



PART 8: THE SUMMIT



What's at the top?

The crater of Kilimanjaro is a primeval place and decidedly uncomfortable, yet I was drawn to it. The idea of spending some days and nights awoke a compelling mixture of reverential fear and wonder; similar, I suspect, to the compulsion which draws some people unquestioningly to church. And like churches, the crater also invites contemplation of the eternal mysteries.
John Reader Kilimanjaro

It's only when you reach the top of Kibo that you realise that the mountain really is a volcano, and all you have done is climb to the crater rim.

The rim itself is largely featureless, though as the highest point on the mountain it has assumed a pre-eminent role and is the focus of all trekkers. The few bumps and tumescences on it have been dignified with the word 'Spitze' or 'Point' as if they were major summits in their own right. Heading clockwise around the rim from Gillman's – the lowest point on the crater rim, according to Tilman – these bumps in order are: **Stella** (the aim of those climbing from Barafu), **Elveda**, **Hans Meyer**, **Uhuru** and **Furtwangler** (named after the man who first used skis to descend); while just to the north of Gillman's is **Leopard Point**. The distance between Gillman's to Uhuru is about 1.5km, with the crater rim rising 207–210m between the two. The floor of the crater, covered in brown shale and rocks and boulders of all shapes and sizes, lies between 25m (at Gillman's or the Western Breach) and 200m (at Uhuru Peak) beneath this rim.

Trudging around the rim to Uhuru is achievement enough. There are, however, plenty of other diversions to keep you on the summit for longer ...

WALKING ON THE SUMMIT

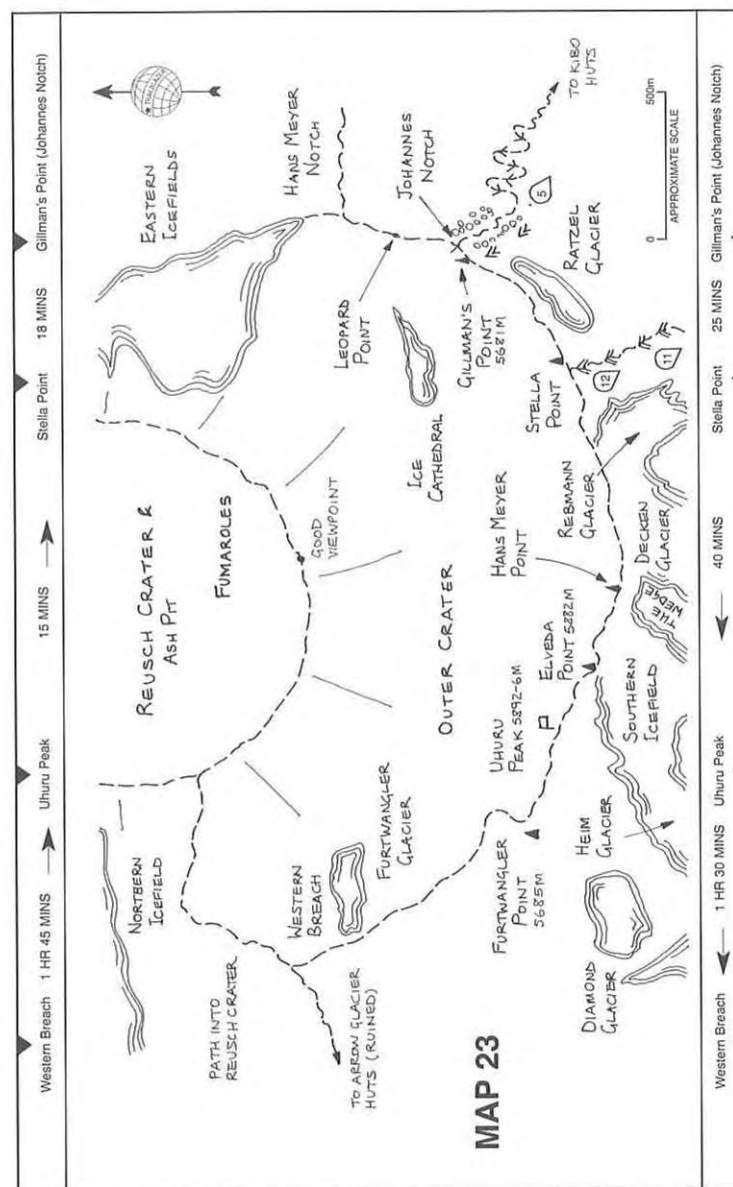
[Map 23, opp]

For most people the conquest of Uhuru Peak, and a shiny gold certificate that says as much, is reason enough to climb Kilimanjaro. Some trekkers, however, always want to do just that little bit more, and if you still have some energy to burn once you've reached the summit you may care to take a quick tour around the crater itself. **Warn your guide in advance** of your intentions – preferably before you've even started your trek – for some react badly to the idea of spending any longer on the summit than is absolutely necessary; a little gentle cajoling, along with a few hints about the size of the tip that awaits them at the end of the trip, should do the trick. Make sure, too, that your guide knows his way

Opposite Top: The inevitable photo opportunity at Uhuru Peak.

Bottom: The Southern Icefield on the summit of Kibo.

Overleaf: Trekkers on Kibo framed against the silhouette of Mawenzi.



around up there: you'll probably be a little short of humour as well as breath on the crater rim, and following an ignorant guide while he tries in vain to locate the correct path to the Reusch Crater will do little to lighten your mood.

The standard way to reach the **Reusch Crater** is to ascend via the Western Breach, where a trail of sorts heads off to the north away from Uhuru Peak; for this reason, it is more common for those who have climbed via the difficult Arrow Glacier Route to visit Reusch than those who ascended by one of the other paths. But those who arrived at the crater rim at either Gillman's or Stella Point needn't despair, for there is also a possible trail, though unmarked and unclear, that crosses the crater floor to Reusch from somewhere between the two. The actual climb up to the rim of the Reusch Crater is surprisingly easy and can take as little as forty minutes, though this, of course, is assuming that you were in fairly good shape by the time you reached the summit in the first place; and this is a very big assumption. Having reached Reusch, check out the bright yellow sulphurous deposits, largely on its western side, and the fumaroles that occasionally puff smoke – proof not only that Kili is a volcano, but that it is also an active one. The smell of sulphur is all-pervasive in this crater, and the earth is hot to touch.

Within the Reusch Crater is the 120m-deep **Ash Pit** which, though it does not conspicuously contain ash, is said to be one of the most perfect examples of this sort of formation in the world. At 360m across, it's also one of the largest; and, we might suggest, one of the most inaccessible. If you reach the Ash Pit, you can truly say that you have conquered this mountain.

APPENDIX A: RECOMMENDED READING

Many of the following books, particularly those written during the great days of exploration in the 1800s, are now out of print and, short of a miraculous find in a secondhand bookstore, the only place you're going to find them is at the British Library in London or a similar institution abroad. For those books that *are* still in print, your best bet is in Tanzania itself, either in the small souvenir shop by Marangu Gate or, somewhat surprisingly, in the large bookshops in Stonetown, Zanzibar. Failing that, you could always try the Internet (Amazon etc) who will usually be able to track a copy down for you.

Fiction

The Snows of Kilimanjaro Ernest Hemingway (Arrow Books, 1994). Short story about a writer dying of a gangrenous leg and a rich wife, written by an honorary game warden based in Loitokitok in the early 1950s. Said to be his most autobiographical work.

Biography

Africa's Dome of Mystery Eva Stuart Watt FRGS (Marshall, Morgan and Scott Ltd, 1930). Brought up in East Africa, Ms Stuart-Watt describes her life among the Chagga people, including an account of her climb to Kibo's crater rim. Interesting if only for the fact that there are few accounts of Kibo from this period under British rule.

Chagga language, history and lifestyle

Chagga – A Course in the Vunjo Dialect of the Kichagga Language of Kilimanjaro, Tanzania Bernard Leeman and Trilas Lauwo (published in Europe by Languages Information Centre). The best Chagga language book I could find, this tome, written by an Australian who worked as a teacher in the region, deals with the basic structure and grammar and is an ideal introduction to the language.

Hunger and Shame – Child Malnutrition and Poverty on Mount Kilimanjaro Mary Howard and Ann Millard (Routledge). Comparatively rich by African standards it may be but, as this book proves, Kilimanjaro still suffers from more than its fair share of grinding poverty. With views from family members, health workers and government officials, this book discusses the moral and practical dilemmas of malnourishment.

Kilimanjaro and its People The Honourable Charles Dundas OBE (H, F and G Witherby, 1924; reprinted by Frank Cass & Co, 1968). Probably still the most authoritative account of the Chagga people, this tome is a little dry in places (particularly the rather involved history section), and outdated too (very few of the more extreme Chagga practices, described on p100 are still conducted today); nevertheless the sections on religion, witchcraft and ritual ceremonies are completely fascinating, and offer the most comprehensive insight into how the Chaggas used to be at least, if not how they are today.

History of the Chagga People of Kilimanjaro Kathleen M Stahl (Mouton & Co, 1964). Highly detailed account of the Chaggas, probably more for those with an academic interest in the subject.

Miscellaneous

Duel for Kilimanjaro Leonard Mosley (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963). Account of the East African campaign during World War I.

Kilimanjaro – Animals in a Landscape Jonathan Kingdon (BBC Publications 1983). Born in Tanganyika, Kingdon is an artist specialising in the flora and fauna of his homeland. This book, based on a BBC series, contains examples of his work as well as an extended commentary on the creatures that live on the mountain.

Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania Popular guide by Dale A Zimmerman.

Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa Guide in the Poyser series.