ASCENT TO KIBO HUT

The journey to Kibo Hut is a battle with boredom and impatience, along with the inevitable struggle for breath. As we walk at such a slow pace that even turtles would be surprised – the only company we have is our thoughts. It's impossible to walk and talk at this altitude, so for the first time, we climb in complete silence. A group of nearly thirty people, and the only sounds are the crunching of the earth beneath our feet and deep breaths. The surroundings are completely different now, there is no vegetation, only endless sand, dust, and some scattered rocks. In the distance, we see it – the king of Africa, the highest peak, Uhuru. And we all cling to it, I'd say. When it seems like we can't go any further, when we ask ourselves, "How much farther?", a glance at this giant waiting for us gives us strength and motivation.

With our thoughts and in complete silence, after more than six hours, we reach the final camp – Kibo Hut, at 4,700 meters above sea level. From here, we will begin our final ascent. From here, the view is unobstructed, and we can see the path that we will take tonight. This sight both scares and excites us. The lack of oxygen is palpable in the air, and there's a nervous tension, some fear within our team, as headaches for some of us grow stronger, weakness and nausea are present, and all of this confirms that altitude sickness is among us. Even those with no symptoms struggle to breathe and move slowly and clumsily, because there's no other way.

The entire day is dedicated to preparations for the final ascent, checking equipment, deciding on departure time, and planning the climbing strategy. Mandatory

rest is expected, and we all try to sleep before the start at midnight. But it's not easy. Our minds are racing with thoughts, fear of the unknown, excitement, anticipation.

Image 17: Our team at Kibo Hut, the last camp before the final ascent

Image 18: Our guides resting before the final ascent.

At 23:20, we gather. Warmed up and ready – we listen to our lead guide, Paolo, for whom this is his 231st ascent to Uhuru.

"The Summit is in your mind," he tells us. "It is conquered wisely, step by step. From the first day, we believed in you, and now, after three days, we know we haven't made a mistake. Now it's your turn to justify the trust we had in you. Thank you for coming to conquer the peak of Africa, and remember – you're not just realizing your dreams here, you're helping us feed our families."

Everything now takes on a completely different dimension. Although this has never been just a climb, now it has a higher, shared purpose for all of us.

The summit has been in my mind for a long time. I have already been there many times in my thoughts, and somehow I'm sure it's waiting for me, and it belongs to me. I look at Uhuru Peak one last time before departure and wonder, "Will this giant allow me to reach the top tonight?"

Image 19: Our team – ascent to Mount Kilimanjaro