

## Gavin's trek up Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania October 6-16, 2012



Due to mix up on the part of the travel company I was the only person with any HWU connections on this expedition, which I undertook to raise money for the Heriot Watt Alumni Fund. That wasn't a problem though – the rest of the party were employees of the JD Wetherspoon's pub and hotel chain and were raising money for a cancer charity. They made me very welcome and were great fun. I hope to catch up with them again in the future.

Perhaps inspired by images I had seen of joyous trekkers clustered round the carved wooden sign that marks the summit (see left and later) I had always been fascinated by the challenge of scaling the mountain – so when the Heriot-Watt Challenge came along it was too good a chance to miss.

The route we followed was the Machame route – also known as the 'Whisky route'. This route has the highest success rate as it offers good opportunities to acclimatise the altitude by climbing high during the day but sleeping at lower altitudes. The trail took us up through the various zones of the mountain – forest, heather, moorland, alpine desert and finally arctic, through the changing (and diminishing) vegetation until after 4 days we reached the Barafu camp from where we would begin our final push for the summit. Here's a quick summary of the trek with a few snaps.



After arriving in the town in Moshi we spent the next day on a short acclimatisation walk up to a village in the foothills of Kilimanjaro.



The next day we set off for the national park to start our trek up the mountain proper, led by our chief guides Jonas and Raymond, and their assistants and supported by an army of porters, cooks. Some of the local wildlife proved troublesome....



That night we stopped at the Shira camp. The tents were just a bit small for someone of my dimensions – but I coped!





The next day we trekked up through the 'heather zone' – a bit like Scotland except the heather was 5 feet high.



That evening we got our first proper views of the summit. Things were getting distinctly chillier.



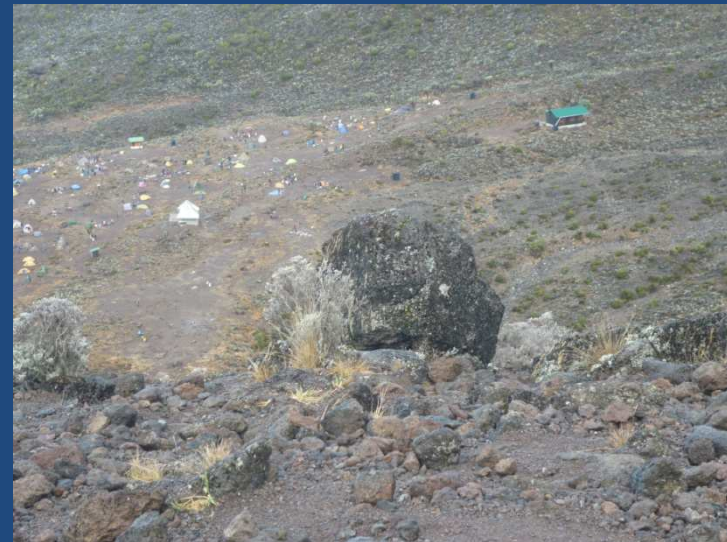
The next day saw us climb up to well over 4000 meters before descending down to camp by the foot of the Baranco wall. Weather distinctly dreich and I felt quite at home.

Some quite strange-looking vegetation up at this height!



Next morning saw us scrambling up the Baranco wall before skirting the western side of the mountain on the way to the Barafu camp. For the first time I started to think I might actually make it all the way to the top.

On the right is the view from the top of the Baranco wall – looking down at the camp we'd just left.....



The assembled party – with summit in background

Lunch on day 4 –my dietary requirements had been heeded obviously!



At midnight on day 4 we set off on the final 1300m ascent of the summit. We didn't make it to Stella Point in time for the sunrise but it wouldn't have made any difference since visibility was pretty terrible. Here I am at Stella Point – the second highest peak.

And finally at 9.15 we got to the summit – to find that the wooden sign had been replaced by an easy-maintenance aluminium one. Well you can't stand in the way of progress.



Following a rapid descent via the Mweka route we got back to the hotel in Moshi early on the Sunday afternoon. A shower and a shave have never felt so good! Beer and pizza never tasted so good.

A great party that night with most people going in the pool whether they wanted to or not!



So all in all, a great experience which I shall always remember!

Big thanks to Jonas, Raymond, William, Matthew and all the Really Wild Staff in Tanzania who were excellent throughout and couldn't do enough to help us.

Thanks also to all the JD Wetherspoon treckers who made my trip so enjoyable – particularly tent-mate Alex (far left in adjacent photo) for putting up with my snoring.

Any downsides? - not really other than 'challenging' toilets in the camps and the demise of the wooden sign at the top!