.

Your assault route however, begins at Barafu Huts and follows a ridge, as opposed to a loose scree slope, where the ground underfoot is much firmer, affording far better footing and being less tiring. An experienced mountaineer will usually ascend a mountain via a ridge and descend a scree slope, not *vice versa*. Assaulting via Barafu is therefore a much more logical option from a mountaineer's perspective. While it is true that two thirds of the way to Stella Point (5752m) from Barafu the ridge does indeed dissolve into a loose scree slope that necessitates zigzagging, it is nonetheless a much more successful assault option than the conventional Rongai/Marangu Route assault as the amount of the Barafu route that is on loose ground is relatively small.

The assault. Around midnight (your guide will judge the exact time that is optimal for you based on your pace thus far) you quit camp for the assault via Stella Point (5752m) to the summit. Tonight is very difficult - particularly the final 500m - and you'll need to commit to fight for the summit. You will inevitably feel like giving up and going to sleep. This is normal but can be overcome with perseverance. When resting please ensure you only stand or sit and **do not lie down or close your eyes**. Please trust your guide at this time; they are very adept at judging whether your condition will allow safe progress or whether you have succumbed to a potentially dangerous condition and to proceed will not be safe. Nausea and headaches are normal and around a quarter of climbers will vomit at or near Stella Point. While very uncomfortable, these are not symptoms that are indicative of being at risk, *per se*. The onset of cerebral and pulmonary oedema are marked by distinctive early warning symptoms that your guide can identify. Please maintain regular dialogue with your guide and frequently update him on how you are feeling.

When you reach Stella Point you will sit and rest. At this point the body often thinks you have finished your uphill fight and will be trying to coerce you into giving up and turning around. While you may genuinely believe that you have already exhausted your reserves in reaching this point, this is actually very unlikely to be so. Remember that you are only 143 vertical metres short of the summit, the journey from here is much less steep, and you have plenty of time for further pauses. If you do feel the need to give up at Stella Point please proceed towards the summit for just two minutes before making your final decision. In most cases this act of re-establishing momentum is enough to persuade the mind and body to co-operate with your intentions and you will ordinarily find hidden reserves for a final push, reserves that you were not aware you still had.

On the summit I will advise how much time you can spend there in consideration of your condition, your timings, and the weather. The brain does not function very intelligently at this altitude so please remember to take many photographs in all directions or you will probably regret not having done so at a later stage.

From the summit you will turn around and descend to Stella Point. From Stella you now follow the ridge line along to Gilman's Point, and descend using the Rongai's normal ascent route. Descending a loose scree slope is logical; it is far easier on the knees and as the ground collapses underfoot if you take short quick strides it's easy to maintain momentum. You will take regular rests, pausing to photograph the Saddle beneath us and Kenya to our left. At Kibo Huts you have a short refreshment break before continuing to Horombo (3705m) where you overnight again.

Distances on summit day:

Barafu to Stella Point: **3.3km**

Stella Point to Summit: **1.2km**

Summit to Gilman's Point: **2.0km**

Gilman's Point to Kibo Huts: **3.4km**

Kibo Huts to Horombo: **9.6km**

Total summit day's distance: **19.5km**

Day 7

This morning you descend from Horombo to Marangu Gate (1860m) via Mandara Huts (2715m). The day's distance is **19.7km** along very well maintained trails. (Horombo to Mandara is 11.6km and Mandara to Marangu Gate is 8.1km). This is the standard Rongai descent route and the Marangu ascent and descent route.

At Marangu Gate it is customary for climbers to tip their support staff. Climbers nowadays tend to tip their support crew 10% of what they have paid for their climb.

Arriving at Marangu Gate at around 1300-1600, you are collected and transferred back to our hotels in Arusha.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions about this itinerary.

Please note that the altitudes may differ slightly from those listed in the book and are based on current studies.

Henry Stedman

Contact for visa purposes (not necessarily your actual hotel):

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