Kilimanjaro Exploration History

In 1848, the German missionary, Johannes Rebmann and his colleague, Johannes Krapt, were supposedly the first Westerners to view Mount Kilimanjaro. Their local guide (never seeing snow before) told them that a native once tried to bring down the silver (snow) but it magically turned to water on the way down. Although Rebmann finally settled the question of snow capped mountains in Africa on the equator (as drawn on maps since Ptolemy in 150 A.D.), the Royal Geographic Society did not believe him.

In 1861, the German explorer Baron Carl Claus von der Decken, confirmed Redmann's report. Decken was accompanied by the British geologist, Richard Thornton. They left Zanzibar with over 50 porters and spent almost three weeks exploring the lower slopes. A year later the Baron returned to the mountain, with Otto Kersten, a German scientist. They attained a height of 4000 m (13,100 ft) where it proceeded to snow.

The local chief of the Chagga people, Mandara, was a very unpredictable and difficult man, and he often would not allow men to climb on his mountain. The tribe believed Kilimanjaro was the home of supernatural beings who were guarding vast riches. To attempt to climb into the realm of the gods meant blasphemy and certain death. The charismatic and eccentric British administrator and naturalist, Harry Johnston, was the first man to win over Mandara in 1884. Johnston was sent by the Royal Geographic Society to study the natural history of the area, and to check the region out for possible colonization. Johnston's trip was a success; he climbed around on the mountain, hunted, collected, built a camp near present day Moshi, and planted crops.

Mt. Kibo (the highest point on Kilimanjaro) was first ascended in 1889 by the German geographer Hans Meyer, on his 3rd attempt in 2 years. Accompanying him to the summit via the Ratzel Glacier, were the Austrian mountaineer, Austrian Ludwig Purtscheller, and Yohannes Lauwo, a local guide. Meyer named the peak Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze. It was renamed Uhuru Peak (freedom in Swahili) when Tanzania gained its independence from Britain in 1961. The party attempted Mt. Mawenzi (the 2nd highest peak on double-peaked Kilimanjaro) to no avail.

Mt. Mawenzi was first climbed in 1912 by two Germans, E. Oehler and the glaciologist Fritz Klute. They were the first people to explore and climb on the Western Breach and the Shark's Tooth. The difficult Breach Wall was finally climbed by the famous mountaineer Reinhold Messner in 1978, and has been compared to the north wall of the Eiger in difficulty. The wall was a lava flow that erupted out of Kibo.

Border History

When Britain and Germany determined the Kenya-Tanzania (Tanganyika) colonial border in 1886, the German Kaiser WilliamI, insisted Mt. Kilimanjaro should be German, since it was discovered by a German. The mountain was located in Kenya, a British colony. Legend has it that Queen Victoria gave Mt. Kilimanjaro to her nephew and future Kaiser, William II, on his birthday in 1886. Supposedly he had complained to the Queen because she owned two snowcapped peaks on the equator, and he had none (Mt. Kenya and Kilimanjaro were both located in Kenya). This is supposedly the reason why the border is not a straight line. At the end of World War I, Britain gained the territory as a spoil of war.

History Of The Name

No one knows for sure where the name Kilimanjaro came from. There are many theories. Most agree that the name is probably a Chagga or Swahili name, or a combination thereof. Kilimanjaro may mean 'mountain of greatness', 'mountain of water', or 'white mountain', or various other interpretations, such as the name of a Chagga spirit that lives in the mountain. The origin of the names of Kilimanjaro's two peaks are more straight forward. Kibo (kipoo) means 'spotted' in Chagga, referring to the rock and snow mix, and Mawenzi means 'broken top' in Chagga.

Physical Geography

Kilimanjaro is a dramatic massif on the plains of Eastern Africa, rising 5895 m (19,340 ft) from 1829 m (6000 ft) at Marangu Gate. This landmark, only 3 degrees from the equator, covers an area 80 km east and west to 48 km north and south. This tallest peak in Africa is actually 3 separate volcanoes, and one of the largest dormant volcanoes in the world. The westernmost cone, Shira, is difficult to distinguish from the landscape, as it has been eroded to 4,045 m (13,140 ft). The other two cones, Kibo and Mawenzi, are connected by a 10 km long volcanic saddle. Kibo is topped by a 180 m deep caldera (2.5 km across) and an icecap. Kibo actually has three craters all located within each other. Mawenzi (to the east, at 5,148 m or 16,894 ft) is a craggy eroded peak. Because Kibo is taller, and easier to climb, it is the most popular peak. Mawenzi requires technical mountaineering expertise, and is rarely ascended. Both peaks have glaciers on their slopes (15 on Kibo), and the top of Kibo includes fumaroles (volcanic gas vents), evidence that the mountain is not completely dormant. During the ice ages, the entire peak was covered by an ice cap up to 100 m deep and glaciers stretched to the base of the mountain. Today, little remains of these dramatic glaciers, and it is estimated what is left may disappear in another 50 years, as they slowly recede. The slopes of Mawenzi are covered in small volcanic cinder cones.

Geology

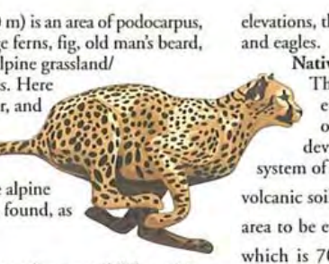
Shira is the oldest volcano, then Mawenzi, and Kibo. Kilimanjaro is part of the Great Rift Valley that was created about 1-2 million years ago, out of a great low elevation plain. Kilimanjaro and other nearby peaks were pushed up creating a huge ridge. All three of Kilimanjaro's peaks grew about 750,000 years ago, to a height of 5000 metres. Shira then collapsed and was covered by lava from the other two peaks. Kibo was active in the Pleistocene, became dormant about 350,000 years ago, and may have been active more recently. The ash cone in the Kibo crater is believed to be only a few hundred years old. A huge landslide occurred about 100,000 years ago during one of the last great eruptions. Mawenzi's northeast wall was destroyed when a volcanic explosion created a dramatic gorge.

Climate

The rainy seasons last from late March to the middle of June, and from October to the beginning of December. January to February, and September to October are usually sunny. The heaviest rainfall is at middle and lower altitudes where the monsoon hits. The highest rainfall is 2000 mm on the southern side of the mountain. Upper levels of Kilimanjaro are in the dry anti-trade winds and are arid, with an average of 100 mm of precipitation per year. Mawenzi is often covered in clouds, while Kibo often sticks up through them.

Vegetation Zones

The East African Plateau is the lowest zone, an area of acacia and semiarid scrub. The fertile cultivated zone comes next, covered in subsistence crops and cash crops, especially coffee. The montane forest zone (between 1900 m and 3000 m) is an area of podocarpus, cedar, and juniper trees, as well as large ferns, fig, old man's beard, and orchids. Above the forest is the alpine grassland/moorland, from 3000 to 4300 metres. Here giant groundsel, tussock grass, heather, and the giant lobelia (everlasting flowers) live, and the soil becomes porous. Above the moorland is the alpine desert where moss and lichen may be found, as well as scree (loose rock).



Wildlife

Colobus monkeys are the most commonly seen wildlife on Mt. Kilimanjaro. Other animals include elephant, blue monkey, cape buffalo, bushbuck, rock hyrax, duiker, leopard, and at higher elevations, the mountain eland. Birds include the hornbill, turaco, and eagles.

Native People

The Chagga (Wachaga) Bantu tribe, the third largest ethnic group in Tanzania, has lived on the lower slopes of Kilimanjaro for thousands of years. They are a highly developed tribe and historically had a well developed system of aqueducts. They are a relatively well-off tribe, as the volcanic soil is fertile and they were one of the first tribes in the area to be educated by the missionaries. This westernized tribe which is 70 percent Christian, consists of business people, merchants, farmers, and school teachers. They make money from cash crops, such as coffee.

Access

There are three international airports fairly close to Mount Kilimanjaro. Kilimanjaro International Airport, located only 40 km from Moshi, offers the most direct route to the park. The visitor can also fly to Nairobi, Kenya or Dar es Salaam on the Tanzanian coast, and take a bus or train from either city. Kilimanjaro is part of Kilimanjaro National Park, established in 1977. The area around the mountain is a forest reserve. Moshi and Arushu are the main supply base towns; both offer numerous guide services and the trekker is often deluged with porters seeking employment.

Climbing Logistics

No technical expertise is required to climb Kilimanjaro on its easier routes. However, because the altitude is so high, climbers need to acclimate and be in good shape if they plan to ascend to the top of Kibo. Many tourists do not acclimate long enough and they become sick (nausea, headaches etc.), some dying from pulmonary or cerebral edema. It is recommended that the hiker take at least 5 days, preferably 6, to reach the top. Most tour operators offer a 5 day hike, so arrange an extra day (best spent at Horombo Hut to acclimate) before starting out. It will cost more, but it may be worth it to have a safer and more enjoyable trip. Other high altitude concerns include proper shielding from the equatorial high-altitude sun. Wear goggles to prevent snow blindness, and sunscreen and lip protection to protect your body from the harmful UV rays. It can snow near the peak, and the air is often cold (0 F or -20 C), so come prepared. Some climbers bring their own freeze-dried food in order to decrease their chances of getting diarrhoea on the mountain. Only the Marangu Route offers reliable shelters (but may be full, especially around Christmas), so bring a tent and stove (which accepts international fuel) on all other routes.

Kilimanjaro is a popular tourist destination; therefore, regulations require that all climbers go with a guide. Guide service is convenient for the tourist as it is less hassle, and porters can help carry provisions. In general, it costs from $300 to $1000 to climb Kibo. Tip porters 10 percent (of the total bill), but make sure they know you won't tip them until the end of the trip. Be firm if the guides try to take advantage of you.

Altitude Sickness

Altitude sickness, also called acute mountain sickness (AMS), refers to a group of health problems associated with high altitudes. Most common are pulmonary and cerebral edema. Pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs) generally can occur above 8,000 ft (2400 m). Symptoms include shortness of breath, a feeling of tightness in the chest, feeling suffocated at night, frothy spit, weakness, tiredness, headache, loss of appetite, nausea, and coughing. In severe stages, judgement is impaired. Cerebral edema, swelling of the brain, occurs over 12,000 ft (3700 m). Headache, loss of balance, nausea, blurred vision, and impaired judgement are the main symptoms. Death can result in both cases if symptoms are ignored. The treatment for both types of edema (AMS) is to go to lower elevations, even 1,000 feet (300 m) can significantly reduce symptoms.

Acclimatization is the key to prevention. It is recommended that you ascend no more than 500 m per day (if possible) if your are at an altitude above 3,000 metres. Others recommend that you remain at an altitude from 3,000 to 4,000 metres for an extra day. Resting and breathing deeply also help. A drug known as diamox can help reduce altitude sickness and make it easier to sleep. If you notice early warning signs, such as headache and nausea, stop, rest, and take pain killers for any headache. Continue if you feel better, but descend if symptoms get worse. Alcohol has a stronger effect at high elevations, so avoid it.

Climbing Routes

If you choose an alternate route to the Marangu Route, be forewarned that the guide may not know much about the other trails. Study up and take a map and compass and be versed on how to orient with them. Only experienced mountain climbers should attempt the other routes. The Loitokitok Trail, coming in from Kenya, is now officially closed and is dangerous; Kenyan bandits have been known to murder hikers along this route.

Marangu (Tourist) Route

The Marangu Route is the easiest, cheapest, most easily accessed, and most popular route, although the least scenic. Ninety percent of hikers go this way. Marangu Gate, located in a coffee, banana, and sisal (a strong fibre) growing area, is the access point. This is the only route which offers usable shelters. The huts were built as part of a Norwegian aid project and include water, toilets, mattresses, and stoves. Each hut is about a day hike apart. Mandara (at 2750 m), and Horombo (at 3720m) offer lodging for 200 people each, and are more like little villages. A side trip from Mandara Hut leads to Maundi Crater. Kibo (at 4703 m) is the final hut; most guides and porters stop here. Climbers leave this hut at 1:00 am in order to reach Gillman's Point (5685 m) by sunrise, climbing up frozen scree. A majority of climbers turn around at the point, on the lower edge of the crater rim. Others climb all the way to Uhuru Peak, the top of Kilimanjaro. The ash pit in the crater and fumaroles may be visited by the hiker. The Maua Route is an alternate, lower elevation, non-maintained trail which connects to the Marangu Route via a stream before the first hut.

Mweka Route

The Mweka Route is the most direct and steepest trail to the summit. Begin on an old logging road reached from the College of Wildlife Management in Mweka. Two decrepit huts (uniports) offer lodging for the porters only. The trail leads up a ridge between the Rebmann and Ratzel Glaciers, with views of the southern glaciers. The trail may not be maintained, and water is difficult to find.

Umbwe Route

This trail begins at Umbwe Village and Mission. The trail is short and steep, but offers great views and passes through forests, with fallen trees to walk over, and moor land. The trail goes up the impressive Great Western Breach. Two sets of caves (actually overhanging cliffs), offer lodging for the porters. Lava Tower Hut offers little shelter. A steep side route leads to the dramatic Barranco Gorge, a scenic area with views of glaciers, icefields, and cliffs.

Machame Route

This trail is the most scenic of the easier routes. The route, which begins at Machame Village, passes through all of the vegetation zones on the mountain, and is wet. A side trail leads to the Shira Plateau. The plateau is covered in pinnacles and makes an interesting rock scramble area. The trail allows access to the Western Breach and southwestern glaciers.

Shira Route

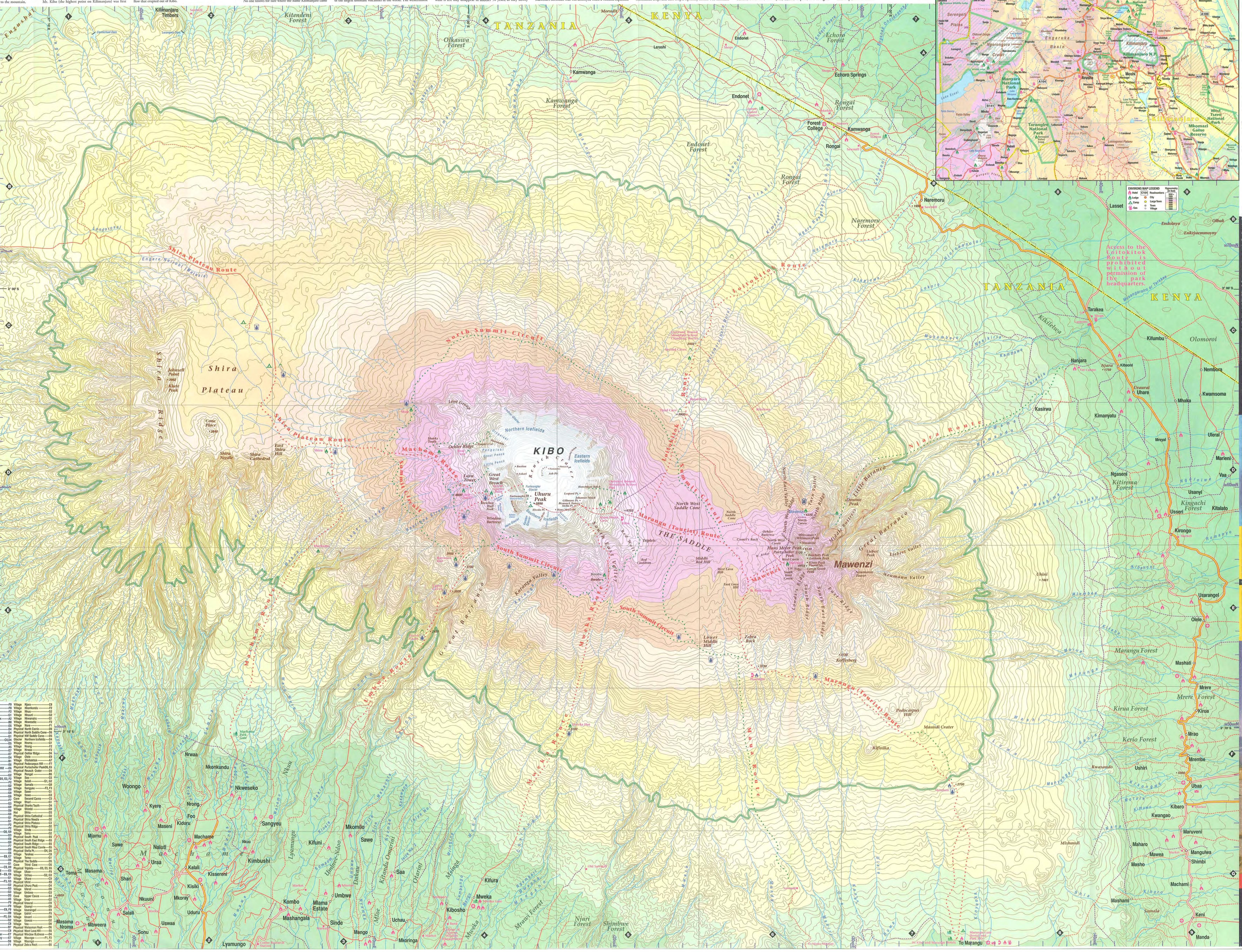
A 4-wheel drive vehicle is required to get to this remote trailhead at *Londorossi Gate in* the west. The trail is scenic but not well maintained. The route passes through the remains of the Shira Crater. Views include Kibo Peak and the Great Western Breach wall, as well as the western glaciers. The Shira Needle offers nice views.

Njara Route

This rarely used route, reached from Njara on the eastern side of the mountain, offers access to Mawenzi Peak. Mawenzi Peak is also commonly reached from the Marangu Route, just past Horombo Hut. This trail passes the only tarn on the mountain.

INDEX

Hut	Arrow Glacier	D4
Physical	Ash Pit	D4
Hut	Barafu	E5
Physical	Barafu	E5
Hut	Barraneo	E4
Physical	Bismarck Towers	D5
Physical	Breach Wall	D4, E4
Physical	Bread Rock	C6
Physical	Bread Rock	D5
Physical	Breschen Wall Peak	D4
Physical	Camel's Back	D6
Hydro.	Carmichael Dam	A1
Physical	Cone Place	D2
Glacier	Credner Glacier	D4
Glacier	Decken Glacier	D4
Physical	Downie Peak	D6, D7
Glacier	Drygaiski	D4
Physical	East Lava Hill	E6
Physical	East Ridge	E6, E7
Physical	East Shira Hill	D3
Village	Echoro Springs	A6
Village	Endonet	A6
Hydro.	Engushal Glade	A1
Village	Foo	F2
Cave	Forest Caves	E4
Village	Forest College	B6
Glacier	Furtesmger Glacier	D4
Physical	Gillmans Pt.	D4, D5
Physical	Great Barranco	E4
Physical	Great Barranco	E7
Physical	Great Barrando	D4
Glacier	Great Penck	D4
Physical	Great West Breach	D4
Cave	Hans Meyer Cave	D5
Physical	Hans Meyer Peak	E6
Physical	Hans Meyer Pt.	D4, D5
Physical	HansMeyer Notch	D5
Glacier	Heim Glacier	D4
Hut	Horombo	E6
Physical	Johannes Notch	D5
Physical	Johnsell Point	C2
Village	Kalali	G2
Village	Kamwanga	A5, B6
Village	Kasirwa	D8
Village	Keni	G9
Glacier	Kersten Glacier	D4
Village	Kibaoni	C8, C9
Village	Kibaro	F9
Physical	KIBO	D4
Village	Kibosho	G4
Village	Kiduru	F2
Physical	Kifinika	F7
Village	Kifumbu	C9
Village	Kifuni	G3
Village	Kifura	G4
Village	KilimanjaroTimbers	A2
Village	Kimanyatu	D8
Village	Kimbushi	G2
Physical	Kirisha	F1
Village	Kirongo	D9
Village	Kirua	F9
Village	Kisiki	G2
Village	Kissereni	G2
Village	Kitalato	D9
Physical	Klute Peak	C2
Physical	Kofferberg	E6, E7
Village	Kombo	G3
Village	Kwamsoma	C9
Village	Kwangao	F9
Village	Kwasando	F8
Village	Kyere	F2
Village	Kyuu	G1
Hydro.	Larangwa Dam	A2
Village	Lasset	B8
Physical	Latham Peak	E6
Hut	Lava Tower	D4
Physical	Lava Tower	D4
Village	Lemira	G1
Physical	Lent Group	C4,D4
Physical	Leopard Pt.	D5
Village	Lerashi	A5
Physical	Liebert Peak	E7
Valley	Liebert Valley	E7
Glacier	Little Penck	D4
Village	Londorossi	B1
Physical	Londt's Ridge	E6
Physical	Lower Middle Hill	E6
Village	Lukani	F1
Village	Lyamungo	G2
Hut	Machame	D3, E3, F2
Physical	Machame	F2
Village	Machame	G2
Village	Machami	G9
Village	Maharo	G9
Village	Manda	G9
Hut	Mandara	F7
Village	Mango	G3
Village	Mangulwa	G9
Village	Marieni	D9
Village	Maruveni	G9
Village	Masama	G1
Village	Masama	G1
Village	Maseni	F2
Village	Mashame	F2
Village	Mashami	G8, G9
Village	Mashangala	G3
Village	Mashati	E9
Village	Masho	G9
Village	Maundi Crater	F7
Village	Mawea	G9
Hut	Mawenzi	E6
Physical	Mawenzi	E6, E7
Physical	Mawenzi Tarn	D6
Village	Mbweera	G1
Village	Mhaka	C9, D9
Physical	Middle Red Hill	E5
Physical	Middle Red Hill	E6, E6
Village	Mjamu	G1
Village	Mkomilo	F3, G3
Village	Mkoray	G2
Village	Mkoringa	G3
Village	Mlama Estate	G3
Hut	Moir	D3
Physical	Morudit	A5
Village	Mrao	F9
Village	Mrembe	F9
Village	Mrere	E9, F9
Village	Mreyal	D9
Hut	Mweka	F5, G4
Village	Naluti	G2
Village	Nanjara	C8
Village	Naremoru	B7
Village	Nembora	C9
Physical	Neumann Tower	E7
Valley	Neumann Valley	E7
Village	Ngaseni	D8
Village	Nguni	F1
Village	Njara	C8
Village	Nkonkundu	F2
Village	Nkuu	G2
Village	Nkuuni	G2
Village	Nkwansira	G1
Village	Nkweseko	F2
Village	Nore	F1
Physical	North Corrie	D6
Physical	North Saddle Cone	D6
Physical	NW Saddle Cone	D5
Glacier	Northern Icefields	D4
Village	Nroma	G1
Village	Nrong	F2
Village	Nrwaa	F2
Physical	Oehler Ridge	D4
Village	Olele	E9
Village	Oloitokitok	A7
Physical	Podocarpus Hill	F7
Physical	Purtscheller Peak	D6, E6
Physical	Reusch Crater	D4
Village	Rongai	B6
Village	Saa	G3
Village	Salali	G1, G2
Village	Samala	G9
Village	Sangyeu	F2, F3
Village	Sawe	G1
Village	Sawe	G3
Cave	Second Caves	C5
Village	Shari	G1
Physical	Sharks Tooth	D4
Village	Shimbi	G9
Hut	Shira	D3
Physical	Shira Cathedral	D2
Physical	Shira Needle	D2
Physical	Shira Plateau	C2
Physical	Shira Ridge	D2
Village	Sinde	G3
Village	Sonu	G2
Physical	South Peak	E6
Physical	South East Ridge	E6
Physical	South Ridge	E6
Physical	South West Corrie	E6
Physical	Stella Pt.	D4, D5
Village	Tarakea	C8
Village	Tema	G1
Physical	The Saddle	D5
Cave	Third Cave	D5
Physical	Triplets	D5, E5, E6
Village	Ubaa	F9
Village	Uchau	G2, G3
Village	Uhare	C9
Physical	Uhini	E8
Physical	Uhuru Peak	D4
Village	Uleral	D9
Village	Umbwe	G3
Cave	Upper Caves	E4
Village	Uraa	G2
Physical	Uraurai	C9
Village	Usanyi	D9
Village	Usarangel	E9
Village	Ushiri	F9
Village	Usseri	D9
Village	Uswaa	G2
Village	Vaa	D9
Physical	Weissman Peak	D6
Physical	West Lava Hill	E6
Physical	Window Buttress	D4
Village	Woongo	F1, F2
Village	Woongo	F1
Physical	Zebra Rock	E6



Legend

International Boundary		National Park Boundary	
Primary All Weather Paved		Trail/Footpath	
2ndary All Weather Paved		Secondary Trail/Footpath	
Dirt/Gravel All Weather Road		Mountain Route	
		Secondary Mountain Route	
○Olele	Village	Glacier or Snowfield	*Echoro* Forest
3840	Elevation		Customs Post
●	Tarn	⊖	Border Crossing
	Dam		Hospital/Clinic
	Park Office		Gasoline/Petrol
	Hotel/Lodge	✉	Post Office
	Backcountry Hut		Phone/Radio
	Backcountry Hut With Attendant	■	Building
△	Campsite		Rain Gauge
	Potable Water		School
∩	Cave		Church/Mission

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>5000 6000 8000 10 000 12 000 14000 16 000 18 000 + feet

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Spheriod: Modified Clarke
Grid: UTM Zone 37
Unit: 1 kilometre between tics
Origin: 39°00'E Greenwich , 0°00'S Equator
Datum: New 1960 Arc
False coord.500,999m Easting, 10,000,000m Northing

True North / Grid North / Magnetic North 19' 5' 14'

Scale 1 : 62,500

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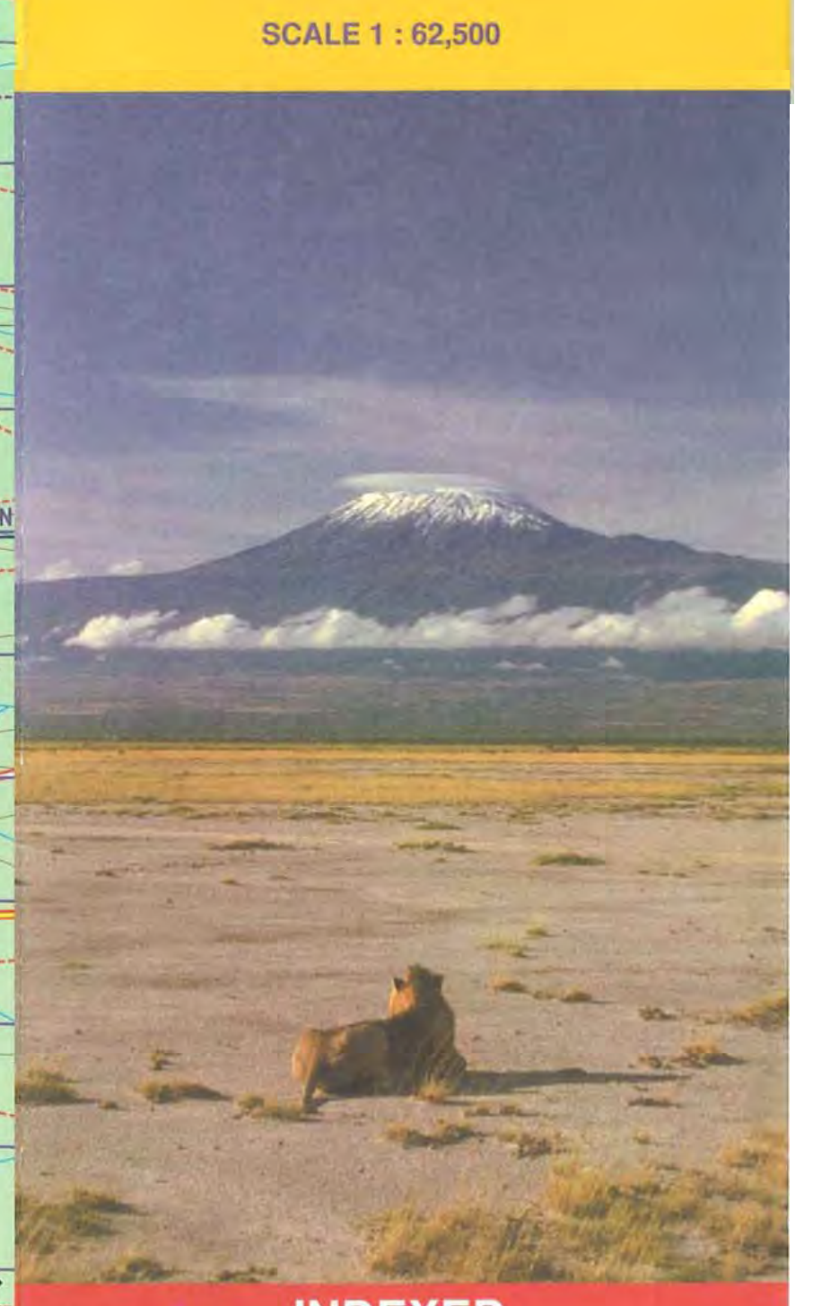

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