

TREKKING IN KENYA - GENERAL INFORMATION

Mount Kenya (5199m) is the second highest mountain in Africa. Although it lies only a few km from the Equator, it is heavily glaciated. The summit area consists of several smaller peaks surrounding the 2 main peaks of Nelion (5188m) and Batian (5199m). The majority of these are composed of syenite, a superb rough rock for climbing. The whole upland area is a national park and the walk in through forest and moorland is for many visitors the most pleasant part of a trip. Climbers are strongly recommended to adopt a leisurely pace. (The opposite approach was adopted in 1964 by Barry Cliff and Rusty Baillie who drove, ran and climbed from Batian to Kibo in a record 21h40.) Acclimatisation problems to **trekking in kenya** are underestimated by many parties; they rush up to the peaks in one day and find themselves too sick to climb. Note comments on Diamox in the Introduction. There have been many cases of pulmonary oedema, mainly as a result of high altitudes being reached too fast. In the event of pulmonary oedema rapid descent is imperative.

To trekking in Kenya and ascend the highest summits requires technical rock and snow climbing of at least grade IV (Severe) standard, and many parties bivouac on the mountain. Batian was first climbed by H J Mackinder with C Ollier, J Brocherel, 13 September 1899, and not again until 1929. The third highest peak, Pt Lenana (4985m), can be reached by walkers and is ascended by hundreds of people each year.

The flora and fauna of the park is very diverse. The forest zone is inhabited by buffalo and elephant and care should be taken when these are encountered. Hyrax, related to the elephant but looking more like an overgrown rat minus the long tail, and various rodents inhabit the moorland. These scavengers will dig up litter or rummage through tents and sacks in search of food. For this reason do not leave food lying around. Carry all litter off the mountain and do not bury it.

The weather has been discussed in the Introduction. Even in the best season (end December to mid March) there are periods of 2 or 3 days when the weather might be bad, and snowfall could prevent rock climbing. After several wet days access roads in the park may be closed to avoid damage to them, and the moorland paths can become very boggy – particularly on the Naro Moru and Sirimon routes. The usual walking access routes are: (i) The Naro Moru, the normal tourist and fastest way up to the southern peak area. A good vehicle track leads to 3050m, and from here the peak area can be reached in about 7h. (ii) The Sirimon and (iii) The Chogoria; these are longer, scenically more rewarding, less used and less developed. The Chogoria is especially beautiful. (iv) Other routes include the Kamweti from the south and the Timau from the north. Several other approaches provide magnificent wilderness walks through unspoilt forest and moorland mainly on the northwest side of the mountain.

Another fine expedition to trekking in Kenya is the Round the Peaks walk. It provides a circular tour linking the main access routes. Walking on the main routes, though physically demanding, is generally straightforward and paths are well-marked. Access routes to climbs often skirt near the edges of glaciers where their recession has left precariously balanced and potentially dangerous boulders. The Krapf glacier below the east face of Nelion is particularly bad in this respect.

Unmanned huts on the mountain are generally small and dirty. Camping is recommended, though this does mean heavier sacks. The Chogoria Route is soon to be designated a campers route only.

Facilities to trekking in Kenya are available on the 3 main access routes and approximate costs per man night are as follows. Naro Moru route, at the 3050m roadhead, clean and pleasant bandas (\$6 per night) or it is possible to camp. In the Teleki Valley, Mackinder's Camp provides a simple bunkhouse. Camping here is possible (extra to park charges). A small hut located in the Teleki Valley is for the exclusive use of MCK members (free). On the Sirimon route, good campsites at the road-head, by the Liki North Hut (small and often dirty) and near Shipton's Caves. Bantu Lodge run two bunkhouses; at roadhead and above Shipton's Caves. The lodge must be contacted if these are to be used. On the Chogoria route there are very comfortable self-catering bandas (Meru Mt Kenya Lodge) beside the park



gate (\$12). A short walk from the gate, climbers may prefer to use the Urumandi Hut. This hut and the bandas are situated in the picturesque area called Parklands which abounds in game and offers many short walks hereabouts. Several good campsites near the roadhead, and beside Minto's Hut – itself small and rather dirty.

Bookings for any of these (other than MCK hut in the Teleki) should be done through one of the following: Naro Moru River Lodge, PO Box 18, Naro Moru, tel. Naro Moru 23. Alliance Hotels, College House, PO Box 49839, Nairobi, tel.337501. Let's Go Travel, PO Box 60342, Nairobi, tel.29539, 29540, or 340331. Meru Mt Kenya Lodge is booked exclusively through Let's Go Travel. Roadhead facilities on the Naro Moru route together with Mackinder's Camp are booked through Alliance Hotels or Naro Moru River Lodge. Halfway from Naro Moru to the park gate, on left side of the road, is a Youth Hostel; clean and pleasant.

Naro Moru River Lodge provides bandas in Naro Moru, equipment hire, transport to and from the 3050m roadhead (\$80 per vehicle journey, one way) and will organise guides and porters (\$10 per load carried to the Teleki Valley). Mountain Rock Hotel (formerly Bantu Lodge), PO Box 333, tel. 017662625, just north of Naro Moru, offers similar facilities, with good porters and guides, at a lower price. 4WD vehicles at Chogoria cost \$55 for one trip to the park gate, \$100 to roadhead.

Porter and guide services on the mountain have not been too reliable and efforts are being made to smarten-up their organisation. The Naro Moru route porters are based 7km from the lodge on road to gate (PO Box 128, Naro Moru, tel.017662015). For guides and porters serving the Chogoria route contact Kenya Mountain Scenes Club, PO Box 461, Chogoria, tel. 01622204.

Park fees have to be paid at the park gates as follows: Entrance \$15 per day and camping fee \$8 per night. All park gates have radio contact with each other and the Park Rescue/Ranger post in Teleki Valley. Camping is possible at all park gates and water is available. Food for the mountain should be brought from Nairobi. Water is plentiful and with few exceptions is clean. Garage facilities will be found at Naro Moru, Nanyuki (for Sirimon route) and Chuka near Chogoria village.

When making arrangements for a visit to the mountain beware of bogus operators. Make sure you only deal with reputable companies. This problem is mainly encountered in Nairobi.

Naro Moru Route: Tarmac roads in 170km from Nairobi. The park gate at 2400m is 17km from Naro Moru along a good dirt road. Several buses and matatu services Nairobi-Naro Moru. From here matatus only go part way to the gate; a ride on passing vehicles can be tried. From the gate it is occasionally possible to get a lift to the 3050m roadhead. See also the Naro Moru River Lodge vehicle service mentioned above.

Sirimon Route: Tarmac roads to Nanyuki, 190km from Nairobi. Continue 15km north on tarmac and at a signpost turn right onto a dirt road up to the Sirimon Gate (2700m) in 10km. Buses and matatus ply tarmac road; from the turning to the Sirimon Gate, failing a lift, one must walk.

Chogoria Route: Tarmac roads to Chogoria, 180km from Nairobi, then a dirt road for 9km to the forestry gate, and in a further 22km the park gate and Meru Mt Kenya Lodge bandas are reached at 2900m. Good bus and matatu services to Chogoria. From here a lot of luck would be needed to get a lift to the park gate. It is possible to book a 4WD vehicle to take you from the Chief's Camp to the gate; the booking should be made through The Manager, Meru Mt Kenya Lodge, PO Box 365, Chogoria; it is also possible to obtain a vehicle at short notice through the porters and guides offices by Chogoria Hospital (for prices, see above).

Other Routes: Bantu Lodge is the best base. The lodge lies one km off the main tarmac road and 5km north of Naro Moru town. It is important to check on the status of these routes beforehand.

Nelion (5188m) and Batian (5199m) are composed of a superb rough rock – syenite – at least as good as granite for trekking in Kenya. Numerous excellent rock and ice routes exist. The main summits generally require a bivouac, satellite peaks such as Point John offer fine one day climbs.