

Kilimanjaro and Safari Trip Report

August 31st, 2017 – September 15th, 2017



August 31, 2017 - flying to Kilimanjaro, Tanzania

Kilimanjaro had always been an ever-elusive dream, a definite bucket list item. I kept on putting it off and off, but this Summer, I decided to do the trip with whomever was available. Caroline quickly agreed to go and unfortunately because of other commitments, the rest of the family stayed back in Dallas. I dearly missed them all and hope that we will have many more adventures where everyone can join in.

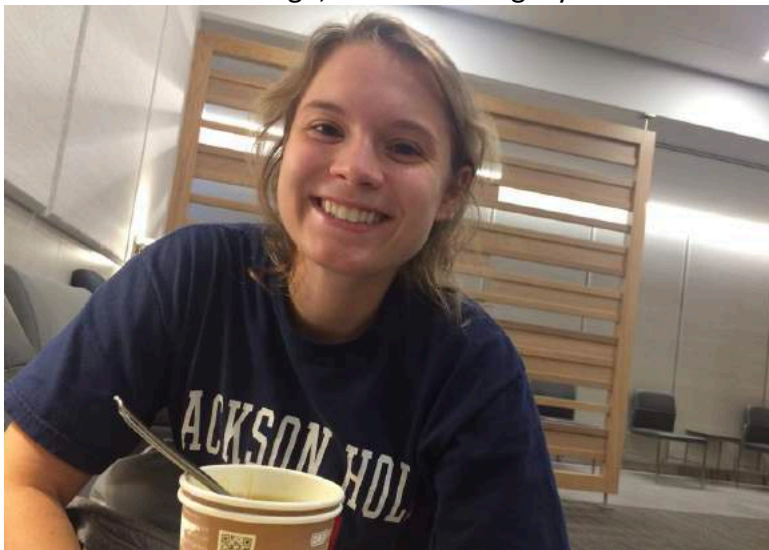
I booked cheap tickets in coach; I have not flown coach for international trips since 2006, JPMorgan used to pay for business, but for the price, coach cannot be beat. For this trip, business class airfare was ridiculous, almost 4 times the price.

Our flights took us from Dallas to Chicago to Istanbul to Kilimanjaro, a long 28 hours and 53 minutes. So given that climbing Kilimanjaro is an adventure, not a pampering holiday, coach fares it was. Surprisingly, it was not bad at all. All the connections and flights were on time and we arrived Kilimanjaro airport as scheduled at 1:00 AM local time.

We look and were happy in coach, excited about our trip.



We got to use the AA Admiral's club in Chicago, and had a long layover.



Service on Turkish Airlines was exceptional, even in Coach. They served great meals and even gave out travel kits.



In Istanbul, and ready to connect to Kilimanjaro, Tanzania.



The plane was fairly empty going on to Tanzania, so we stretched out.



In Tanzania, visitors get the entry visa at the airport, ex-cy, \$100 for US citizens and \$50 for everyone else. The visa issuance process was from the 1960's, they create a triplicate paper visa application, using 2 sheets of red carbon paper in between. Next, they collected the \$150 from us and threw the bills into a communal cardboard box. Later at passport control, after another 20 minutes in line, the visa with a photo was issued. They took a full set of fingerprints as well.

The ride from the airport to the hotel was uneventful and very typical of an underdeveloped country. Speed bumps, a 50kph speed limit and motorcycles and bikes without lights carrying 1-4 persons. Our driver drove 90-100kph and I thought he was going to take down several motorcycles.

At the hotel, the check-in was swift and efficient: name, address and passport number. Within 10 minutes we were showered and in bed fast asleep. Morning came quickly and the sleep was jet lagged, after all we have an 8-hour time difference.

September 2nd, (Flight was over 1 day so we skipped 9/1) - Moshi, Tanzania

I felt pretty good and had a much better night sleep than Caroline. In the middle of the night, I took a sleeping pill and slept until the alarm rang at 8:30am. Breakfast was good, coffee, juices, fresh fruit, made to order eggs and bacon, and some local savories.



I didn't know Pub Alberto was such a happening night club. ☺



Around Moshi.



Everyone wanted to touch Caroline's white skin.





Like in most tourist towns, they love to take advantage of them, we walked into a phone store to buy an adapter plug and the salesman without blinking said \$20, this thing on eBay is \$1 for 3. Two doors down we bought one for \$2. Same with our altitude sickness pills, how much we asked and were told Tanzanian Shillings 5,000 each. I asked for 2 and the salesperson tried to charge me TS 15,000 instead of TS 10,000. BTW, TS 10,000 is a little less than US\$ 5.

We returned to the hotel, and hang around the pool area and drank some Kilimanjaro water until dinner time. We decided to eat at the hotel, it was pizza night, so we had pizza and a beer and went to sleep, still adjusting to local time.



Hydration is a must, one of each is best.



September 3rd, 2017 - Lemosho Trail - Day 1, Registration at Londorosi Gate, then drop-off at trail, Lemosho Gate 2,100m to Mti Mkubwa Camp 2,650m

We drove from the hotel in Moshi to the Londorosi Gate 2,250m for Registration and Park Fee payment. The road was very similar to the ride from the airport until the pavement ended. 1 hour of pavement followed by 2 hours of dirt, I will let the pictures speak for themselves, but here is a bit of narrative.



Bumpy gravel loose sand and narrow. There were segments where the berms were so steep, I thought we would topple over. Part of the road was washed out and an alternate makeshift path was blazed by some adventurous souls and now it has become the official road. There was quite a bit of construction, the new dirt/gravel was dumped on one side blocking two-way traffic, thankfully, there was little traffic and there was just enough room to pull in between piles of dirt.



Once at Londorosi Gate we ate lunch and were supposed to be on our way within 2 hours. At Londorosi, they make sure that porters only carry a maximum of 20kg/44lbs, this part went fine. Paying for entry fees did not. Our guide tried using a prepaid card to pay for the entry fees, US\$ 3,300 for 4 people plus porters, guides, and cook. Long story short after waiting around for 3 hours, in increments of 15 minutes at the time, I whipped out my credit card and paid the fees.



The last thing I wanted was to have to go back to the hotel and start the day over because they were closing soon and we still had a 2-3 hour hike to our camp at Mti Mkubwa.

Needless to say we were happy to be on our way, although we had to track back several kilometers on the same dirt road until the Lemosho trail turnout.

The Lemosho trail gate, the start of our 70Km trek.



The hike was awesome, mostly because we were finally on our way en route to Mt Kilimanjaro summit, elevation 5,895 meters. Along the way we saw monkeys and our guide pointed out several plants and features of the landscape. We reached camp quickly, our tent was ready and we were treated to great hot dinner, warm water to clean up and warm sleeping bags. We were fast asleep early.



Wildlife along the forest, monkeys.



Accommodations - remember Adventure, forget the Hilton hotel
The trek is primitive, tent camping, out houses, good hot meals-not gourmet but comfort food, and a bit of roughing it. Getting in and out of a tent is hard, inside a bit small, crouching over is also hard, but somehow it feels right and we are both satisfied. Yes, it's only day one, will see on day 7. Everything we have is carried up the mountain, tents, food, water, our gear, etc. to support this trek for Caroline and I we have 2 guides, 8 porters and a cook. We only carry our daypack, it has some clothing, mainly water, a few snacks and cameras.



Our Hilton on Kilimanjaro.



Cozy.

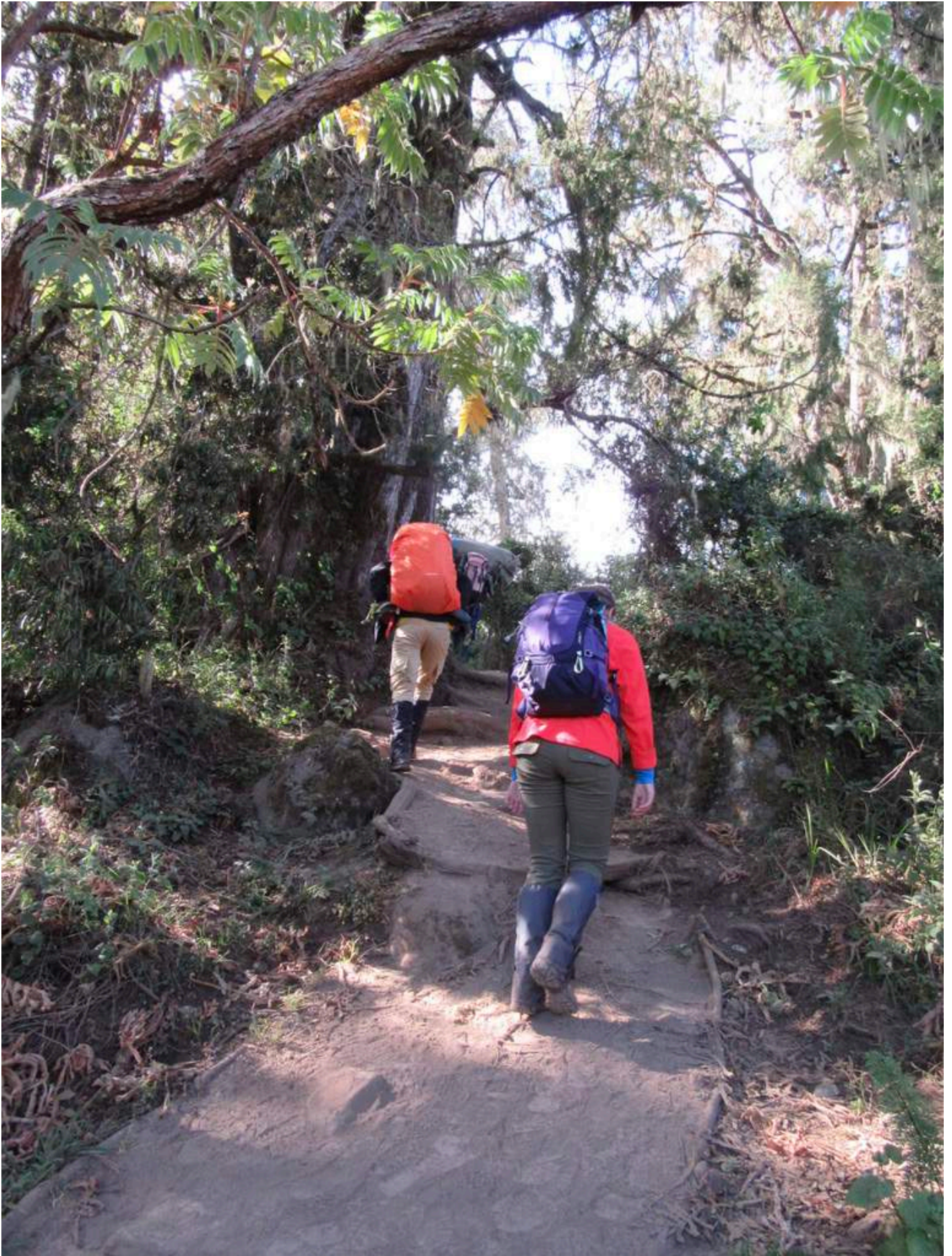


September 4th, 2017 -Lemosho Trail - Day 2, Mti Mkubwa Camp 2,650m to Shira 1 Camp 3,610m

An awesome day. I slept pretty well last night, my first tent camping night since I used to take Albertito camping with the Boys Scouts. It was over 10 years ago, before moving to a Sydney in 2006.

The trek started gradual, then it steepened for most of the way, eventually flattening out as we approached Camp. The terrain changed from rain forest to moorland, and then arid high tundra. It was dusty and some parts steep, but not crazy steep. It took about 3 hours to reach camp where we stopped for the day just around noon. While we could have easily carried on to Shira 2, the slow pace is all about acclimatizing to high altitude. Most Kilimanjaro climbers fail to summit because of altitude related illness, not fitness level or ability.









The day was partly cloudy, mild temperatures, in the 60's F. We got the first glimpses of Mt Kilimanjaro, it was about 3/4 visible with its cloudy hat around the peak. We hope for a clear day tomorrow.



Kilimanjaro in the background, covered by the clouds.



Upon arrival at camp, there were huge birds loitering all around the camp, they were all black except for their white collar. We also spotted a couple of doves, but no mammals.





One of the most popular items on the trail was my solar charger. Everyone wanted a charge. Definitely must have to keep all of our electronics fully functional, although no Mobile or Wi-Fi is available. For Caroline, it's iPhone games and pictures, for me it's my inReach satellite, iPhone, canon camera batteries, Apple watch and iPad to write this story and when awake in the middle of the night play some Sudoku.



The food is superb, 3 hot meals a day, morning snacks and afternoon tea. Meals always start with a soupy dish for hydration and warmth. They tend to be starchy, but always accompanied by fresh fruits and vegetables. Today's menu

Breakfast - Porridge, sausages, eggs, toast with jams, peanut butter, fresh fruit, tea, honey and coffee.

Morning snack - fruit juice, wafers cookies

Lunch - soup, cubed beef and peppers, spaghetti, cucumber and tomato, oranges bananas

Afternoon tea - tea, hot chocolate, coffee, popcorn, cookies

Dinner - thick broth soup, savory pancakes, chicken with peanut butter, rice, sautéed green beans, avocado tomato cucumber salad, fried plantains

Delicious food and served very hot.



At Shira I Camp, always take a sign photo.



Later in the afternoon, the weather cleared a bit, but still no full view of Kilimanjaro.



September 5th, 2017 - Lemosho Trail - Day 3, Shira I Camp 3,610m to Shira II Camp 3,850m

The day started with the customary breakfast, a fruit flavored porridge, warm and very yummy, followed by everything else. We arrived at camp Shira 2 in less than 3 hours, the first ones here. And now we camp and acclimate for the rest of the day.



Big rock on the way, almost a full view of Kilimanjaro on the right.





Arriving at Shira II Camp site.





Our home away from home.



The trek today had a full view of Mt Kilimanjaro, first a bit hazy then much clearer as we got closer.



Unfortunately, by late morning the clouds closed in and we are back to the 3/4 view.



A bit about our staff. We have 2 guides, Leo and Joshua, Leo is a very experienced guide, he has been guiding for 4 years and was a porter for another 10. Leo has climbed Kilimanjaro more than 160 times and has summited 120 times. Joshua has only been guiding for about a year, was a porter for 4 years before that. Joshua has only summited 4 times. You can tell Leo's experience by his path and watching his foot placement, it's precise, the least amount of over climbing and his pace steady and well-paced.

Joshua on the left, Leo next to Caroline.



Our Cook, Erik, is a master at camp cooking. He manages to serve us 3 square hot meals. When we sit down to eat, the food is steaming hot and we need to usually wait for it to cool a bit. He does a great job in adding flavors and ensuring that there is variety. Erik is awesome.

The lead porter, Frank, is super attentive, ensures that all is packed well, and set up upon arrival at camp. He brings us warm water to bathe and keeps us hydrated by keeping our camelbacks containers full. 2nd porter Wilbur, puts our gaiters on every morning. Real nice guys.

Porters carry everything, you can sometimes see their struggle in their faces. I tried to capture some of that in the pictures that follow.

Random Porters carrying stuff, you can see their effort to carry those heavy loads in their facial expressions. While most porters were male, they did have a few female porters as well.





This afternoon we did an extra walk to higher elevation to continue acclimating to the higher elevation. It cleared up over Mt K to get this photo.



We also rebuilt and added to the sculpture garden.





Beautiful views of Mount Meru in the background, part of the Arusha National Park.





Last picture of the day as the sun sets, notice my long shadow.



September 6, 2017 - Lemosho Trail - Day 4, Shira II Camp 3,850m to Lava Tower to Baranco Camp 3,900m

Today started at midnight or just before with Caroline not feeling well. My poor mama was very nauseous and ended up vomiting everything, I suppose the altitude of Shira camp caught up to her. I was awake most of the night tending and nursing her. She was cold although it was warm in the tent and she too slept poorly. Morning came fast.

We sat down for breakfast as usual in the morning and decided to take it very easy for the day's trek. Fortunately, Caroline was feeling a bit better.



Caroline hardly ate, and what she ate she later vomited. The rest of the day was all about juice and fluids to make sure that she kept hydrated.

It was a beautiful clear day, full view of Kilimanjaro. The trek was to Lava Tower for lunch and onto Baranco Camp for our overnight. Leo carried Caroline's backpack and we walked very slowly.



We were definitely in the clouds at 13,000 ft.



The climb had very varied terrain and was rocky on some parts.



We took many breaks and it was clear that Caroline was not feeling well.



But she was a trooper, counting steps from 1-5 over and over, we pressed on.



As her symptoms returned, we slowed down even more. I decided to shorten our trek and just get to Baranco Camp using the lower trail. It was still almost 11km, 6.6 miles. As we approached Baranco Camp, the landscape turned and we were in the middle of an Oasis.









Finally, Baranco Camp. On the far background we saw a preview of tomorrow's climb up Baranco Wall.



Once at camp my challenge was to keep my Mamita warm.



Dinner was as usual but within 30 minutes, Caroline's was out on a bowl. I tucked Caroline in and made sure she was warm and could get some rest.



Next was to plan for the next day. I have always been of the mindset: plan for the worst, hope for the best. Although Leo, our guide, wanted to continue to Karanga Camp, I firmly said no because it meant climbing the steep Baranco Wall and gaining more elevation. Also for me to continue the climb solo was not an option, I could never leave Caroline by herself and entrust medical decisions to a third party. We agreed that if Caroline was still not feeling well in the AM, we would take the shortest path to lower elevation and abort the climb to the summit.

The positives were that we had a great hike on the mountain for several days, but obviously the not so positive is that our goal was to summit and not doing so would be a bit of a letdown. Health and wellbeing is the number one priority and above all goals.

We were clearly sleeping in the clouds some 13,000 ft. above sea level.



With that I too went to bed, it was early, maybe 9 pm and I hoped that Caroline would feel better the next day, not to summit, but good enough to be able to trek to lower elevation.

Caroline slept like a baby, I checked on her several time during the night for warmth and fever.

September 7th, 2017 - Lemosho Trail - Day 5, Baranco Camp 3,900m to Karanga Camp 3,995m

Fortunately, once the AM arrived, Mamita was feeling much better and feeling a bit hungry. The true test was going to be holding down breakfast. We agreed to carry on and off we went up Baranco Wall en route to Karanga Camp, a fairly short but steep 7km trek.

We awoke to a beautiful day, eventually the clouds gave way to blue skies.



Baranco Wall is the steepest section on the climb, 1.2km and a 325m elevation gain. Parts of it could easily give you vertigo, it was very narrow and it was crowded. Pretty much a people traffic jam on the way up. Given that the mantra is “Pole Pole” – “Slow Slow” this was self-governing and everyone went pole pole, even the porters.

On the next few photos, notice the lineup Baranca wall, it like an ant trail. (To the left of the blue line) The wall was much steeper than what it looks in the photo. I would not have liked being a porter carrying 20Kgs (45Lbs) up the wall.





At the top, it was very satisfying. We took a nice long break and then continued onto Karanga camp.





The trail leveled off a bit and we took on the scenery along the way.





It's impossible to capture in a photo, but here is the descend into the last valley prior to the climb to Karanga Camp in the far top background.



From the other side, just a few more steps to camp.



Karanga is the last water stop, so porters had to make the trek to the valley to load up on water for the next 2 days. Tough work.



Thus far we have spent 3 days above the clouds acclimating. I feel pretty good and thankfully Caroline is feeling good as well.



Along the way we have picked up a few Swahili words, not sure on exact spelling.

Jambo – hi, hello
Mambo - how are you
Poa – good
Asante – thank you
Pole pole – slow
Huraka huraka – faster
Rafiki – friend
Akuna matata - no worries
Maji – water

Everything ends with ie or y, tenty, coldie, warmie, campy, etc.

At Karanga Camp, the landscape turned to Alpine Desert.



On arrival, our coffee, tea and/or hot chocolate was waiting.



September 8th, 2017 - Lemosho Trail - Day 6, Karanga Camp 3,995m to Barafu Camp 4,673m (base camp)

Leaving Karanga en-route to Barafu Camp was making the Summit a step closer to reality.





The trek today was very cool, alpine desert landscape and very rugged. The sun came out for a bit early this afternoon, eventually turning into a foggy and cloudy day, not dark, just not sunny.



We made Barafu Camp at around Noon:30, a steady up-flat-up climb. We now find ourselves at the base camp for the summit ascend at midnight tonight.



The views were fantastic, but the air was thin.



We are now only a 5km trek, but an elevation of 1,222m away from the Summit. Our midnight wakeup vocabulary will be pole pole all the way to the summit.



Unfortunately, unlike all other camps, Barafu Camp was filthy. Lots of litter everywhere. Part of the reason is that all trails eventually end up at Barafu to summit. It can also get quite crowded. Because its occupied 24x7, it is impossible to monitor who is leaving the trash behind. Very sad.

Summit Prep was mainly choosing what to wear at midnight, there was not much else for us to do. The temperature at the peak is typically $-15^{\circ}\text{C}/5^{\circ}\text{F}$, the big unknown is the wind and precipitation. Our guide said to expect wind.

After our Wheeler peak experience, Caroline laid out 7 tops and 2 jackets, 4 layers of pants. Me, 3 tops, ski jacket and 3 layers of pants.

We tried to go to sleep relatively early, 7:00PM or so, it was still light out. Anticipation made it hard to get to sleep, even though we were tired.

Our wake-up call at 11:30PM came fast. The routine was easy, down some coffee and a snack while getting dressed and get ready to go. All those layers made it stiff and awkward to move around, but it's always better warm than cold.

September 9th, 2017 - Lemosho Trail - Day 7, Barafu Camp 4,673 to Uhuru Peak Summit 5,895M – 19,341Ft then down to Mweka Camp 3,100m

It was a beautiful night, not too cold, no wind and the moon shining bright along with tons of stars. Most prevailing was the Southern Cross.



Our Guide's advice was to be fully layered up. We heeded to his advice and it turned up to be perfect. Wearing our head lanterns, we set off into the night. The moon was bright making it easier to see and pole pole up the mountain we went.

There was no wind but as we gained altitude, it got cold. The feeder tube of the camelbacks kept on freezing unless the water was blown back into the reservoir. As the sun begun to rise, so did the excitement.





Mt Mero with its shadow casted against the clouds; photos do not capture the awesomeness of what we were experiencing and the thrill of seeing once in a lifetime images.



Still some Glaciers, although they are melting away fast.



And finally the Summit. Wow, just standing there for a few minutes was exhilarating.



We quickly began our descend, first to Barafu Camp for lunch and then onto Mweka Camp for the overnight. The way down was in full morning light and equally as stunning.





It looked like another planet, the gray is fine volcanic dust/ash and the glaciers in harmony.



Stella Point on the way down from the summit.



The top part of the descend was through volcanic ash, it felt like skiing moguls, also very slippery.



A very steep descend, but going with gravity, it was relatively effortless. Also a beautiful day.



Camp Barafu in the background, our lunch stop. After lunch we packed and continued to Mweka Camp.



The clouds looked like a glacier, beautiful contrast.



From Barafu to Mweka, the trail was terraced, very harsh on your knees. Part of it is that it is a very long day, almost 20Km or 12 miles.



I am sure that the porters enjoyed going down fully loaded. They are masters of balance and very agile.



One last view of this majestic mountain through the rain forest.



High Camp is ½ way between Barafu and Mweka, some people opt for this camp to shorten the day.





And finally, camp. A very long but exciting day.



September 10th, 2017 - Lemosho Trail - Day 8, Mweka Camp 3,100m to Mweka Gate 1,640m to Arusha Hotel

A photo with our support team, here is everyone except 2 porters that headed down early.



And the trek continues to the Mweka Gate.





The ending gate in sight.



A bitter sweet sign, the trek is over with a forever memorable joy of summiting.







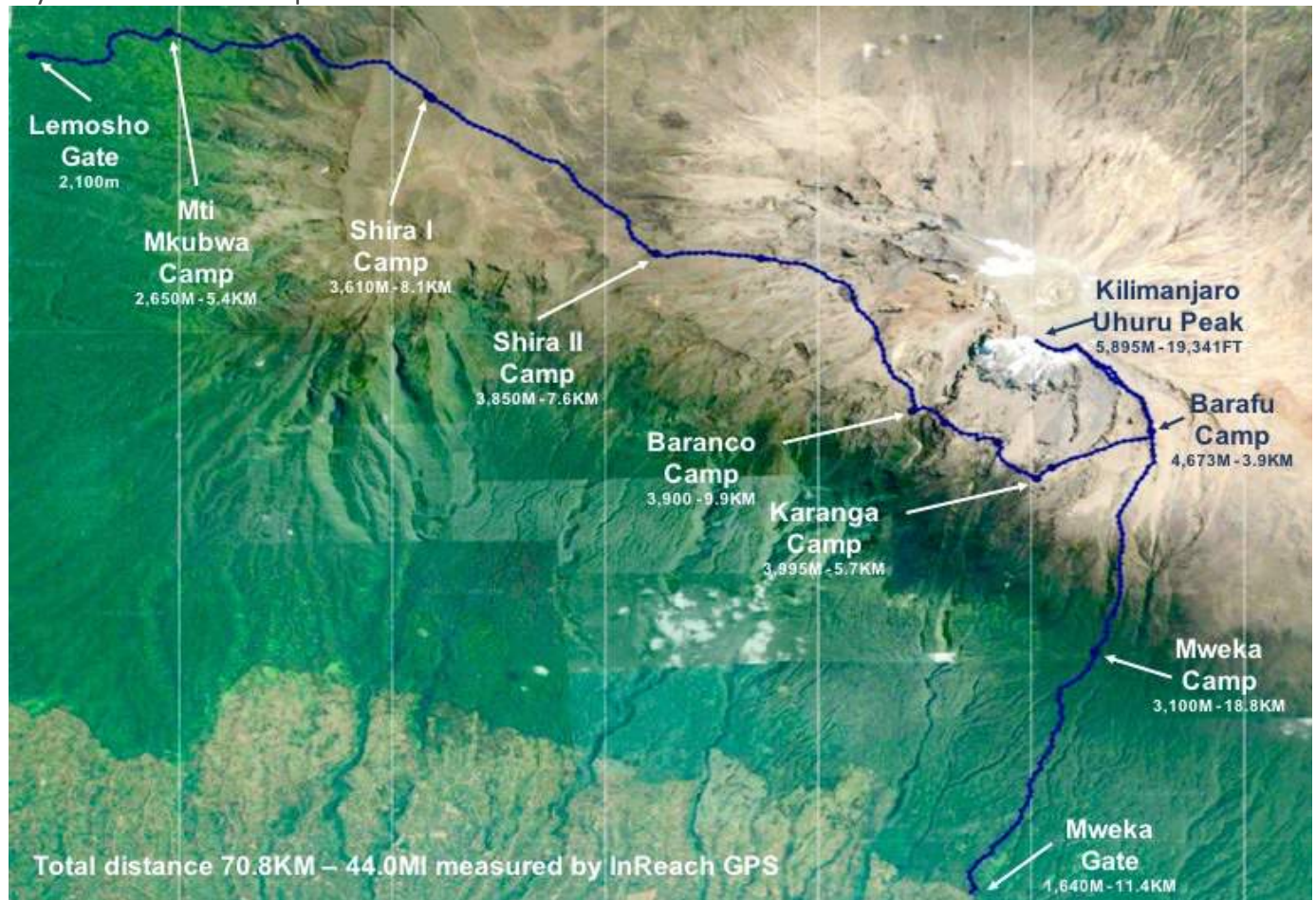
The drive to Arusha.



After 7 nights of camping, a long warm shower, here is Caroline enjoying dinner and a beer in bed.



My satellite InReach kept tracks of our trek.



We also indulged in a 4-day Safari, have a look at the “Big 5” in nature and many more...