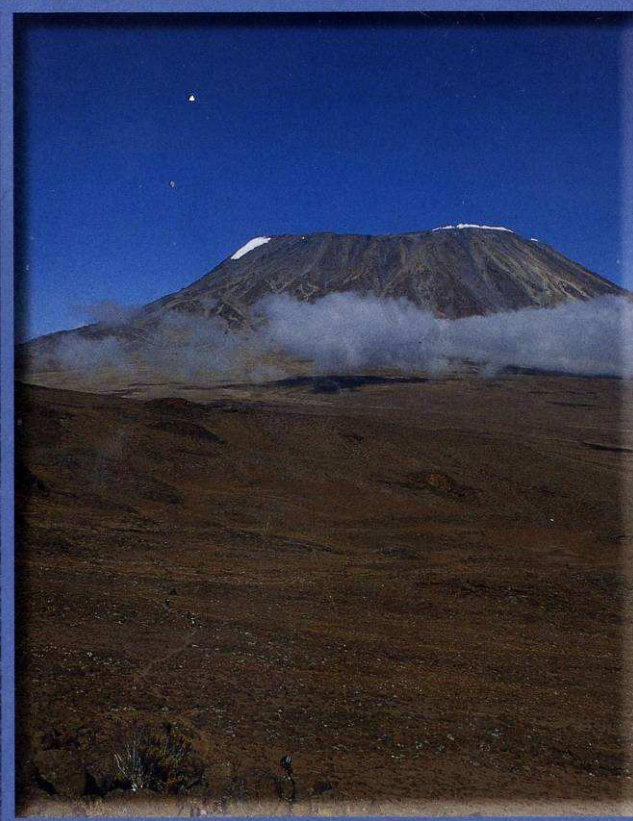


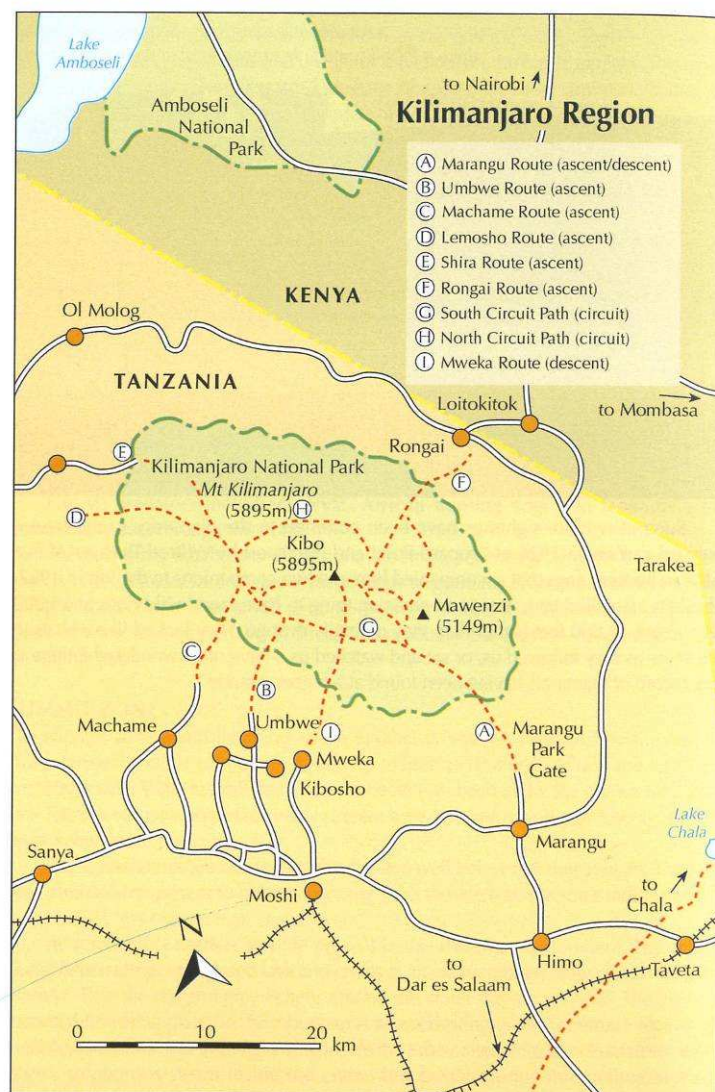
A CICERONE GUIDE
by Alexander Stewart

KILIMANJARO

A COMPLETE TREKKER'S GUIDE




CICERONE



PART 4 CLIMBING KILIMANJARO

There are a number of ways to approach and climb Kilimanjaro. Six forest and heath/moorland routes begin on the lower slopes and ascend to 3500–4000m. These routes then usually merge with the South Circuit Path before linking to one of three final summit ascent routes. From the summit there are two separate descent routes that are affiliated to each of the earlier climbs. The easiest way to make sense of this jumble is to study the Kilimanjaro Region Map.

Typically, when you sign up with an outfitter to tackle Kilimanjaro, you sign up for a particular combination of routes; the most common uses the Marangu Route as both an ascent and descent route. If you sign up for one of the other paths, you will agree to tackle a particular combination of ascent and descent routes in advance of your departure. Thus you might wish to undertake the Machame-Mweka Route, which would climb the mountain along the Machame Route and then return to its foot along the Mweka Route.

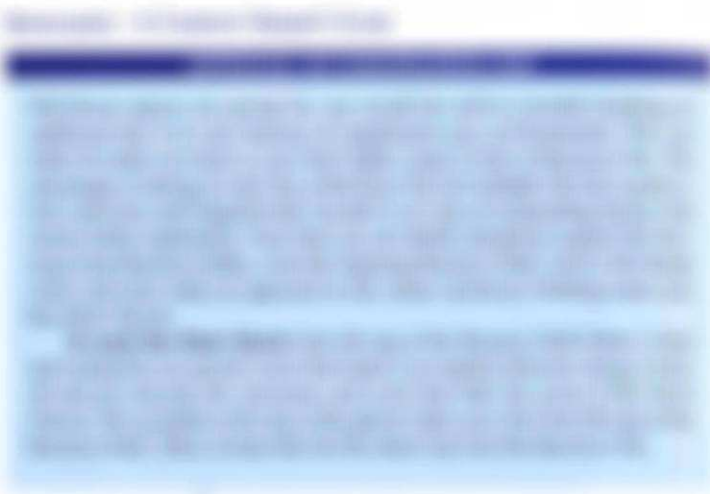
Each of the **six initial ascent routes**, the Marangu, Umbwe, Machame, Lemosho, Shira and Rongai Routes are all detailed below (please see Appendix A for the route comparison chart). In addition, there are full descriptions of the **three final ascent routes** to the crater rim; the Normal/Marangu Route, Barafu Route and Western Breach Route are all outlined. Furthermore, there is a description of the **Summit Circuit Paths** that circle Kibo at around 4000m.

After a **full description of the summit**, there follow explanations of the **two descent routes** on Kilimanjaro: the Marangu, and Mweka Routes.

'IT WAS HELL. IT WASN'T FUN. BUT EVERYTHING TURNED OUT WELL.'

In June 2005 the American Sean Burch broke the record for the fastest ascent of Kilimanjaro. Burch, a fitness expert, completed the Marangu Route to the summit in 5 hours, 28 minutes and 48 seconds, shaving just under eight minutes off Austrian Christian Strangl's previous best time. Burch trained for this extreme challenge for more than a year and spent eight days acclimatising on the mountain, running laps around the crater and skipping on the summit. He then rested for several days at the foot of the mountain, using meditation techniques to focus on the trial ahead. When asked how it felt to reach the top, he commented that, 'When I got to the summit ridge I started sprinting to the sign as fast as I could, and by the time I reached the top, I immediately puked. So the feeling wasn't celebratory. It's now just starting to sink in as an accomplishment.'

Under no circumstance should you try to emulate this feat!



Southern Icefields seen on the traverse to Uhuru



C: MACHAME ROUTE

Time on the mountain (ascent, summit ascent and descent):	6 days
Length:	61km
Height Gain:	2800
Grade:	Hard
Start:	Machame Gate
Finish:	Barafu Hut
Summit ascent routes:	Western Breach or Barafu Route
Optional extra days:	Karanga Valley on the way to Barafu hut if using Barafu Route to the crater rim. No obvious place on Western Breach final ascent route
Descent route:	Mweka Route
End trek:	Mweka Gate or Kidia Village

The Machame Route is the westernmost route to scale the southern slopes of Kilimanjaro. It is often considered to be the finest forest/moorland ascent route on the mountain. Hans Meyer wrote that, 'Without doubt Kibo is most imposing as seen from the west. Here it rises in solemn majesty, and the eye is not distracted by the sister peak of Mawenzi, of which nothing is to be seen but a single jutting pinnacle. The effect is enhanced by the magnificent flowing sweep of the outline, the dazzling extent of the icecap, the vast stretch of the forest, the massive breadth of the base, and the jagged crest of the Shira Spur as it branches away towards the west'.

When teamed with either an ascent of the Western Breach or more commonly with the Barafu Route to the crater rim and the Mweka descent route, this is one of the most lovely, complete outings on the mountain.

The route is slightly more challenging than some of the other forest/moorland routes but, like the other routes described here, it does not require any technical ability. Although the terrain is in parts tougher to negotiate than on other routes, the variety of vegetation, scenery and the stunning views of the Shira Plateau, the Western Breach and Kibo make this a highly attractive option.

The Machame and Mweka Routes used to simply be rough tracks used by the park rangers or groups of mountaineers looking to access the technical climbing



Porters ascending through the forest towards Machame hut – the trail has been significantly improved

routes on this side of Kibo. Although improvements were made to the Machame trail in the 1970s, it wasn't until the 1990s that it began to gain in popularity as people recognised its myriad charms and began to appreciate that it offers you a better chance to acclimatise whilst ascending. Subsequently, it has become known as the 'whiskey route', since it is harder, more expensive and much more intoxicating than the 'Coca-Cola route' (Marangu Route). A lot of work has been done in recent years to improve the track conditions and promote this route as an alternative to the Marangu Route, largely to reduce the pressure of numbers on

the main tourist path. The result has been a significant upgrade in the track quality, which in turn has ensured that there has been a marked increase in foot traffic on this side of the mountain. The total number of users has multiplied considerably and the campsites have swelled under the wave of new interest.

The success rate for reaching Uhuru has traditionally always been higher on the Machame Route than on the Marangu Route. No doubt this has been at least partly due to the fact that it provides a longer ascent and that consequently you are allowed to acclimatise better ahead of the final summit bid. It is also likely that the greater success was also in part due to only more experienced groups choosing to ascend Kilimanjaro via this route. With the popularisation of the Machame Route, the percentage of people that successfully summit may fall as less capable groups opt to try this ascent route rather than the traditional Marangu Route.

The path begins climbing slowly through thick, leafy forest on the west flank of Kilimanjaro before emerging on the moorland. It then takes in the dramatic Shira Plateau, providing a glimpse of an unusual side of the mountain, before joining the South Circuit Path and contouring around the southern face of Kibo. The final summit bid can be made either via the perilous Western Breach, from Lava Tower and Arrow Glacier Hut, or, more usually, via the Barafu Route, which is reached by circumnavigating the peak beneath the spectacular Southern Icefields. Descent from the summit is then conducted on the Mweka Route, which drops quickly and steeply off the southern side of Kilimanjaro by way of the Mweka Hut to finish at the Mweka Gate.

To the Trailhead

The Machame Route begins from Machame Gate, adjacent to Machame village on the south-western side of the mountain. All of the registration formalities can be completed at the national park office here. Park fees are also paid at this point. Your outfitter will ensure that you are ferried to the gate by bus.

Machame village is 25km from the town of Moshi. To reach the village, follow the tarmac road from Moshi first west and then north for 45 minutes. Machame village itself is a straggling affair set amid fertile farmland. The final 3km approach to Machame Gate is through a series of banana and coffee plantations and via a small stretch of natural forest; it takes 15 minutes. The road that scales the final ridge to bring you to the gate is only a dirt track, but it is clear and well maintained. The gate itself is at 1800m.

There are toilet facilities at the gate. Local men are often stationed by the gate in a bid to sell walkers water, gaiters or trekking poles, some fashioned from tree branches.

Huts and accomodation

Everyone on the Machame Route is **obliged to camp**. Although there are a series of old corrugated metal uniports along the trail, walkers are not intended to use them. The uniports are all old and generally in a state of disrepair. Adjacent to each of these huts is an area cleared for camping. There are long-drop toilet facilities at each of the campsites, as well as, with the exception of the Barafu Hut, good water sources. Barafu is dry and all water supplies must be carried to this point.

The basic Machame Hut is a tatty uniport. There is a park ranger stationed here who will require you to register once you arrive at the campsite. The Shira Hut is a similar basic structure that is in such a state that most groups actually choose to camp south of the hut by the Shira Cave or, even further south, at the Shira Camp. The Barranco Hut, erected in 1966, is idyllically located but it is nonetheless a little shabby. There are two small uniports at Barafu that also date from the 1960s. Set amidst a desolate lava landscape, they are as inhospitable as they look.

Stage	From-to	Distance	Time	Height Gain
1	Machame Gate (1800m) Machame Hut (3000m)	10km	5–6hrs	+1200m
2	Machame Hut (3000m) Shira Camp (3840m)	7km	5–6hrs	+840m
3	Shira Camp (3840m) Barranco Hut (3950m)	10km	5–6hrs	+110m
4	Barranco Hut (3950m) Barafu Hut (4600m)	8km	7–8hrs	+650m

STAGE 1

Machame Gate to Machame Hut

This is a fairly gentle introduction to climbing Kilimanjaro, which passes through some of the finest forest scenery to encircle the mountain. Ascending steadily on a straightforward path, you are transported through lush montane cloud forest to arrive at the Machame Hut on the edge of the heath/moorland zone.

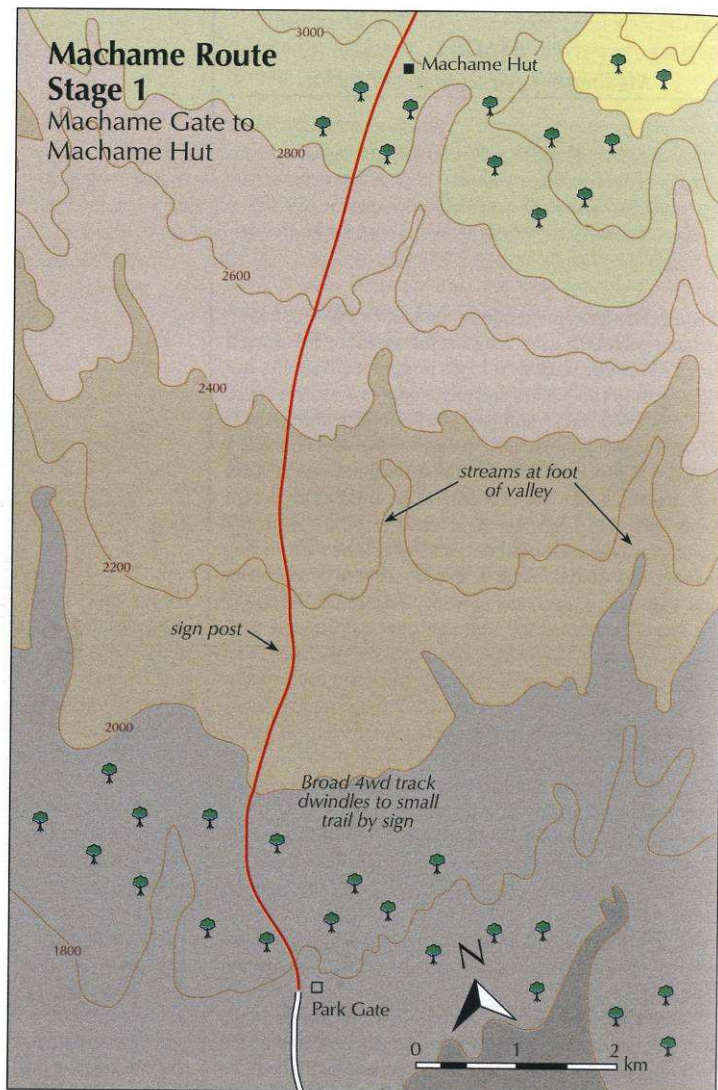
Having completed the requisite formalities and registration requirements at the gate, you **start the ascent by following a broad 4WD dirt track** as it loops around the warden's hut and begins to climb north and then north-east into the forest.

The 4WD track rapidly dwindles and within 3km is reduced to a single track. At the end of the 4WD track is a **signpost**. Reached 15 minutes after leaving the gate, it states that the Machame Route is only to be used as an ascent route. The path from this stage used to be a rough and unkempt way to access Kilimanjaro that involved scrambling over tree roots and up slippery, uneven sections of mountain-side. However, a great deal of work has been carried out on this lower section of the route and the path is now well graded and even. Roots have been covered or cleared and drainage ditches dug alongside the track to ensure that it doesn't degenerate into a river channel during the heavy rains. In some places the new track crosses the remains of the older path and you can see just how different the two are. The transformation should make you appreciate just how much hard work has gone into creating the current highway. Although still ongoing at the time of writing, the path improvements are due to finish in early 2005 and should see the track up-graded all of the way from the gate to Machame Hut.

The path meanders through close, intensely green forest where lianas and mosses cover camphor, cedar, juniper and olive trees. ▶

The track rises along an increasingly vertiginous ridge, although the drops to either side are largely obscured by the thick vegetation. What breaks in the undergrowth there are reveal stunning views across forest-blanketed ridges. There is

The endemic *Impatiens kilimanjari* is also prevalent here, as are *Impatiens pseudo-viola* and *Viola eminii*. This stretch of the forest is particularly attractive. Birdlife here is abundant and vocal, although you will need to have quick eyes or boundless reserves of patience to actually see the turacos, hornbills and other avifauna that are creating the diverting sounds.



a lot of interest here and you should walk slowly and carefully, absorbing what's around you.

After 2½ hrs the trail passes through a **large clearing** in the forest that is often used as a lunch stop. There is a long-drop toilet here. After this point the gradient increases somewhat as the ridge steepens slightly. To the north you can frequently hear the sound of water, rising from the stream, which runs parallel to the track, at the foot of the ravine. It is also possible to spot a miniature waterfall to the right of the track where another small stream passes close by the foot of the ridge. The path continues to ascend through the forest on a clearly discernable path for a further 2½ hrs. As the track improvement had yet to reach this stage at the time of writing, there are still roots, ruts and other obstacles along the path to be negotiated.

The forest then thins dramatically and changes character noticeably; the larger trees loaded with moss and old man's beard merge with and then give way to giant heathers and scrub. Scarlet *Gladiolus watsonioides* and red and yellow red-hot poker lie amongst the grasses. A signpost adjacent to the track warns of potential fire hazards and the risk of dropping lit cigarettes in this often tinderbox-dry area.

After 15 minutes of this transformation beginning, the path breaks cover and arrives at **Machame Hut** (3000m).

Trees festooned with
Old Man's Beard at
Machame hut



There are a handful of tent pitches along the approach to the battered uniport, but the majority of the pitches are on the higher ground above the hut. There should be a park warden resident in the hut who will require you to sign a register upon arrival. He can also sell you water or even beer at this point. There are long-drop toilet facilities in the vicinity of the hut and water can be retrieved from a small stream found 30m from the campsite to the north-west of the site, down a steep slope.

Unfortunately the campsite is frequently cloaked in mist and low cloud during the afternoon, so views of the mountain will be obscured. Early mornings are often clear though and you will be able to see the dome of Kibo rising above a ridge to the east. Looking the other way, out across the plains to the south-west, you will be able to pick out Mount Meru amidst the morning haze.

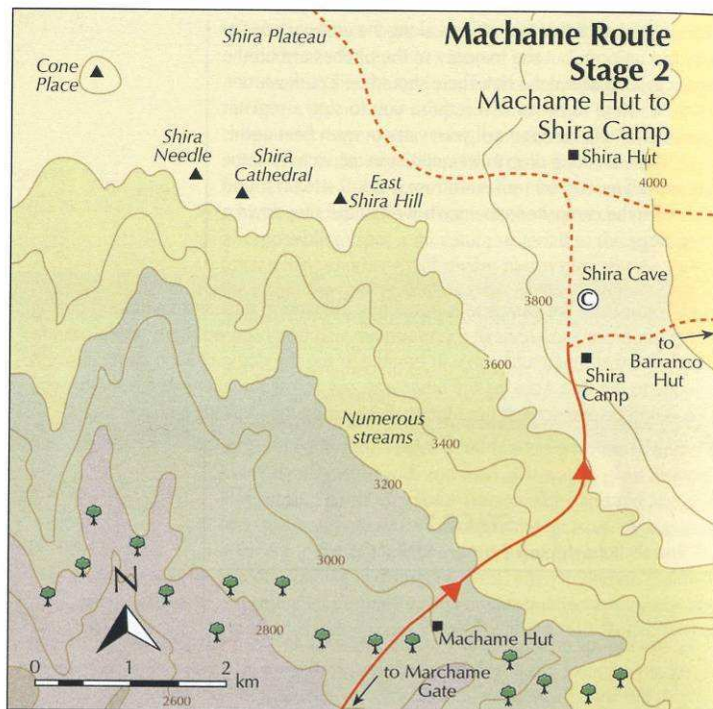
STAGE 2

Machame Hut to Shira Camp

Following an energetic start to the day and an aggressive ascent of a steep volcanic fin that juts out of the mountainside, the terrain levels and the path eases onto the Shira Plateau, an atmospheric, ancient part of Kilimanjaro.

As the early morning sun climbs above Kibo to the east of Machame Hut, **follow the path that heads north-east** towards a rocky ridge. The ridge protrudes from the mountain and is clearly visible from the Machame Hut. As you traipse up through the scrub, keep an eye open for glimpses of Kibo to your right, looming larger as you climb above the surrounding foothills. There are several clearings on the ascent, the first reached half an hour after leaving the hut site; from here you can gaze back over Machame Hut and the closely packed canopy of trees that stretch westwards towards Mount Meru.

The path loops from one side of the ridge to the other, crossing the crest of the ridge several times. As the path

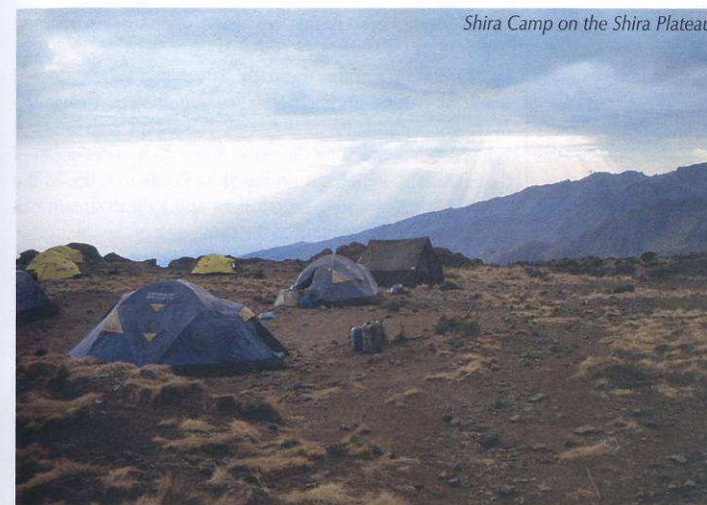


Large white-necked ravens often scavenge here and can be seen soaring above the area or hopping awkwardly from boulder to boulder in search of scraps. The route ahead is also visible from here and it is possible to make out the path as it skirts the head of the ▶

climbs, the vegetation around it alters and you find yourself leaving the skeletal trees to walk amidst hardy tussock grasses and *Senecio*. There are several large boulders on the ridge top that offer a superb view east to Kibo, although mid-morning cloud frequently mounts up and obscures the summit.

The path arrives at the foot of an **eight-metre-high semi-circular rock cliff** 2hrs after leaving Machame Hut. The ascent used to be relatively straightforward, amounting to nothing more than a scramble, but it has been further simplified with the recent creation of some cut steps in the rock face.

Having surmounted this obstacle, the path drops into a relatively sheltered, scenic **valley** dotted with *Senecio* and everlastings. This is usually the point where groups pause to have lunch. ◀



Shira Camp on the Shira Plateau

The path eases horizontally across a steep slope above the head of the valley. It crosses several small, smooth streambeds before clambering past a series of large boulders and rocky outcrops onto the flatter, easier ground of the **Shira Plateau**. The path then meanders over the plateau on an almost level gradient, winding around rocky patches of shale

◀ valley beneath the lip of the Shira Plateau, before rising north to access the plateau.

The plateau is exposed and barren, but has a number of fascinating features. From the campsite you'll be able to see the striking, jagged Shira Ridge edge to the west, about 1–1½hr walk away. The three high points on the sheer ridge, looking west to east, are the Shira Needle, Shira Cathedral and East Shira Hill. The Shira Needle has a small, precarious summit that can be reached by scrambling awkwardly up a serious rock face. The Shira Cathedral is a dramatic rock buttress set amidst a series of pinnacles and spires, with sheer drops of several hundred metres apparent on the southern face. The small rounded, grassy peak behind this ridge is the Shira Cone (3840m), which is also known as Cone Place. The highest point on the plateau is its far western extremity, where Johnsell Point (3962m) and Klute Peak are visible behind the Shira Cone. If you pan left from the end of the ridge, you'll get great views of Mount Meru to the south-west, particularly at sunset when the sun drops below the horizon adjacent to Meru's perfect cone.

Shiny black chunks of obsidian, formed by the very rapid solidification of lava, litter the Shira

Plateau and act as potent reminders that this area is in fact the remains of the oldest of the three volcanic cones that comprise the Kilimanjaro massif. Indeed the final descent to the campsite, across the caldera, is on a giant solidified lava flow, clearly visible amidst the dust and gravel beneath your feet.

and clumps of everlastings. *Lobelias* also appear here for the first time. ◀

Continuing north, the path arrives at a rough cleared patch of ground an hour after the lunch stop. This is the overnight campsite for most groups. The **Shira Camp** (3840m) is just south of the Shira Cave and about 30 minutes south of the Shira Hut, which sits on the Shira Route to Kibo. At the campsite there are long-drop toilets, and a clean stream can be found some 10 minutes to the south-east of the site.

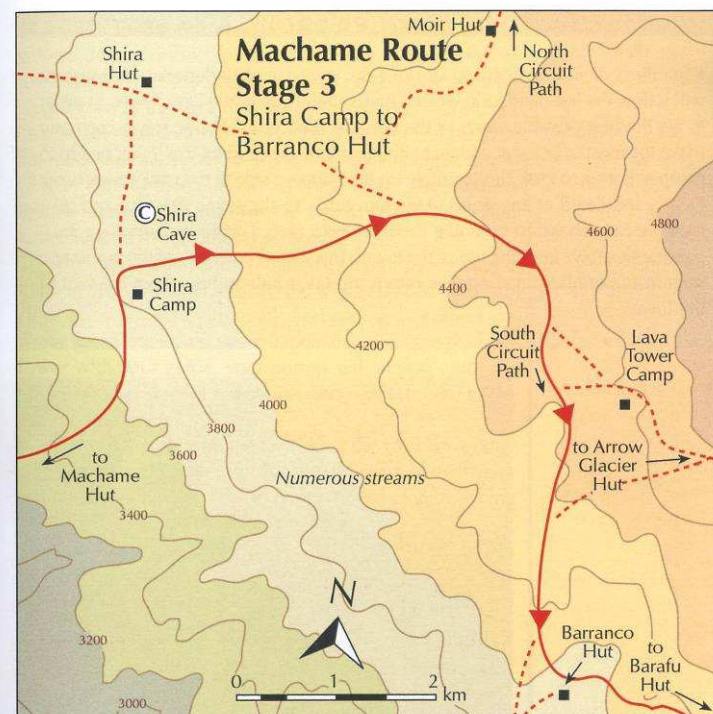
STAGE 3

Shira Camp to Barranco Hut

This is a superb day's walking that showcases some of Kilimanjaro's finest features. The path climbs across the Shira Plateau to a high point by Lava Tower, before dropping into the Barranco Valley to arrive at Barranco Hut, a mere 110m higher than the day's start point. This climb-high, sleep-low approach to scaling Kilimanjaro maximises your ability to acclimatise and improves your chance of successfully reaching the summit. The views of the Shira Plateau, Lava Tower and the western face of Kibo are sumptuous, and the final campsite affords you with some of Kilimanjaro's classic viewpoints.

From the Shira Camp, the path heads east across the Shira Plateau, aiming directly towards Kibo. As it negotiates the rocky plateau, the path intersects one that leads from Shira Cave. The path climbs gently east along a fin of petrified lava, undulating across the creases of the plateau.

After 2½hrs, **the track is joined** from the left by a small trail that leads from the Shira Hut and is part of the Shira and Lemosho Routes. Ignore the junction and continue on what is now technically part of the **South Circuit Path**. The path veers south-east, drops into a broad, rock-strewn valley and then regains the lost height, rising evenly and gently towards Kibo. To the left of Kibo, in the foreground is a line of hills; this is the Oehler Ridge. The path leads in a southerly direction and passes through an area of interesting rock formations.



KILIMANJARO'S HARSH BEAUTY

Large boulders are perched precariously on eroded plinths of smaller stones bound together by mud, providing surreal looking sculptures. The rocks are variously patterned with grey and orange lichens and provide scant protection for small clumps of everlastings. There is a very real sense of being in the wilderness here. The walk in towards Kibo is startlingly austere. Ahead the impressive ice-frosted cliffs of Kibo are visible as are the first views of the Western Breach.

If the weather is clear the views are astounding. Swirling cloud teases and tantalises you with glimpses of the summit. The high speed winds that race across the summit create unusual cloud formations and can cause a cloud cap to form that sits snugly atop the summit.

CLIMBING THE LAVA TOWER

Regardless of which ascent to Uhuru Peak you plan to undertake, most groups will follow the left-hand fork, which climbs slightly up to the Lava Tower. In order to get the best possible views of the Western Breach. Climb the tower itself and make the most of being at a higher altitude before descending to a lower height to camp at Barranco Hut. The scramble up the northern side of the Lava Tower is not clearly indicated at any point. Ask your guide to show you the way and take extreme caution whilst climbing the steep rock face. There are exemplary 360° panoramic views from the top of the tower. The sheer immensity of the landscape seen from here is staggering. The return trip takes half an hour from the foot of the Tower.



Porters approaching
the Lava Tower

After half an hour the **path splits**, with forks passing either side of a distinctive, black wedge-shaped outcrop of rock. **To the left** of this landmark is the orange-black volcanic plug known as the **Lava Tower** (4600m). Those groups tackling the Western Breach ascent to the crater rim will camp in the lee of the Lava Tower overnight before climbing to Arrow Glacier Hut for their summit ascent attempt. **The Western Breach Route from Lava Tower to Uhuru Peak is described in the Summit Ascent Routes section.**

The right-hand fork, on the other hand, passes to the south of the Lava Tower, beyond the wedge-shaped rock outcrop. It is rejoined by the path descending from the Lava Tower after 1km. Whilst you will probably detour to the Lava Tower with your guide, your porters will almost certainly take this route, since it is a shorter, more direct route to the Barranco Valley.

There is a path from the far side of the Lava Tower that drops into a rocky valley, fords a small stream of meltwater and climbs a slope in order to crest a ridge before rejoining the path that leads to the Barranco Valley.

After the paths have rejoined to the south of the Lava Tower, the path drops down a loose scree slope in a series of zigzags. At the foot of the slope it crosses several branches of **Bastions Stream**. The path then scrambles back up a rock-strewn ridge and passes a **well-signposted junction** to the left that leads directly to Arrow Glacier and the foot of the Western Breach.

The path continues south for an hour, descending a stony ridge, before dropping steeply into the **Great Barranco**

THE GREAT BARRANCO VALLEY

An enormous landslide that occurred over 100,000 years ago gouged out the Great Barranco Valley. The slip broke away part of Kibo's crater rim, creating the less steep gradient of the Western Breach, and scored a deep gash in the mountainside. The views of this enormous gash, which is over 300m deep here, are superb and offer virtually unparalleled sights of the Western Breach and Southern Icefields. To the right of the Western Breach, the vast, vertical, Breach Wall and other sheer cliffs rise imperiously from the head of the valley to create an almost impenetrable rampart. On the far side of the valley, the 300m Barranco Wall stands, appearing to block the following day's progress around the southern face of Kibo.

Valley past quantities of *Senecio* and *Lobelia*. Perched on the edge of the final descent to the floor of the Great Barranco Valley is the dramatically sited **Barranco Hut** (3950m). The old uniport is battered and grubby, but there are very attractive sites to pitch a tent all around the area. There are long-drop toilets to hand and several streams from which to draw water.

STAGE 4

Barranco Hut to Barafu Hut

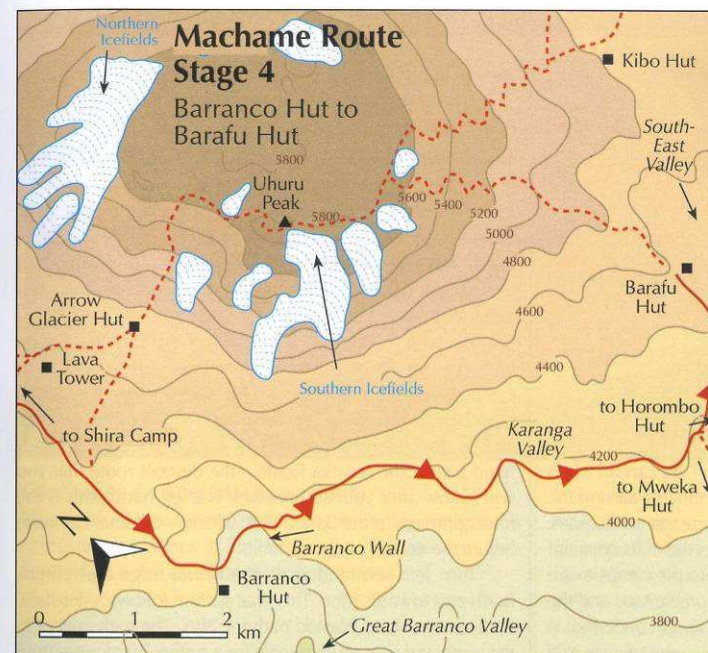
This is a potentially long and difficult day. The early stages are focused on traversing the attractive Great Barranco Valley and overcoming the stiff challenge posed by the ascent of the Barranco Wall. Having overcome this obstacle, the gradient relents as the path contours around the southern face of Kibo, under the massed ranks of the Southern Icefields, before making an arduous, tiring approach to Barafu Hut.

It is well worth waking early to catch the sunrise at Barranco Hut, since it can be spectacular to watch the light strike the dramatic slopes and catch the eternal snows.

There is a great sense of achievement to be had upon successfully cresting the Wall and the views of the bulk of Kibo from this vantage point are outstanding. The Heim Glacier, part of the Southern Icefields, ▶

◀ **From the Barranco Hut** the path descends into the Great Barranco Valley, passing tall *Senecio* and winding around tussock grasses as it goes. The path drops to the valley floor and crosses boggy ground and a stream. Be sure to mind your footing here since the ground is marshy and many of the rocks used as stepping-stones are unstable and may simply sink into the soft ground under your weight. On the far side of the stream, at the foot of the Barranco Wall, is a giant boulder with a small cave beneath it. Most groups pause here to regroup before tackling the Wall.

Although the Wall is imposing and looks to be very steep, it isn't actually very difficult to climb. The rock face is close to vertical in places, but a series of cairns and splashes of red paint highlight a diagonal line that zigzags up the face to avoid the sheerest sections. The rock is relatively exposed and can be very slippery after rainfall, requiring you to use your hands in order to scramble safely in some places. Whilst tackling the Wall, spare a thought for the porters as they attempt to scale the Wall, many carrying your kit on their heads or strapped to their own bags. The 300m climb to the top of the Wall takes 1–1½ hrs. ◀



The path above the Wall crosses a **high alpine plateau** in a south-easterly direction, dipping and climbing to cross small gullies housing streams, whilst the Heim, Kersten and Decken Glaciers reveal themselves high above your left-hand side. The path drops into the **Karanga Valley** 1½ hrs after scaling the Barranco Wall. This valley is windswept but hosts a variety of flora, including numerous *Lobelia*, in stark contrast to the rather barren surrounds that you have recently traversed.

The Karanga River at the bottom of this valley is the **last water point before the summit** for those climbing the Barafu Route to the crater rim. Your guide should ensure that there is enough water gathered to last until you retreat from the peak to Mweka Hut. Make sure that all the water collected from here is properly sterilised since there are a number of toilets adjacent to the stream and there is a slight possibility of contracting giardia from untreated water.

◀ is also clearly visible from here. A series of small cairns marks the indistinct path that leads to the snout of the glacier and the start of some of the technical climbing routes to the summit.

EXTRA ACCLIMATISATION

Some groups choose to camp in the Karanga Valley and use the additional day spent on the mountain to aid their acclimatisation. There are long-drop toilets and tent pitches on the valley floor for just such a purpose.

Be careful when moving around the campsite after dark as the cliffs adjacent to the campsite are precipitous and the terrain underfoot is very uneven and unstable in places. There have been a number of serious and indeed fatal accidents here as a consequence of people loosing their bearings in the dark.

On the eastern side of the Karanga Valley the path climbs a series of switchbacks to escape the valley; this ascent takes 15 minutes. At the top the path skirts under an overhang and past an additional set of tent pitches. This sheltered spot is often used as a lunch stop.

The path from the Karanga Valley Wall continues south-east, undulating across two gentle river valleys. The path contours around the mountain for 2hrs through a patch of moorland, before cresting a ridge and reaching a **crossroads**. The South Circuit Path continues straight ahead. The right-hand path is the Mweka Route – the descent route that you will follow after your summit bid. The left-hand path is the final approach to the Barafu Hut, which is the final campsite before the assault on the summit.

Turn left here and scale the broad ridge that climbs north-east towards Kibo. This final section follows a desolate, rock-strewn, wind-blasted path for 2hrs. The path curves to the north and rises more steeply for a further 30 minutes until it arrives at **Barafu Hut** (4600m), on the western lip of the South East Valley. Barafu is the Swahili for 'ice', and the exposed, hostile campsite here merits its moniker. A pair of old uniports are in reality little more than rusted shells and the tent pitches are scattered amidst outcrops of rough lava. Long-drop toilets are set on the edge of the ridge. There is no water available at Barafu or indeed anywhere in the immediate vicinity. ◀

By virtue of its elevated and exposed position, the views from Barafu are very good. Having approached from the western side of Kilimanjaro, this will be your first chance to examine the jagged outline of Mawenzi, now visible across the broad expanse of the Saddle. There are also expansive views of Kilimanjaro's broad southern flank, which reveal just how huge the mountain actually is.



Continuing on from Machame Route

The Barafu Route to the summit begins to the north of the campsite and climbs to Stella Point on the crater rim. (See Summit Ascent Routes, for route description.)

View across Kilimanjaro's crater to silhouette of Mawenzi. Uhuru Peak looms top right

J: BARAFU ROUTE

Time on route:	6–8hrs
Length:	4.5km
Altitude gain:	+1295m
Start:	Barafu Hut (4600m)
End:	Uhuru Peak (5895m)
Descent route:	Mweka Route

A version of The Barafu Route was first used in the opening half of the 20th century to access Kibo's crater rim; today it is usually tackled in association with the Machame Route, though it can also be accessed from the Umbwe, Lemosho and Shira Routes. Regardless of the approach route, this is the most strenuous part of the climb. The ascent to the summit takes around 6–8hrs. The climb to Stella Point on the crater rim usually lasts 4½–6hrs and the push from here to Uhuru Peak will take a further 1½–2hrs.

The Barafu Route is a steep, tough ascent on loose scree and small rocks that crests the crater rim alongside the Rebmann Glacier at Stella Point. The climb is only a stiff walk, except in the aftermath of heavy snow when it may become much more of an effort. During the driest months from December to March the whole route is usually free from snow. In the remainder of the year you may encounter snow as low as 4600m. However, the altitude and cold add to the overall hardship on the climb.

As on all of the final ascent routes, the climb to the crater rim begins shortly after midnight in order to take advantage of the frozen scree and ensure that you arrive on the crater rim or at the summit in time for sunrise. A headlamp is vital and walking poles may also make your progress easier on the unstable, shifting surface. By setting off early, you will also guarantee that you have sufficient time to descend from the mountain to the Mweka Hut, the overnight campsite on the way down the mountain from here.

From the Barafu Hut the path winds up the western side of the South East Valley. The path scales two short, rocky cliffs to the north of Barafu Hut before levelling as it approaches the final steep climb to Stella Point. The path bends left and

begins to zigzag up the slope on a series of tight switchbacks. These switchbacks persist for the next 3hrs. The climb is in no way technical, but the tedious slog on loose and enervating scree and shale is disheartening. Kick your feet into the scree and plant your walking poles firmly into the slope to help you edge your way up the slope and prevent yourself from slipping unduly.

The gradient increases yet further as you arrive at the **final incline**. The switchbacks peter out and the final 30-minute direct ascent is done on fine, loose gravel. As you approach the snout of the Rebmann Glacier, the path jigs right to climb between this and the remains of the Ratzel Glacier. Follow the gap up until the gradient relents and you gain the crater rim at **Stella Point** (5700m). ◀

By this stage the sun is probably set to rise from behind Mawenzi and the thin band of red and gold on the horizon is likely to be expanding rapidly. Pause at Stella Point and revel in your achievement as the light fills the sky and the sun bursts from behind the horizon, illuminating the glacial snows and the blanket of clouds lying far below you. Behind you, to the north, is the crater. The view across the inner Reusch Crater to the Northern Icefields is similarly powerful.

The route from Stella Point to Uhuru Peak is the same as that from Gillman's Point (the access point on the crater rim from the Marangu and Rongai Routes). Gillman's Point lies

Stella Point is named after the wife of Kingsley Latham, a member of the Mountain Club of South Africa. They both reached this point in 1925.

Silhouette of Mawenzi from Stella Point at sunrise



30-45 minutes to the right of Stella Point. For the summit, turn left and head west around the crater edge, passing above the stepped Rebmann Glacier, ascending slowly for 1-1½hr until you arrive at the celebrated signpost on the **'Roof of Africa'**.

Rebmann Glacier at sunrise as seen from Stella Point

THE SUMMIT

'Kilimanjaro is a snow covered mountain 19,710ft high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called 'Ngaje Ngai', the House of God.'

(Ernest Hemmingway,
The Snows of Kilimanjaro)

The summit of Kilimanjaro is a remarkable, otherworldly place. The crown of Kibo is a vast crater that contains an inner crater and an ash pit. The blasted rock and shattered slopes give it a harsh air, whilst the improbable icefields and glaciers decorate the rim and upper slopes. The landscape here is akin to a still raw wound, redolent of the earth's violent and explosive past.

Having scrambled up the Normal/Marangu Route, Barafu Route or the Western Breach, you find yourself on the rim of this vast volcano. The highest point on the crater rim is Uhuru Peak (5895m). This is unsurprisingly the focus for the majority of walkers. However, whether they make it to the summit is still open to question since it is some distance from any of the crater access points. HW Tilman observed that, 'Between the point at which the crater wall is first reached and this highest point, a distance of perhaps 600 or 700 yards, are three other peaks, points, or bumps of varying heights, all slightly lower than Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze [now Uhuru Peak] itself. These several points were always the cause of much heart burning.'

For many people simply gaining the crater rim is sufficient reward. Gillman's Point is the lowest point on the southern rim. Accessed from the Normal/Marangu Route, it is still 1.5km from Uhuru Peak. The summit is a further 210m higher than this point and the arduous approach is often too daunting for exhausted walkers. Tilman himself and his companion Eric Shipton, failed to reach Uhuru Peak on his first attempt in 1930, admitting that beyond Stella Point, 'Yet another top loomed vaguely through the mists some distance ahead, but I am obliged to confess that its challenge aroused little interest in us, and, after debate, we turned in our tracks.'

Those that do have the strength to push on to the summit will be richly rewarded. The view from Uhuru is utterly breathtaking. The whole summit looks unfinished. In the thin

