

A walk above the clouds. James B. Quibell Climbing up to Uhuru Peak (5895m), Kilimanjaro, Tanzania.

This article was written for
the Cheltonian Association
of Cheltenham College.
Founded in 1841



Who, where, what, when.

Climbing Kilimanjaro is a good way for a school to celebrate its 10th Birthday. As a teacher at such a school, Stanford Lake College in the Northern Province of South Africa, the department I head, 'Outdoor Education', organised such a trip for 17 students, 3 past pupils, 2 staff, 3 parents and 2 guests (27 in all).



Tanzania in East Africa borders Uganda and Kenya to the North, Malawi and Zambia to the south and the Indian Ocean and Zanzibar to the East. Kilimanjaro is a collection of three mountains: Shira Ridge 3962m, Kibo 5895m and Mawenzi 5149m. The highest point and our ultimate goal was Uhuru Peak 5895m on Kibo. Kilimanjaro is also the highest free standing mountain in world, the highest in Africa and one of the world's largest volcanoes.

September is a great time of year except for the dust. It is the very end of the dry season with clear skies, warm days and cool evenings.



Technical Route

There are many routes to reach the summit of Kilimanjaro and we wanted a slow climb to allow ourselves full opportunity to acclimatise. We walked the **Lemosho Route** which took us 7 days. (This route is termed a whisky route because it is hard, as opposed to the coca-cola route which is easy / soft).

From a start point at 2200m we made our way to Forrest Camp at 2650m. Camp 2 was Shira 1 on the Shira plateau at 3610m. The walk to camp 3 was a very long 10 hour day, walking high to 4500m and camping low at Barranco 3950m. This method helps reduce altitude sickness of headaches, nausea and sleeplessness. Karanga camp on day 4 was an easy 4 hours walk settling at about 4000m. The final summit camp is Barafu at 4600m and again an easy 4 hours. From here we made our ascent to Stella Point at 5700m and on to Uhuru Peak, the summit at 5895m. Then back down to Mweka camp at 3100m.

Summit day is incredibly tough. With little sleep, cold winds, and a steep climb it is definitely the start of an awful day! 7 hours later with 26 shufflers in front of me I reached Uhuru Peak. The delight of summiting is almost outweighed by the utter exhaustion, but success nevertheless! 1/2 an hour at the summit for photos, and then a 3 hours back to Barafu camp, rest, lunch and a further 4 hours to Mweka. An 18 hour day at the end of which, you are utterly shattered but very satisfied.

My Kilimanjaro High points

- ☺ Reaching the summit is of course brilliant. It takes several hours, days or in my case a couple of weeks before you are really pleased you did it!
- ☺ The sunrise over Africa is slow, orange and beautiful.
- ☺ Team work of the group and especially my colleague dragging me the last 20 meters to Stella Point! (5700m)
- ☺ All of our 17 students making it to the top, and the way they helped each other. Awesome leadership of Head Boy. 'McG'

My Kilimanjaro disappointments

- ☹ A good bout of gastro starting on summit night and the necessity for a strong course of antibiotics.
- ☹ The commercial nature of the trip resulting in lots of litter and Africa strongest smelling ablutions!!

My Kilimanjaro recommendations

- Hire ablutions. They will take port-a-loos up for you.
- Tailor your own vegetarian menu very specifically.
- Use water purification tablets regardless of your strong guts.
- Leave time in Tanzania to reflect. We did a school painting project North of Arusha, which was excellent.

What did Kilimanjaro mean to me?

Some say that to summit Kilimanjaro is a very spiritual experience. I would agree and I know many of our group experienced a strong spiritual awareness. Furthermore it was about survival and stumbling my way to the summit. As HOD of Outdoor Education there was a well defined expectation to reach the top!!

My summit experience allowed me to think and fortify my values. What are the most important foundations of my life?

- **Faith** Renewal of the truth of Psalm 139.
- **Family** The need for extensive quality time with my wife and children. Deep gratitude for my parents and brothers.
- **Friends** Deepening of my appreciation of the friends that surround, support, encourage, humble and work with me.

Kilimanjaro is much more than a summit. It is the life lesson that to set goals is theoretical; to achieve them takes hard work, persistence and determination. *Labor omnia vincit!*

James B. Quibell OC

James boarded at Cheltenham College from 1988 to 1993 in Christowe House, under the infamous Dr. Paddy Sloane. He then studied a BSc Hons at the University of Surrey; Roehampton, and rowed for the London Rowing Club. He married Thomasin Caff in 1998 and they moved to South Africa in 1999. He worked for St Peters Anglican Church in Tzaneen as a youth worker. In June 2002 he was appointed Housemaster at Stanford Lake College. He is now a Deputy Headmaster and HOD for the Outdoor Education department. They have 3 children: Sarah 8, Sam 6, and Alice 7 months.



James, (left) flying a Cheltenham Association flag with 2nd yr pupil Brandon Wentzel

Some averages.

- 25,000 tourists attempt to summit each year; Av. 70 per day
- There are 3 porters for every client; 75,000 porters
- 100,000 people a year each year on and around the mountain.