

The Wheldon School & Sports College  
Kili 2004

Jambo,

In the summer of 2004 two staff from Wheldon visited Shimbwe and then went on to climb Kilimanjaro. Sponsorship from colleagues at Wheldon, along with family and friends, resulted in my personal total of £600 going to the Trust.

We booked through the Marangu Hotel and did the six-day Marangu route. The change of vegetation and scenery was dramatic, as we passed up through each climate zone. Accommodation was in huts which were quite comfortable, food was good (and plentiful) and we were only carrying daypacks - the porters were carrying the main loads.

For four days, this was a very pleasant walk gaining approximately 1,000 metres per day. Altitude sickness is a serious concern and can begin from 12,000ft (nearly 4000 metres) onwards. Although even medical opinion is not 100% clear on the whole area, certainly drinking plenty of water and gradual acclimatisation helped to minimize the effects of altitude for us.

At the last hut (Kibo) we prepared for the climb which began at midnight. Our two guides accompanied us for the final effort. With only half as much oxygen as normal, progress was slow ("pole, pole") but with constant support and encouragement from our excellent guides, we made it to the crater rim (Gillman's Point) just at dawn.

An hour and a half later, we arrived breathless at the true summit and stood at over 19,300ft (5895 metres). The glaciers were amazingly wonderful creaking and shimmering in the early morning sun. For everyone, there has to be a great sense of achievement and a glow of satisfaction - but not for too long, as you still need to get down quickly!



In fact, in my colleague's case (who was feeling the effects of altitude), it was very quickly indeed as the guides professionally got him down fast to Kibo hut. After a brief rest/sleep, we continued down spending one more night on the mountain at a lower hut, before one necessary night of relative luxury in the Marangu Hotel.

In all, it was a truly brilliant mountain experience as part of a fabulous trip to our partner school. Even more exciting this summer (2005) will be the small group from Wheldon, including Year 12 pupils, who will follow a different route up the mountain, but will also aim to look down from the summit of Kilimanjaro, the highest point in Africa.

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April 2005

