



The footslog up the Barranco Wall is not for the faint-hearted.

# Summit celebration marks 40th birthday to remember



The two climbers take a breather after reaching Machame camp after the first day's ascent.

Two old school friends from Wick – businessman **Stuart Page** and **David Rosie**, an electrical engineer, who are now both living in London – teamed up last month to scale the highest peak in Africa, Kilimanjaro, raising more than £3600 for charity. Here Stuart gives an account of the gruelling week-long trek

LAST year in October I was on safari in Tanzania with another mate and was in the foothills of Kilimanjaro when I somehow thought it would be a good idea to try to raise some money for charity and reach the summit on September 11, 2013 – my 40th birthday.

Once I got back to the UK I approached one of my oldest school friends, David Rosie, who I'd gone all the way through school with – both South school and Wick High. Fortunately he didn't really take much persuading even when I told him the 40 per cent success rate of reaching the summit.

If we're honest, we both left our training a little late. I started about three months before and pulled my hamstring in my second week which stopped any further training for about five weeks. I was also having physiotherapy for neck and back problems I'd been having.

Mentally, I didn't think I'd have any problems but I was worried about my old body and my back in particular as I'd had part of a disc removed a few years previous.

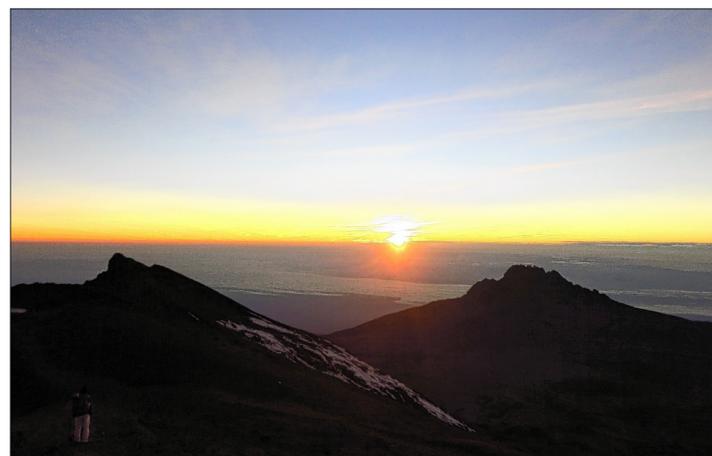
With only six weeks to go I was contacted by a client (I run my own accountancy practice and property company) who offered to help us train and set up a brutal training regime six days a week which turned out to be both painful and invaluable.

Once we got to Kilimanjaro we were both feeling good and very positive. We had a meeting with our guide, Jeff, and he gave our gear the thumbs up so we were happy about that too. We then had a discussion to ensure we knew the dangers and symptoms of severe acute mountain sickness (AMS). We were also told there were no helicopters so if we had problems we would have to be carried down – even this news didn't dent our enthusiasm.

The next morning we met the rest of our team. There were 12 of us in total – seven porters, a cook,

**Heading up into the darkness with only a headlight to light the way and a -10C temperature with a howling, freezing wind blowing down, I did have to wonder what the hell I was doing.**

Stuart Page



The sunset over Mount Meru was a highlight of the trek.

an assistant guide and our guide. We then set off for the Machame gate as the Machame or "Whisky" route was the one we'd be attempting. This is a different route to the one attempted by Chris Moyles et al. The route they tried was shorter, not as scenic and has a higher success rate.

#### Day one – Machame gate to Machame camp 3032m

This was a five-and-a-half-hour trek up through rainforest which eventually turned into alpine moorland. It was fairly steep in parts but not too bad a trek to deal with on the first day.

Once we got to the camp we had our first experience of the "toilets" (if you consider a wooden box with no door and a hole in the ground a toilet). To help combat altitude sickness the body must be well hydrated – we were consuming three to five litres of water per day. This has the obvious side effect of having to use said toilets on a very regular basis but even after a week I didn't get used to those. I hope to never see or smell one again!

After a baby-wipe bath we had our first meal on Kili which surprised us both. Our cook, Walter, really knew how to rustle up some tasty food using only a gas burner with the added disadvantage of doing his cooking inside a tent. Every single meal Walter made was restaurant quality which really blew our minds and gave us something to look forward to after each long day.

#### Day two – Machame camp to Shira camp 3847m

We both enjoyed this trek as it took us out of the forest and above the clouds which offered spectacular views any time the mist cleared.

As the day progressed we felt our first effects of the high altitude we'd heard and read so much about. The effects weren't too bad but we both had shortness of breath and headaches.

The Shira camp is located on the dry and rocky Shira Plateau which had absolutely breathtaking views of both the Western Breach and Mount Meru to the west.

The sunset over Meru was fantastic especially as it was starry. Once the sun went down the temperature dropped so it was into our tent and sleeping bags to try to get some sleep which we both found hard to come by.

#### Day three – Shira camp to Barranco camp 3985m

This was an incredibly long and gruelling day, seven to eight hours with a stop at the Lava Tower (4600m) to help acclimatise.



Stuart (extreme left) celebrates reaches the peak along with David, guide Jeff, cook Walter and assistant guide Emmanuel.

and felt much better as his face had a look of bewilderment on it too. The altitude was really hitting us.

Getting up from lying down, taking jackets off, putting boots on, getting in or out of the tent, eating, talking, laughing and getting in or out of our sleeping bags all left us struggling with blinding headaches and awful shortness of breath. On the plus side, we did have many moments of hysterical laughing which were very tiring but most enjoyable.

After some food we got our gear ready for the summit attempt. We had a final talk with Jeff and a final check of our gear. It was also decided that Walter, our cook, would help us with the summit attempt to give us the best chance of getting there. So there would be five – David, Jeff, Walter, Emmanuel (assistant guide) and myself – although I wasn't quite sure who I was by this point. It was now 6pm, the day was nearly over, the temperature was dropping very fast and the wind rising.

Sleep just didn't happen for either David or myself and we started to get ready around 11pm as we were leaving for the summit at midnight. A midnight ascent is recommended as you have enough time to come back down while it's light and also you can catch the sunrise over the African plains – if by that time you can figure out what the sun is.

Heading up into the darkness with only a headlight to light the way and a -10C temperature with a howling, freezing wind blowing down, I did have to wonder what the hell I was doing.

In front of us there was a zigzag of lights coming from other trekkers' headlamps which seemed to be never-ending both above and below us. We were both told to make sure our Camelbak tubes were clear but it made no difference – mine still froze after about an hour. After six to seven hours of very

We both experienced some really severe headaches and shortness of breath on this trek and were really glad to get back down to lower altitude at the Barranco camp. After another excellent meal it was off to bed.

Another restless night and I was awoken at around 5am with a warm feeling on my face which turned out to be the first of two heavy nosebleeds. I had the next one at around 8am but felt okay and it seemed to clear my headache.

#### Day four – Barranco camp to Karanga camp 4130m

After breakfast this day's trekking started with a 300m climb up what looks like a sheer rock face. This is the Barranco Wall which does in fact have a very narrow path with some parts that need both hands and feet to climb up.

We were both in awe at how quickly our porters went up Barranco while carrying up to 40kg.

This was quite a good day with only mild headaches. The Karanga Valley camp had a lunar landscape look about it with the only other life being the sinister-looking ravens that scavenge any scraps of food left behind by trekkers.

#### Day five and six – Karanga camp to Barafu camp 4681m to Uhuru Peak 5895m

We took around four hours over rocky terrain to reach the Barafu camp. Just as we arrived we both had our first proper experience of altitude sickness. As I was walking along, for a few seconds, I couldn't figure out where I was.

When we were signing in I looked over at David



While baking hot through the day, temperatures plummeted to minus 10C overnight with a high wind chill so it is vital climbers have a tent which withstands the elements.



Stuart and David on the Kili Lava Tower path which traverses the dry and rocky Shira Plateau with breathtaking views of the western breach of Africa's highest peak.

slow and painstaking walking we were both on our last legs, really struggling to reach Stella Point (5672m) with very little energy left when I looked round to see the faint orange line of the horizon and immediately started to feel better.

This was my 40th birthday and I was going to make it to the summit!

Once the sun lit the mountain we could see what was in front of us and could see we didn't have far to go to reach Stella Point. Once we got there it was only another 45 minutes to the summit – Uhuru Peak (5895m).

I found I had renewed energy by Stella but couldn't concentrate very well. Trying to get my camera out of my pocket was a real effort as I had to take my mitts and gloves off. Aside from how cold it was, opening my jacket to get my camera out was made harder by the fact it didn't occur to me to put my gloves in my pocket so I struggled to do things while holding them in my hand which was really stressing me.

Eventually, Jeff noticed and held my gloves while I took ONE photo. David was a bit behind me by the time I reached Uhuru but he got some good pictures once he'd figured out how to operate his camera.

As he approached Uhuru I said to him: "Right mate, let's get some photos taken and get the hell out of here." I really wanted to get off the mountain and have a few pints as I'd given up for the last seven weeks.

Going back down was a blast. Jeff and I "skied" down around 600m of scree which was great fun but by the time we reached Barafu I was so tired I could hardly walk.

This day was definitely the hardest of my life, 16 to 17 hours of hard trekking. After a couple hours of rest, some breakfast and a cup of tea, we set off for Mweka camp and our final night on the mountain.

#### Day seven – Mweka camp to Mweka gate 3110m

This was a very pleasant three-hour hike to the gate through forest with lots of birds and a few monkeys.

All symptoms of altitude sickness disappeared and we both felt very tired but very satisfied and excited about celebrating my birthday with lots of beer on Zanzibar a few hours later.

We were also both really looking forward to our first shower in seven days. And access to the internet to see what the world had been doing without us. Not much as it turned out!

■ Stuart is raising money for Cancer Research, the Brain Tumour Charity and the RSPCA and can be sponsored at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/StuartPage73> while David's efforts were in aid of the RNL and St Christopher's Hospice – <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/DavidRosie>

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