



## Going for the Summit

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**I**t was midnight, and we were ready to move.

I had put on five layers of clothes to keep my body warm. My one litre of drinking water was kept in my inner jacket to prevent it from freezing, and my camera was also kept close to my body so that it would continue to function when, hopefully, I reached the summit.

I was climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania with my wife, our younger son and four others. At 5,895m a.s.l., Mt. Kilimanjaro is the highest mountain in Africa. Thousands of people from all over the world climb the mountain every year.

There are six routes to the peak. The route we were following is known as Marangu Route, a.k.a. the Coca-Cola Route. It is purportedly the easiest among the routes.

Day one was a three-hour leisurely walk from Marangu Gate to Mandara hut through a beautiful mossy forest, rising

from about 1,900m to 2,700m. On day two, we trekked to Horombo Hut at 3,720m through mainly alpine moorland. We put up an extra night in Horombo Hut, allowing a full day for acclimatisation trekking to Mawenzi Hut at 4,300m and back. On day four, five hours of trekking through alpine moorland and high altitude desert took us to Kibo Hut at 4,720m.

Led by our chief guide Rocky, we started to inch our way up the steep incline. A three-quarter moon lit up the mountainside to a certain extent, thus some of us did not even turn on the headlamp. We were following a zig-zag path to reduce the gradient. Even then, we soon began to feel the strain on our legs. The low oxygen content in the thin atmosphere made us gulp for air, and we felt so sleepy that we just wanted to lie down and sleep. We could not do that of course, so we just had to keep going.

The slope became steeper and steeper, and the loose sand and pebbles on the trail made the going really tough. About half way up, two members decided to turn back. The others pushed on, like robots moving their legs mechanically.

After six and a half hours of struggle, the five of us finally reached Gilman's Point on the crater rim at 5,681m. The sun was already up and the view was spectacular. But it was cold up there. When the wind blew, I shivered.

Three members were satisfied for reaching Gilman's Point and decided that the best way to beat the cold was to descend. Only my son and I decided to go for broke. We had set out to conquer the peak, and we were not about to turn back before reaching our goal. So we trudged on..... and on..... and on..... And two hours later, we were finally at Uhuru Peak (5,895m). Hurray! ■

