

Mt. Kilimanjaro Trip Report

March, 2007

Day 1: We just arrived at Umbwe Cave to camp on night one. Today's hike was a steep but easy one of about 4 hours up to 9348' elevation starting from the Umbwe trailhead at 5576'. This was through the rainforest, which has been living up to its name for several hours now. We had lots of pea size hail too.



Our guide is Freddy and we have six others with us (an assistant guide and five porters including one cook). These guys are amazing, carrying 60 lbs+ of weight on their heads. We're only carrying daypacks. They set up tent and I'm in it now while they finish everything in the rain.

Ben Powell is with me again on this trek. He and I have hiked many times: the Wasatch Range in Utah, Half Dome in Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, and Volcans Acatenango & Feugo in Guatemala. Ben's a professor of economics at San Jose State University.

Everyone says Umbwe is a hard route, but we both thought today was pretty easy. The guide wants you to go slow so you can acclimatize easier. Last night we met a guy at the hotel who came down sick from AMS (Advanced Mountain Sickness) after only two days and had to evacuate the mountain. Hope we feel ok.

Ben and I spent 5 days in Nairobi at the Mont Pelerin Society meeting (we are both members). It was a pretty good meeting. It's good to have a job like this.

Day 2: We awoke to a beautiful morning at 6 a.m. and began to pack up. Breakfast was toast, sausage, eggs (for Ben—I hate eggs) plus tea. Last night's dinner was pasta with a beef sauce—it was decent.

We began with Freddy at 8:15 heading for Barranco camp at 12956'. The trail is pretty steep but again not too hard. It follows a ridge most of the way. We went pole pole (Swahili for slowly slowly) but still beat our porters by two whole hours. Freddy was pretty mad at them for being so slow! We can't complain—it's just amazing the weight they're carrying.



Ben and I had planned to hike up some to get some more altitude (hike-high/sleep-low is the motto for acclimating). But rain came in again and we decided to stay put.

I did something embarrassing today. We were hiking on a fairly narrow ridge on a section of solid rock. I



made a little jump across a gap instead of taking two safe steps. The next thing I know I'm falling head first off the edge! Thankfully, I fell into a mossy spot about 8 feet down. It softened the landing and I was ok. I'll probably have a sore neck and shoulder to show for it tomorrow though. I need to be more careful!

We left the rainforest today and entered the heath and moorland zone. And the camp at Barranco is at the beginning of the alpine desert. Kilimanjaro has 5 climatic/ecological zones: lower forest and farmland, upper rainforest, heath and moorland, alpine desert, and arctic. There are about a dozen different camps here at Barranco. Most of the trekkers came via the Machame route and they are on day 3; they will decamp tomorrow, but we're going to spend an extra day hiking up to Lava Tower and back. This is just for additional acclimation.

Day 3: I called home last night on the cell. Crazy to get phone reception at this elevation.

Ben and I slept amazingly well—nine hours. It was cold, about freezing, but warmed up quickly as soon as the sun rose over the ridge. Unfortunately Kilimanjaro was clouded in all night. I'm hoping to get a good night shot. The moon is nearly full right now.

After breakfast, we left for Lava Tower (15088'). Freddy I think



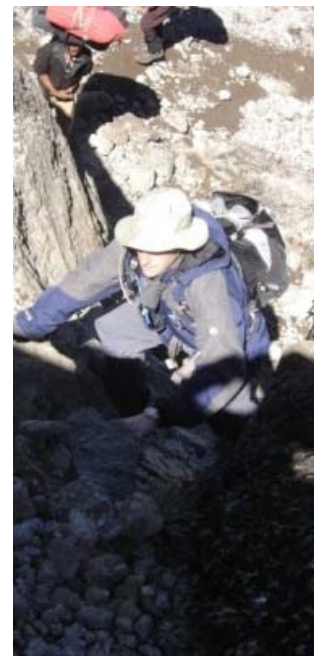
has been feeling us out for how strong we are and suggested going up all the way to Arrow Glacier camp (16236') just below the Western Breach route to the summit. The Western Breach is closed since last year when someone died from falling rocks. This is the highest elevation either of us will have ever been.



We were both having on and off again headaches from the altitude but drinking lots of water seemed to stave off the worst of it. Unfortunately, we ran out of water on the way down and really struggled at the end. This was the toughest day so far. But we managed and after lunch and a brief rest (and a Coke) we felt 100% again. We're pretty confident that we'll make it but now know that summit day will take everything we have.

(Oh, btw, Ben stepped in a huge pile of human crap today! Some of the more expensive guide companies offer portable toilets to their clients. I bet they don't know that the porters just chuck the bag of crap over the rocks.)

Day 4: Slept well again and left Barranco camp at 9 a.m. heading for Karranga camp (13120'). This day begins with a very cool 800' wall to climb. Nothing about this is particularly technical but we definitely had to use all fours in places. After we got to the top of the Barranco wall, Ben asked if we could follow some trail marking cairns up the mountain on an old lava flow instead of following the undulating main trail down to Karranga. Freddy agreed and said we could go up and then traverse on the moonscape terrain all the way over to above the Karranga valley before descending. This is what we did. The climb up was awesome and I liked the scree traverse -- the crater rim was just 4000' up above us. Ben doesn't much like descending on scree though. It's funny because he's a much better and





more confident climber than me. Freddy has been picking up the pace too. Clearly he thinks we're good enough. Yesterday's elective hike to Arrow Glacier and today's elective hike up and around the mountain slope instead of down the valley indicates his confidence in us.

In fact, he's just offered to let us summit tomorrow afternoon instead of the following morning. We would leave Karranga early and stop briefly at Barafu camp (15088') before going for the summit in the afternoon. Our original plan calls for us to stay at Barafu leaving at

midnight for a sunrise summit the next morning. The advantage of his idea is that the temps are much warmer and winds much less during the day. We also would not have any crowds on the summit since almost everyone does the midnight thing. The other advantage is that we'd be able to get off the mountain a day earlier. (Beer awaits us at the bottom!) Ben is not too keen on the idea because we'd lose some hours of acclimatization at Barafu. I don't think we need it. Right now we're disagreeing about this, but I told him the default plan is to stick with the original midnight ascent so it's up to him to decide if we go early.

Ben just came in and said, "F\$%& it, let's go tomorrow." So tomorrow it is!

It's raining again – 3 out of 4 days so far. Officially rainy season begins in a couple weeks but it's early this year. I like climbing mountains but spending half your day in a tent is not so much fun.

The summit day plan now is to leave Karranga at about 7 a.m. to get to Barafu at about 9 a.m. Then after resting a bit we'd leave for the summit about 11 a.m. making the summit after about 5 hours.



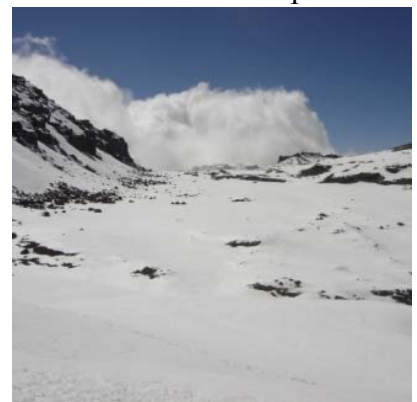
Day 5: We did it!! Uhuru Peak, 19340'!

As planned we left Barafu at 11:15 just as that morning's trekkers were coming back from the summit. One guy, an American from the accent, asked us with an incredulous look, "Where are you guys going?" I replied, "To the top. Back by dark." His face wrinkled and he muttered "Good luck," but that wasn't what he was thinking. He was thinking, "you guys are f-in' nuts!" I sure would like to run into that jerk again!



The trail is relatively easy loose rock with lots of switchbacks. And as we continued it got progressively harder physically. The last two hours or so was little more than a shuffle—maybe 8-10 inches with each step. Pole. Pole. After 4 hours 45 minutes we reached Stella Point on the crater

rim. What a sight! The crater is HUGE. The glaciers are HUGE! (It's hard to believe the scientists who say they'll be all gone in 20-30 years but what do I know.)



The real goal is Uhuru Peak—still a couple hundred meters up over fresh ice and snow. I'm not embarrassed to say that I was pretty freaked about the ice and even thought about not going on. But Ben brought me back to my senses. At 4:45 we reached Uhuru Peak. Took some pics by the famous sign and left after just a few minutes. We were both having mild headaches and some nausea from the altitude. It was cold but not that bad. It was probably in the 20s with a 20 mph wind.



The way down was uneventful and thankfully we veered off to take a long scree field down. It's almost like skiing. I love this kind of thing, but again Ben doesn't like scree fields much. I got out in front of him with Freddy (the assistant guide stayed with Ben) and arrived at camp about a half hour before he did just as dark was descending. Freddy was barely tired but he looked over and said, "Babu, you are very strong, very strong." This was quite a compliment coming from him!

We ate (very little) and hit the sack right away. I can tell you that I didn't regret our decision to go up during the day when I heard the other trekkers leaving around midnight. It was COLD! And the winds were brutal (40-60 mph easily).



Day 6: We awoke at 6 a.m. and left camp at 8 a.m. It was a long and hard downhill trek of about 9500' of elevation loss. Going down is so much harder on the feet than going up. Anyway we got to the Mweka gate (5500') (Mweka is the standard descent route) about noon. Freddy was bragging to the other guides about how strong his clients were and we got lots of compliments. The park official gave us our "gold certificate" signifying our successful summit and we headed off by bus for the village of Moshi for a shower and beers!

Day 7: Freddy took us around town for much of the day to buy souvenirs and of course drink more beer. Unfortunately, Ben lost his camera sometime yesterday after we got to the hotel. We think he dropped it and it was simply never turned in. So we lost tons of great pictures.



In the evening we met up with Mike, a staffer at the Heritage Foundation who was at the same meeting in Nairobi. He reached the summit the day after we did.

Tomorrow we have an 8 hour bus trip back to Nairobi and a flight home the next day. I'm ready to go home.