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EVEREST



THE TIMES

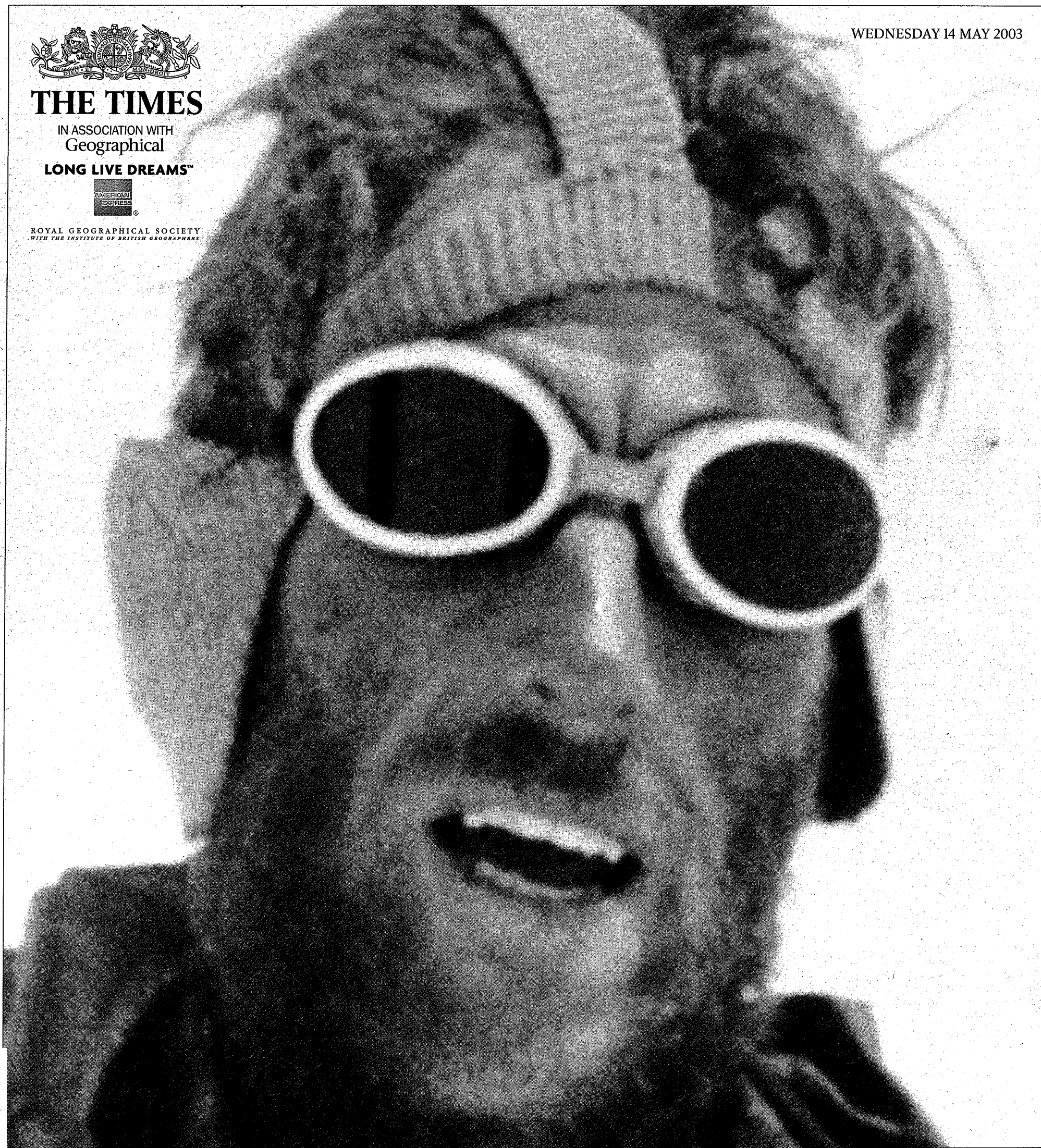
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
Geographical

LONG LIVE DREAMS™



ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY
WITH THE INSTITUTE OF BRITISH GEOGRAPHERS

WEDNESDAY 14 MAY 2003



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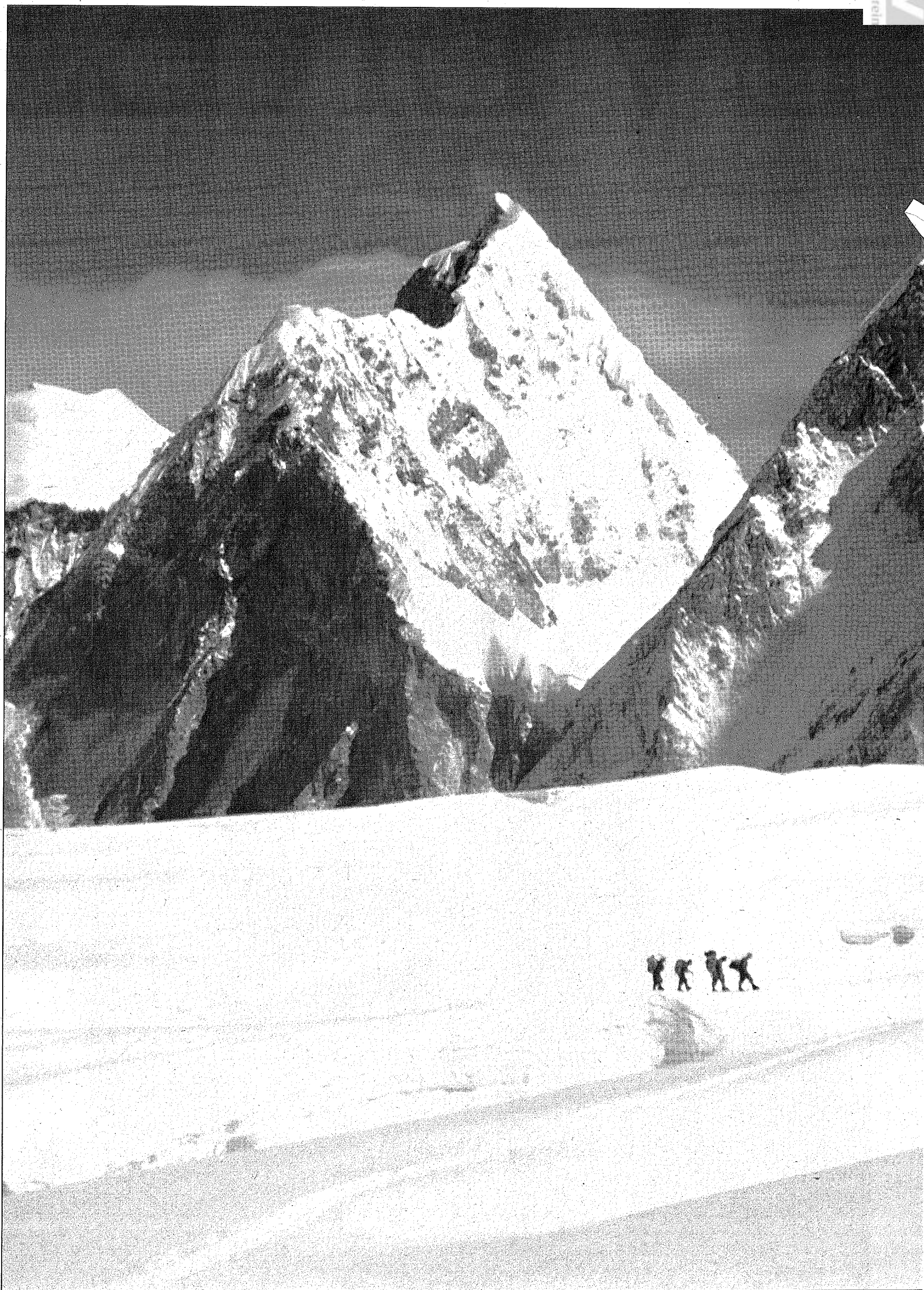
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Cover picture: Edmund Hillary after the successful climb
This page: Hillary leads a party of Sherpas into the Western Cwm

Many of the pictures in this supplement can be found in the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers library (www.rgs.org/imagingeverest)

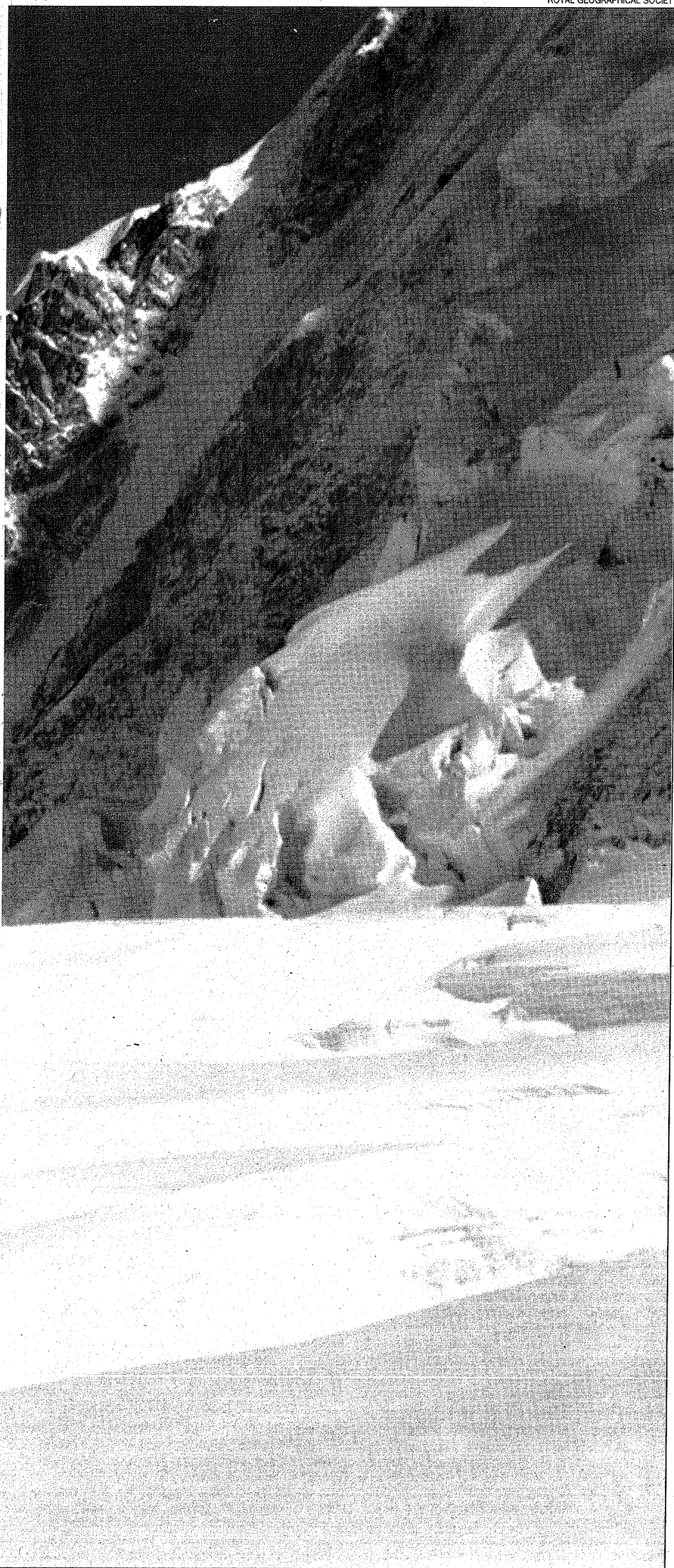
Archive material is drawn from the RGS-IBG and from *The Times* archives. For more information about the RGS-IBG and special offers see page 46

The new book *Everest: Summit of Achievement*, by Stephen Venables, published by Bloomsbury courtesy of the RGS-IBG, has 300 photographs from the Everest archive. For details of an offer for *Times* readers see page 23



A VICTORY FOR THE HUMAN SPIRIT

On May 29, 1953, at 11.30 in the morning Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Norgay Tenzing became the first men to climb Everest. With laconic understatement Hillary recalled: "Well, we knocked the bastard off." It was the culmination of one of the great adventures of modern times, achieved with impeccable timing: the news was announced on the eve of the Queen's Coronation. It seemed like the dawn of a new era and *The Times*, which broke the story, invoked the shades of that earlier adventurer, Sir Francis Drake, and his Queen, the first Elizabeth. It saluted John Hunt for offering to his sovereign "a tribute of glory" and proclaimed: "their victory is a victory for the human spirit"



CONDITIONS BAD, BASE ABANDONED SAID CODE: IT REALLY MEANT SUCCESS

HOW JAN MORRIS, WRITING AS JAMES MORRIS, RECORDED THE TRIUMPH FOR TIMES READERS

In The Times house journal for 1953, the reporter James Morris recalled his assignment on Mount Everest and how he and the newspaper's foreign desk plotted to keep the story from falling into the hands of their rivals.

Chomolungma is the local name for Everest, and it is characteristic that there are at least five different translations, all by scholars of repute. Everest, for all its grandeur, is a permickety mountain, a place of waspish annoyances and difficulties. For the newspaperman the most awkward thing about it is its situation. It lies bang on the border between Nepal and Tibet, the one country just emerging from that peculiarly romantic political state known as "forbidden", the other in Communist hands and barred to Western visitors. The mountain is thus ridiculously remote and inaccessible. The sinews of a foreign news service are the international cables and telephones, for without them the hottest news is liable to cool; but from Everest to the nearest cable office or telephone it is about 180 difficult and roadless miles.

Wireless transmitters are not encouraged in Nepal, so the most obvious way of getting news away from the mountain is ruled out from the start. When the problem of communications with the British 1953 expedition was discussed in London early this year, ingenious amateurs suggested that carrier pigeons might be used; or beacon fires; or that dispatches might be floated in watertight containers down the river that flows from the region of the mountain into India. One enthusiast wondered if use might not be made of those strange powers of telepathy for which Tibetan sages are allegedly noted.

But the only really practicable way of sending messages from Everest to the cable office at Kathmandu was by runner.

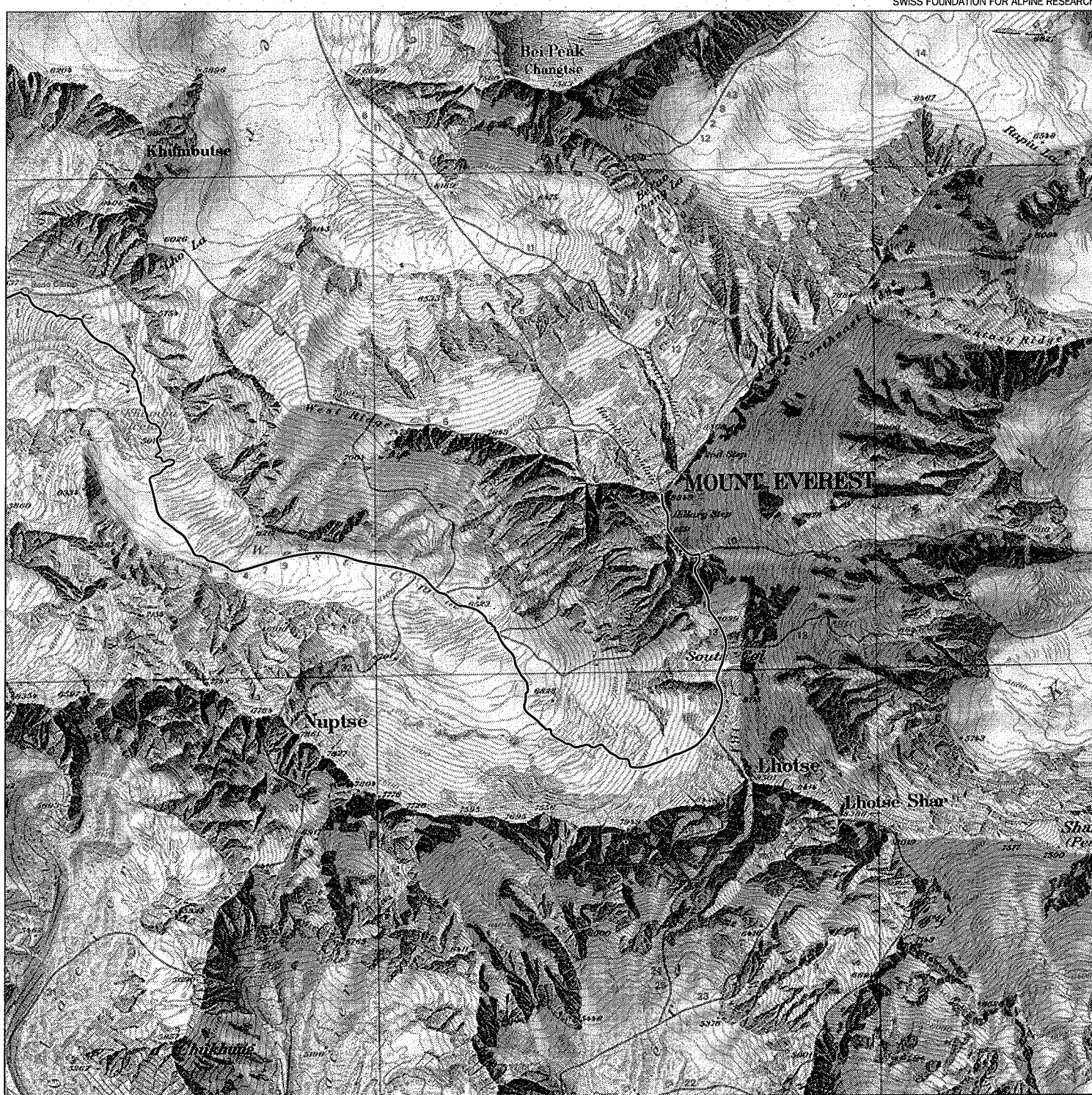
Runners recruited from the Sherpas, the tough people who live in the area, had been employed by all previous expeditions. This time competition was going to be ruthless and unrelenting, and it was foreseen that runners would be intercepted and bribed to disgorge their news, that dispatches would be milked, and hearsay information cagily collated.

The most careful plans were therefore laid in the old *Times*'s offices at Printing House Square (abbreviated to PHS) to ensure that *The Times* had the fullest and speediest news service from the mountain. We alone had the copyright of Colonel Hunt's own dispatches, but there was nothing to prevent any enterprising rival from sending a correspondent to the foot of the mountain to pick up what he could.

It was decided in February that I should join the expedition as Special Correspondent, to see that our news got away swiftly and safely, and to supplement Hunt's messages with dispatches of my own. ("I wish," said the Foreign Editor when they gave me this welcome assignment, "I wish Morris didn't look quite so pleased!")

FROM THE MOUNTAIN OUR MESSAGES WERE TO GO by runner to Arthur Hutchinson, Delhi Correspondent of *The Times*, who would be stationed at Kathmandu to shepherd them through the cable office and interpret them where necessary. Hutchinson had dealt with the dispatches sent by the Swiss expeditions to Everest last year, and he probably knew more about news communications with the mountain than anyone else. In case the Kathmandu route proved unsatisfactory, an Indian employed by Hutchinson was to be at a town on the Indian frontier, 150 miles or so south of Everest, prepared to transmit any dispatches sent his way.

I left London for Delhi by air halfway through March, and on March 25 I flew into Kathmandu. This extraordinary place, all



An aerial view of Mount Everest showing the various routes climbed, including the 1953 route, seen above Nuptse

palaces and pinnacles, wide green spaces and cluttered bazaars, princes and drooling children, lies in a wide, secluded plain surrounded by high hills. The aircraft from India weaves its way through a narrow mountain gorge, the peaks towering above it on either side, until suddenly in the green below there appears the fabled capital, for all the world like something in a lost world or a forgotten country of legend.

Hutchinson was waiting for me (in bed with a fever) in the city's one "hotel". This was a nobleman's palace, converted for familiar economic reasons into a cross between an army transit camp, a provincial museum, and a seaside boarding house. At every conceivable doorway throughout the building was laid a fibre mat inscribed with the ironic word "Welcome".

The walls of every room were hung horribly with life-size portraits of the nobleman's

relatives (one of them apparently in the uniform of the Nepalese Navy, and looking quite extraordinarily like Admiral Beatty). Here and there could be found a stuffed crocodile, or a petrified ibis, and in the hall two small tigers were locked in eternal conflict. Sometimes the place would echo with the roars of a rather mangy lion (a live one) that happened to live in a private zoo across the road. Now and again, too, the entire building would reverberate with Hutchinson's exasperated bellow: "Bearer!"

The Everest news campaign had already opened. The main body of the expedition had left for the fortnight's trek to Kathmandu, closely followed by Ralph Izzard of the *Daily Mail*. Colin Reid of *The Daily Telegraph* (an old colleague of mine from Egypt days) was living on boiled chicken—the safest dish in

the "hotel"— and several Indian newspapermen were in Kathmandu. A Reuter correspondent was expected any day.

I was to travel to Everest with Major Jimmy Roberts, a Gurkha officer who was taking oxygen supplies to the expedition. We set about recruiting our ragged, barefoot, petulant porters and assembling their loads in the garden of the British Embassy.

On March 27, as we were engaged in this job, we were astounded to get a message from Hunt dispatched only two days before from Namche Bazar, a village about 30 miles from Mount Everest. It takes anything up to 12 days for a runner to travel from Namche to Kathmandu; Hunt's message could only mean that somewhere out there, in primitive country first visited by Europeans three years before, there existed a wireless transmitter. The message

Essential supplies included
chocolate biscuits, tinned peaches
and half a dozen **oysters**.

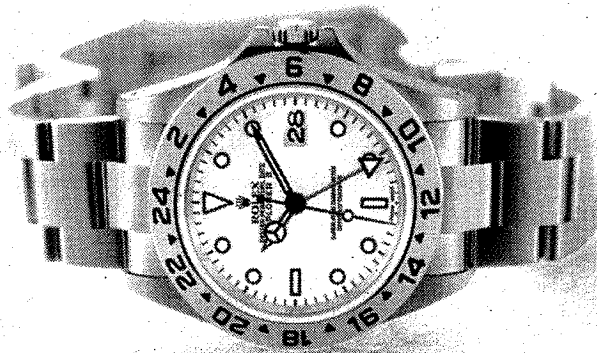


Tenzing Norgay & Edmund Hillary (1953). ©Photograph courtesy of The Royal Geographical Society.



Since 1933, when the British Everest Expedition reached 28,150 feet, Rolex Oysters have been key equipment on numerous Himalayan climbs, including Hillary and Tenzing's landmark ascent of the summit 50 years ago. Indeed, Sir John Hunt who led the 1953 expedition later wrote 'we have come to look upon Rolex Oysters as an important part of our high-climbing equipment.'

To this day Rolex continues to be associated with the world's highest mountain. Among the climbers who have relied on these most durable of timepieces are Junko Tabei, the first woman to conquer Everest and Reinhold Messner, who became the first person to reach the summit without oxygen. Though not, of course, without a Rolex.



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ROLEX



OUR RIVALS WERE ASTONISHED TO FIND THERE WERE MEN WHO COULD RUN 150 MILES IN THREE DAYS

had reached Kathmandu through the Indian Embassy; but the embassy staff were decidedly reticent about its origins, and the strange transmitter was very much in my mind throughout the long trek from Kathmandu. It was a difficult walk through mountainous country, enlivened by occasional plank bridges swinging dizzily over torrents, by groves of gorgeous rhododendrons, by quaint local music and quainter local food. Once I found an enormous and very damp frog sitting in my sleeping-bag, and for days my porters thought it funny to shout at me: "Sahib! Sahib! One frog in your bed!"

Once (on Easter Day) I had an attack of stomach trouble so acute that every hundred yards or so I had to lie flat on my back and wish Everest to perdition.

Several times beetles five or more inches long swooped around our heads. More than once I wondered if it really was all right to drink the grey and syrupy liquid that passed for water.

Twice I sent short dispatches back, addressed to the British Embassy in Kathmandu. The first I entrusted to a group of Hunt's porters whom we met on their way back to the capital. The second was taken by a rather dotty-looking young man I recruited in the bazaar-village of Thos (a village exquisitely set beside a clear fresh river and between lovely wooded hills): he shambled off in the general direction of Kathmandu, and I heard later that he delivered the message crumpled but intact, and collected his fee from Hutchinson.

I gave one old boy, with an immense white beard, a copy of the airmail edition of *The Times*. He regarded it with such veneration that when I came back the same way, more than three months later, he still had it protruding prominently from the neck of his shirt.

A fortnight of walking brought us to Namche. This is the headquarters village of the Sherpas, and as full of gossip as a suburban shopping centre or a cavalry mess. I had not been there ten minutes before I discovered the truth about the wireless transmitter. Namche is only a few miles from the frontier with Communist Tibet, and the Indian Government (which enjoys a privileged position in Nepal) has established a police post there to keep an eye on movement over the border: hence the radio link with Kathmandu.

The Indians manning the post seemed friendly enough, and indeed transmitted a short message for me. (In London a kindly sub-editor headed the piece with the phrase "By runner to Kathmandu"; and our rivals were astonished to find that in Nepal there were men who could run 150 miles in three days.) But I did not feel altogether happy about them. There was no guarantee that any news they sent for me would be kept private, and I resolved that unless other correspondents used the transmitter for news I would not use it except for the final message of success or failure; and even then I would disguise the news in some way.

Next day we reached Thyangboche, where some of the climbers, including Tenzing, were encamped. They had finished their preliminary training, and were going up to Everest the next day. I sent a message home that night with the mail runner, who was going back to Kathmandu with the expedition's letters, and set about recruiting some Sherpas to look after me during my stay on the mountain.

They are an odd people in appearance, the Sherpas. They are short and stocky, like Toby jugs, and they wear coarse, dark woollen cloaks, high fur-lined hats, and embroidered Tibetan boots. (I had a tiny pair made for my small son, and for weeks my wife has been trying to rid them of their violent smell of yak.) Their wives

My dear Norman,

In my letter dated May 19, I enclosed a series of phrases, which (if you receive them) will bear the following meanings. These phrases have been devised by Morris and myself to cover at least the two major eventualities of success or failure, since in certain sections of our route from him to you it has become impossible --- for reasons explained in my letter of May 19 --- to use the words we had originally devised.

PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF THIS LETTER BY CABLE, AS ALSO RECEIPT OF MY LETTER DATED MAY 19.

After ~~the~~ receipt of this letter (or that of May 19, whichever is the ~~earlier~~ earlier) you may at any time expect ~~to~~ to receive, either direct or through the Foreign Office, a cable beginning

Either SNOW CONDITIONS BAD, meaning EVEREST CLIMBED

~~or, in the event of failure, beginning~~ or, in the event of failure, beginning

WIND STILL TROUBLESOME meaning ATTEMPT ON EVEREST FINALLY ABANDONED AND WITHDRAWAL FROM MOUNTAIN UNDER WAY

Whichever of these phrases is used will be followed by the names of the climbers who ~~have~~ reached the highest point attained, using the following phrases for this purpose:

SOUTH COL UNTENABLE	meaning	BAND
LHOTSE FACE IMPOSSIBLE		BOURDILLON
RIDGE CAMP UNTENABLE		EVANS
WITHDRAWAL TO WEST BASIN		GREGORY
ADVANCED BASE ABANDONED		HILLARY
CAMP 5 ABANDONED		HUNT
CAMP 6 ABANDONED		LOWE
CAMP 7 ABANDONED		NOYCE
AWAITING IMPROVEMENT		TENSING
FURTHER NEWS FOLLOWS		WARD
ASSAULT POSTPONED		WESTMACOTT
WEATHER UNFAVOURABLE DETERIORATING		WYLIE

A SHERPA climber of any name (other than Tensing) will be represented by the phrase AWAITING OXYGEN SUPPLIES.

~~that the phrase below will be~~ If the message records failure, i.e. begins WIND STILL TROUBLESOME,

James Morris had worked out a code for each climber and every eventuality in order to keep the ascent secret from rivals

are shy and pretty in youth, loud-mouthed and importunate in middle-age, and appalling in their dotage. I was an unwilling admirer of the Sherpas, for I did not like their heartiness but deeply respected their good cheer, their honesty and their resolution.

I became, however, greatly attached to my cook-sirdar, a friendly character named Sonam, and later stayed with him at his house lower in the valley. He specialised in a delicious dinner dish which it was his fancy to call "Snowman Pie". It consisted of chopped-up yak meat decoratively embedded in mashed potato and garnished with a vegetable called a "Thyangboche onion" — excellent, if indigestible. He also had an uncanny knack of whistling up boiled potatoes, sizzling from the fire and covered in butter. Sonam, like every Sherpa I met, was an incorrigible tippler, and did his best to corrupt me by

Copy of a Message received from COL. HUNT, NAMCHE BAZAR on June 1, 1953.

" Snow condition bad hence expedition abandoned advance base on 29th and awaiting improvement being all well. "

Forwarded to the British Embassy, Nepal, Kathmandu.

(G.R. Joshi)
Vice-Consul, Indian Embassy
Nepal.

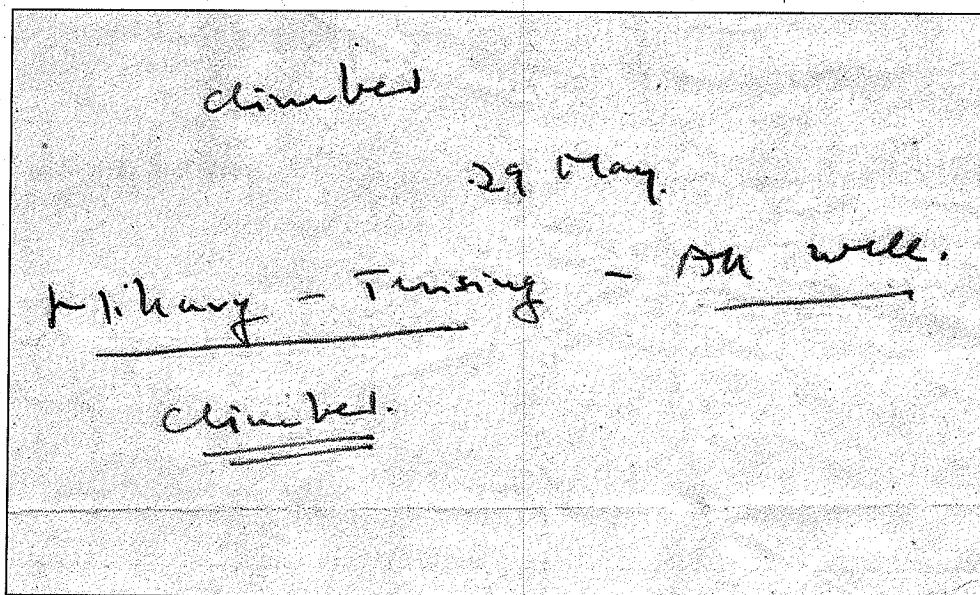
The code that let the world know that Everest had been climbed



James Morris greeting the team at the expedition's Base Camp after their successful ascent. Morris stayed for some weeks at the camp from where he organised his runners



James Morris appearing in an advert



The note the Foreign Editor of *The Times* took to conference on hearing the news

THE ASCENT

'You will ask ... "what is the use of climbing Mount Everest?" and my answer must at once be, "it is no use" ... if you cannot understand that there is something in man which responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself, upward and forever upward, then you won't see why we go. What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. and joy is, after all, the end of life ...'

George Mallory, 1922

producing at odd moments through the day a hideous old bottle full of *rakshi*, a drink closely akin to methylated spirits made from fermented rice (it was not at all bad).

With this good friend, and with a little company of Sherpas to carry my goods, I set off with Charles Evans and Alfred Gregory for the mountain. Thyangboche is at about 13,500ft, and soon we were above the 15,000ft mark. At this height the unacclimatised visitor is likely to feel breathless and unduly tired, and it was something of a strain moving up the Khumbu Glacier that leads to the foot of the mountain.

The glacier valley is all boulders and moraine, interspersed with snowfields and great pinnacles of ice; but it is saved by its surroundings — for it is overlooked by one of the most magnificent groups of mountains in the world, peak upon peak in a splendid profusion. The

site of the expedition's base camp was a moraine hillock in the middle of the glacier, just below the boot of the icefall, a mass of crumbling ice which led on to the mountain proper. It was a bleak and unfriendly place, with temperatures at that time sometimes very much below freezing point.

Here I settled down for a stay of some weeks during the preliminary operations on Everest, moving sometimes higher on the mountain, but always returning to base to organise my runners. I had a double sleeping-bag; a high-altitude tent; a radio receiver for hearing BBC weather broadcasts (the BBC also broadcast the news of the birth of my second son); two walkie-talkie sets for communication with other camps on the mountain; my camera; my typewriter; some books; and three

desperately heavy sacks containing Nepalese money — all in ancient coin, for the Sherpas were inclined to turn up their noses at paper money. All this rather cluttered up my quarters, but I managed to make myself reasonably comfortable; and, indeed, although I lost about a stone in weight, I soon began to feel notably fit.

My first experience of mountaineering proper came with the climb up the icefall into the Western Cwm, the great snow valley cut in the flank of Everest, which was the highway to the summit. It would be idle to pretend that I found it easy; but the other men on the rope were some of the world's finest and friendliest climbers, and somehow they pulled me over the gaping crevasses, heaved me up the iceblocks, pushed me over the precarious makeshift bridges, and dragged me through the wilderness of crumbled snow and ice. The climate was appall-

ing. Sometimes it was parchingly dry, and blazing hot; sometimes cold, damp and dreary with snowfalls. There was a great deal to be said for the pleasure of arriving at a staging camp on Everest — just a couple of tents huddled in the snow but still a place of tea-mugs, sleeping-bags and good company.

At 20,000ft and above the altitude is likely to tell quite severely on the novice climber. I found my brain a little blunted, and my natural enthusiasm dampened. I wrote less than I ought to have written, and took fewer photographs. (Tom Stobart, the expedition's cinematographer, who is a climber of experience, found at one time that taking any pictures at all was a most intolerable bore and mental burden.)

I sent regular dispatches home during the long weeks before the assault. I built up a small corps of elite runners, all of them swift

I SHALL NEVER FORGET THE TRANSFORMATION THAT OVERCAME THE CAMP WHEN THE SUMMIT PARTY GAVE US THE NEWS OF THEIR VICTORY

and trustworthy. To ensure maximum speed, I offered them pay on what I think is called a sliding scale. They had a basic fee of about £10. If they did the journey in eight days, they got £5 extra; if they did it in seven days, they got £10 extra; and if, miracle of miracles, they did it in six days, they earned a bonus of £20. It was astonishing how they responded to these incentives (and I think also to the comradeship and sense of purpose which we shared with them). Time after time the journey, always before supposed to take ten days at the very least, was done in six days; and two magnificent runners did it in five. Some of them regularly brought me presents of eggs; one had a deep contempt for the local *rakhsi* and used to pop over to Those now and again (a mere 60 miles or so) to bring me back a special brew prepared only there.

The fight to wrest the story from us was now at its height, though no other correspondent came on to the mountain. In Kathmandu one of the great news agencies, and one of the London national papers, each had powerful receiving sets with which they hoped to intercept wireless messages from Namche and cable messages going out of Kathmandu via the radio link with India. A Reuter correspondent had stationed himself at the Thyangboche monastery (he turned up at base camp one afternoon and I gave him tea) and an Indian working for *The Daily Telegraph* was at Namche. To make sure that the final news of success went over the Namche radio safely — I could scarcely afford to ignore that means of communication altogether — I devised a new code. We already had several adequate codes which made messages look gibberish, but I was afraid the Indians would not accept dispatches unless they thought they understood them. I therefore, with a certain nasty cunning, composed a new cipher in which coded messages looked as if they were not coded at all. Thus the code phrase for “Everest climbed” was “Snow conditions bad”; the phrase meaning “Hillary” was “Advanced base abandoned”, and that for Tenzing “Awaiting improvement”.

The main assault on the mountain, by Hillary and Tenzing, was made on May 29. For a week or two before then there was a rising tide of excitement, and my runners left for Kathmandu almost daily (very expensive). I stayed at Base Camp as long as I could. It was easier to write dispatches there; I could organise the runners; and as no other European was there I was able to be of some service to the expedition — each day the climbers would radio their needs to me, and I would see that the necessary stores went up by Sherpa.

However, on the day of the attempt I felt I should go up higher, so I climbed up the icefall again to Camp III, and the next morning went on to Camp IV, at the head of the Western Cwm.

There most of the climbers were waiting, in a state of high expectancy, for news from the higher places; and a kind of feverish hush settled on the camp when we first spotted the figures of Hillary and Tenzing on the ridge high above us. Hunt, himself seriously weakened by his exploits on the final ridge a few days before, sat on a packing-case tense as a violin string. The rest of us looked through binoculars, or laid the odds, or sipped lemonade rather listlessly, or thumbed our way through the old newspapers that littered the main tent of the camp. It was, for me anyway, a decidedly pre-dentist feeling.



Sherpas, wearing crampons, cross a log bridge over a crevasse in the Western Cwm, the long ice-filled valley considered the key

But, I shall never, as long as I live, forget the transformation that overcame the camp when the summit party appeared and gave us the news of their victory. It was a moment so thrilling, so vibrant, that the hot tears sprang to the eyes of most of us. The day was so dazzlingly bright — the snow so white, the sky so blue; and the air was so heavily charged with excitement; and the news, however much we expected it, was still somehow such a wonderful surprise; and it felt to all of us that we were very close to the making of history; and away in England, as we knew, an entire nation, in celebration for the Coronation, was waiting eager-hearted for the word of triumph. It was a moment of great beauty: a joy for ever, as the poet wisely said.

It was May 31. I was nearly 22,000ft up on the inaccessible slopes of Everest, but it occurred to me in a moment of wild optimism

that *The Times* could conceivably print the news of Everest's conquest on the very day of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation, June 2. I had climbed up the Cwm that morning from Camp III, and I was tired; but I felt I must get down to Base Camp again that evening and get the news off by runner first thing in the morning. Michael Westmacott, a great-hearted friend, instantly volunteered to come with me down the mountain. I got Ed Hillary's story from him as he sat in the big tent eating an omelette (he has since become godfather to my son) and we set off down the Cwm in the late afternoon.

The thaw had set in, the sun that day had been blazing, and the snow surface of the Cwm was crumbling. We kept falling in up to our thighs, and the process of extraction was tiring and unpleasant. The Cwm is overshadowed by a vast and impenetrable mountain rampart, and

before long the sun had disappeared and the snow valley was cast into gloom. It was twilight when we reached Camp III and drank a little lemonade. Below us the mass of the icefall looked singularly uninviting.

The route had been entirely obliterated by snow and the thaw, and only occasionally did we glimpse, often on some unattainable eminence, the little route flags which used to guide our way through this wilderness. We stumbled and slithered our way through the iceblocks. The dark was coming on and I was fairly exhausted, often losing my footing on the crumbly ice, getting entangled with the rope, or tottering on the brinks of crevasses. Mike prodded his way through a maze of icecliffs with infinite skill, but our progress was slow and perilous. Once we reached a steep snow-slope, and glissaded down it on our feet; I stubbed my toe on



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to the first ascent by the British expedition in 1953 and the site of Camp IV

an iceblock at the bottom and spent a moment or two cursing creation in general and the foreign department of *The Times* in particular; I had to hobble home with half a toenail, and eventually had the whole thing removed in Calcutta. At the foot of the icefall the little glacier rivulets had swollen in the thaw into swift torrents; we balanced our way along their edges, sometimes jumping across to surer footing on the other side, sometimes slipping in so that the water oozed into our socks and over the tops of our boots.

It was long after dark when we reached Base Camp, to be greeted by my loyal Sherpas. I rumpled into my sleeping-bag and typed out a code message to tell the world that the mountain had been climbed by Hillary and Tenzing. It ran: "Snow conditions bad stop advanced base abandoned may twentynine stop awaiting

THE ASCENT

▲ Tibetans call Everest Chomolungma, which has many translations, including "big fat hen". The Nepalese name, given after the peak was recognised as the world's highest, is Sagarmatha, meaning "brow of the sky"

▲ Sir George Everest, after whom the mountain is named, is thought to have believed a Tibetan or Nepalese name would have been more apt

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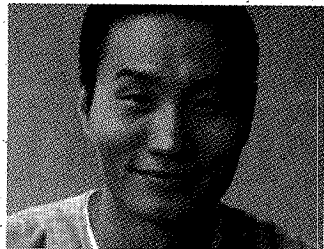
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Michael Lee
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At 6:05 it was in the corner

At 6:16, the middle

At 6:21, the other corner

At 6:42, a bit more to the left

Now I'm certain that this new sofa was the right choice for my new flat

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THE LAST GREAT IMPERIAL ADVENTURE AND THE LAST TIME WE COULD LOOK DOWN ON THE REST OF THE WORLD

IT WAS A MAGICAL MOMENT BUT IT ALSO MARKED THE END OF INNOCENCE, SAYS JAN MORRIS

Most Britons thought it only proper that when Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, was climbed for the first time in 1953, it was a British expedition that climbed it. As it happened, Everest had never been within the boundaries of the British Empire, standing as it did on the high Himalayan frontier between Nepal and Tibet, but it was well within what was called in those days a British sphere of influence, and had long seemed a sort of quasi-imperial peak.

It had first been identified by a British surveyor, it was given a Briton's name, British expeditions had been going there for half a century, and around its presence there swirled all manner of imperial suggestion, from the skulduggeries of the Great Game to the mythologies of stiff upper lip and gallant amateurism.

Everest was, so to speak, half in fief to the British Raj in India, and as long before as 1905 the most imperial of the Viceroy's, George Curzon, had expressed the conviction that it really ought to be first climbed by the British, "the mountaineers and pioneers par excellence of the universe". The first seven expeditions to the mountain, between 1921 and 1938, were almost symbolically British, not just in nationality, but in culture. The very first was defined by the Dalai Lama, giving instructions to his officials in the Everest region, simply as "a party of sahibs", and parties of British sahibs they were all to remain. They generally had a military flavour, and their climbers were almost all men of the upper middle classes, with a general bearing, manner and attitude figuratively imperial.

The Empire was already past its prime, debilitated by the First World War, economically faltering and industrially overtaken but it still presented a brave face to the world — and to itself. The values that had created it were not yet discredited, and the imperial styles had not yet degenerated into parody, but were serious expressions of purpose. Dressing for dinner in the jungle was sensible self-discipline. The stiff upper lip was not an affectation but an instrument of example and survival.

So the Everest expeditions between the two world wars displayed, if not the ideology, certainly the aesthetic of the *Pax Britannica*. The climbers were sustained by hundreds of local porters, and nothing could look more imperially evocative than a long, long train of Everest bearers, bent half-double by their loads, led by their dozen sahibs through the wilderness. The British attitude towards these employees, Tibetans, Nepalese, Sherpas, was characteristically at worst patronising, at best paternal. They greatly admired the mountain peoples, and probably the nearest they got to racism, or perhaps just political incorrectness, was sometimes to make fun of them — one particularly flamboyant Sherpa of the inter-war expeditions, habitually slung all around with knives and water bottles and knapsacks, they fondly christened "The Foreign Sportsman".

They, themselves, like the Empire that bred them, were often more complex than they seemed. A hundred old pictures illustrate their ambiguities. Before they set off for the mountain they look terribly British, in tweed jackets and plus-fours, or shorts and long socks. They suck at pipes. Some have walking sticks, some have pith helmets, and they pose for the camera resolutely manly and unsmiling. By the time they get to Everest, though, they have gone more or less feral. Like so many of the imperial activists they have been liberated — from vicar-

7

MAN'S CHALLENGE TO THE HEIGHTS

YEARS OF ENDEAVOUR CROWNED BY THE EVEREST VICTORY

Seldom since FRANCIS DRAKE brought the Golden Hind to anchor in Plymouth Sound has a British explorer offered to his Sovereign such a tribute of glory as COLONEL JOHN HUNT and his men are able to lay at the feet of QUEEN ELIZABETH for her Coronation day. It somehow seemed from the outset that the aura of victory went invisibly with this expedition, as with none of the other companies of equally skilled and gallant men who had matched themselves against the giant and fallen back defeated. None could easily give a reason for the air of hope and confidence that surrounded them; but it is pleasant to think that the atmosphere of youth and aspiration belonging to the new reign inspired COLONEL HUNT's men in a contest which, as has long been recognized,

become passable. Yet the men who threw themselves so repeatedly against the northern crags made their own contribution to the sum of knowledge. Though their exploration of the Tibetan route was abortive, they painfully accumulated for the benefit of later comers much of the necessary intelligence about the winds and snows at great altitudes, the behaviour of the human body in rarefied atmosphere, and its effect in undermining the power of the will. The final assault has been accomplished by long and arduous training; by intense study in laboratories of the facts observed in action; by careful study on the part of the climbers themselves of the counsel that science had to give; and by the daily guidance of the specialists accompanying the party.

How a leader writer in *The Times* proclaimed the achievement by John Hunt and his team in time for the Coronation

age or from regimental mess, from mother or poor dear Ethel, or simply from the restrictions and inhibitions of their culture. Now they look like groups of gentlemanly ruffians, dressed in apparent throwaways, old army jerseys, battered trilby hats, raincoats and puttees. Here we see one of them paying a visit to a Buddhist monastery wearing what looks like a speckled dressing-gown. Here somebody else advances towards Mount Everest, on a hot day, stark naked but for a hat and a backpack.

But they were certainly no wimps. Those seven expeditions never got to the top of the mountain but they did climb higher than anyone, anywhere, had ever climbed before. Even in 1924 Colonel E. F. Norton, wearing a leather motorbike helmet, two sweaters and two gabardine suits, with a woollen muffler "to complete my costume", reached without

oxygen a height of 28,126ft (8,573m) — less than 1,000ft from the summit.

As in the Empire itself, there were many idiosyncratic characters among them, rebels, mystics, visionaries or free-thinkers despite their high bourgeois upbringing. General Charles Bruce, leader of the 1922 expedition, looked the very incarnation of Colonel Blimp, but was in fact a passionate devotee of the Himalayan cultures. Howard Somerville, doctor of the same expedition, decided on the way home from Everest to stay in India as a medical missionary; he spent 40 years there, becoming a pioneer in the treatment of leprosy, besides writing the incidental music to the first of all Everest films. Hugh Boustead (1933) had deserted from the Royal Navy during the First World War; finding he wasn't seeing enough action, he jumped ship in South Africa, joined the Army and served with such dis-

tingtion that he was the very first Royal Navy deserter to be pardoned. Frank Smythe (1933, 1936 and 1938) reported seeing UFOs when he was on the mountain. Percy Wyn-Harris (1933 and 1936) later became Governor of The Gambia, and sailed out from Britain to the independence celebrations of that colony single-handed on a five-ton yawl. H. W. Tilman (1935 and 1938) adored cats, became a famous partisan leader in the Second World War and finally vanished somewhere in the South Seas.

And, of course, there was George Leigh Mallory (1921, 1922 and 1924), a schoolmaster of spiritual and literary leanings. He it was who, asked why he wanted to climb Everest, replied "Because it's there" — the only Everest quotation to go into the language. He was a gracefully powerful climber, a character of charismatic sexual and intellectual charm, and it was perfectly

1953

It wasn't just the conquest of Everest and the Queen's Coronation that led the nation to believe that 1953 was a bumper year. South of the border, the English were cheering after a win against Australia regained them the Ashes

▲ Further afield, the Korean War officially ended with the

agreement that the country would be divided at the 38th parallel — as it was when the Communists first attacked. The US lost 33,327 soldiers with a further 102,000 wounded. The war cost more than \$18 billion. An exchange of prisoners meant the British (and US) PoWs were finally allowed to return home

▲ The Britons Rosalind Franklin and Francis Crick

and an American, James Watson, made one of the biggest scientific breakthroughs of the century when they discovered the double-helical structure of DNA

▲ The Soviet leader, Josef Stalin, died this year, as did Queen Mary and the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, who collapsed after a night out in New York

▲ General Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated as President of the United States. Also in America, the Rosenbergs were executed for spying

▲ In the UK sweet rationing finally ended, marking a down trend in the nation's teeth. After much speculation about its name, the Queen launched the new Royal Yacht, *Britannia*

▲ The former Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* had its premiere in Paris

▲ There was tragedy, too, of course; 128 lives were lost when a car ferry sank off the Irish coast. At least 280 were killed and thousands left homeless due to severe flooding in eastern England

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



The 1922 Everest team sitting down to breakfast during the approach march. Their supplies were probably bought at Fortnum & Mason in London's Piccadilly

in the imperial tradition, the tradition of General Gordon and Captain Scott, that he should lose his life in a failed attempt on the ultimate mountain. His disappearance was to provide a permanent epiphany for the British connection with Everest. Long afterwards, when the British Empire was no more, I found myself writing one day: "The Moon will never seem so far away, nor quite so worth the reaching, as that last useless summit of the world — where Mallory, like the illusions of all our glory, lies still in the snow."

For by 1953 the glorious illusions of Empire were almost gone — possession by possession the British had withdrawn from their imperium, and they no longer had the will, the power or the desire to dominate the world. The imperial idea, though, stoked by nostalgia and regret, was still alive in their minds. The kingdom that

had so recently emerged battle-scarred, impoverished but victorious from a terrible war, still instinctively believed that Britons had if not a right, at least a sort of duty to be first upon the top of the world.

In 1952 the first full postwar expeditions had been mounted by the Swiss, and had narrowly failed to reach the summit. The British attempt of 1953 was to be a last flourish of the sovereign spirit, especially because it would be the year, too, of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation, and thus (so it was fondly hoped) the start of a new Elizabethan Age. The expedition had all the hallmarks of an imperial enterprise, an enterprise not jingoistic indeed — it was too late for British bombast — but still conducted in the old style. It was recognisably a party of sahibs with their native bearers, and it went as if to war. The team was led by one of Montgomery's former staff

officers, and was organised with Montgomery's thoroughness. It included two New Zealanders, in those days thought of simply as overseas Britons, while the most experienced of the Sherpas, rather like a native officer commissioned into the old army of British India, had been promoted out of porterdome to one of the climbing party.

It was only proper, in those late and liberal days of Empire, that the first two men to reach the summit, under the leadership of the Englishman Colonel John Hunt, DSO, should be Edmund Hillary, late of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and the Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, who had been to Everest with the British four times before; and just as apposite that the news of their success, the culminating adventurous exploit of the British Empire, should reach the imperial capital on the very

eve of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation. It was a magical moment for the British, an allegorical moment of delight, and the world, whatever its views on British imperialism, generously celebrated with them.

Ed Hillary, the true colonial boy, breezily summed up the achievement with the words: "Well, we knocked the bastard off." But as an epitaph of the British Everest story, perhaps of the Empire itself, I prefer John Hunt's tribute, in his official account of the expedition, to "the wonderful work done by my wife, Mrs Goodfellow and Miss Mowbray-Green, in sewing many hundreds of name-tapes on all our garments, thus avoiding a possible cause of contention among us on the mountain".

There! *Sic transit gloria* — for this, the last great imperial adventure, was perhaps the last great innocent adventure too.



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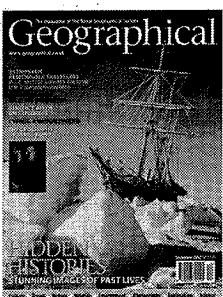
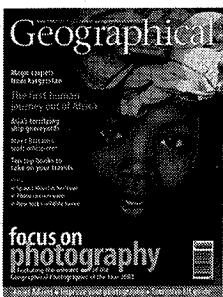
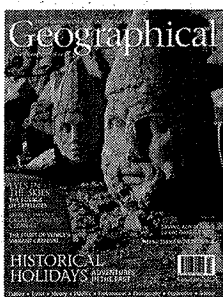
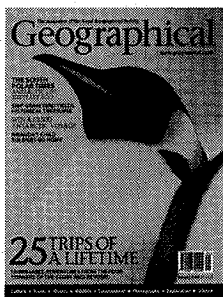
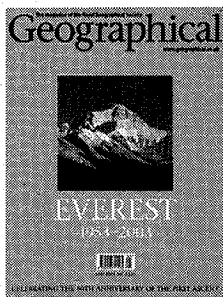
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'ONE OF THE MOST STUPENDOUS WORKS IN THE WHOLE HISTORY OF SCIENCE'

A MISSION TO MEASURE THE EARTH'S CURVATURE PROVIDED THE MEANS FOR ESTIMATING ITS HEIGHTS, SAYS JOHN KEAY

The 19th century's great age of exploration was inspired in part by a spirit of acquisition that, though usually political or commercial, was sometimes dignified with the cloak of scientific inquiry. Science, as an adjunct to exploration, involved rationalising, classifying, quantifying and representing the natural world. It could be, in other words, another form of control, and was not always distinguishable from cruder methods of exploration and conquest.

Typical of such activity was the measuring and mapping of the Earth's lesser-known regions, those *terrae incognitae* whose blank spaces so intrigued the 19th-century explorer. Along with the polar regions and the inner realms of Africa, Australia and mid-Arabia, the Himalayas were a big challenge. Jesuit missionaries had reached Tibet via Kashmir and the western Himalayas in the early 18th century, and emissaries from the British East India Company in Bengal had done so through Bhutan in the late 18th century. But they took little interest in the mountains themselves; and maps, like that of Jean Baptiste d'Anville of 1733, showed "the snowy range" as a ridge of unknown height.

The first suggestion that the Himalayas might be "among the highest mountains of the old world" came from Major James Rennel, who in the 1770s surveyed up to the mountains in Bengal on behalf of that province's recent British conqueror, Colonel Robert Clive (later Lord Clive of Plassey). At that time, the world's highest mountains were thought to be the Andes, while the highest peak in the "old world" (that is, Eurasia and Africa) was supposed to be Pico de Teide on the island of Tenerife. The height of Pico de Teide was in fact overestimated by several thousand feet (its true height is 12,198ft).

In 1784 Sir William Jones, a Calcutta judge and British India's greatest polymath, went one further than Rennel and declared that the Himalayas were the highest mountains in the world "not excepting the Andes". Jones had corresponded with two explorers who had crossed into Tibet. He deduced that the highest peaks were much more distant than was generally thought, and from the banks of the Ganges he measured the angle of elevation to one in Bhutan (it was Chomolhari), which he calculated to be 244 miles away. The height thus roughly gauged from this calculation convinced him that the Himalayan peaks rose to a height greater than the 20,000ft measured in the Andes.

He could not prove it, however, and his claim was discarded by the scientific establishment. Also discredited, this time correctly, was a suggestion that the Himalayas were a range of active volcanoes (their plumes of windblown snow had been mistaken for smoke).

Only in 1817-20, when the first surveyors penetrated the mountains to the west of Nepal and began measuring them at close quarters, did the evidence become overwhelming. Trekking up to heights of 12,000-16,000ft, Lieutenant William

Webb and Captain John Hodgson were among colossal glaciers and eternal snows; and still the main summits towered above them. But now proximity to the peaks meant that the observed angles of elevation were much greater and so much less liable to distortion. Measurements were taken, and one giant looked to be, according to a scribbled note in Webb's angle book, "so far as our knowledge extends, the highest mountain in the world". Its local name was Nanda Devi and for the next 30 years, while expeditions into the central Himalayas from Tibet and Nepal remained impossible, Nanda Devi reigned supreme as the world's highest mountain (its height is now established at 25,645ft).

Ironically, the techniques required for accurately measuring mountains from a distance had been developed elsewhere in India. In 1802 William Lambton had begun from Madras what has been called "one of the most stupendous works in the whole history of science". Lambton was interested in geodesy, the study of the shape of the Earth. Replicating similar experiments in Europe and South America but to a much higher degree of accuracy, he had embarked on a mission to measure the curvature of the Earth.

This could be done by comparing the distance between two points as ascertained by astronomical observation, with the figure obtained by actual measurement taken along the ground; from the distance between the two the curvature could be calculated. It sounded simple but the required accuracy was possible only with very elaborate instruments and over enormous distances (his Great Arc from south India to the Himalayas would be about 1,600 miles long).

Such an ambitious geodetic exercise had the added virtue of greatly facilitating the mapping of India. Lambton's measurement along the ground was achieved by a process known as "triangulation". A baseline between two points, usually about seven miles apart, was carefully measured over a period of several weeks using a chain of precisely known length mounted on wooden trestles. Then, from each of the same two points, the angle between this baseline and the sight line to a third point was measured using a theodolite (a tripod-mounted telescope that measures horizontal and vertical degrees). A triangle was thus formed and, if the length of one of its sides (the baseline) plus two of its angles was known, the lengths of its other sides could be calculated. One of these sides could then be used as the baseline for another triangle without the need for ground measurement, further triangles being projected and calculated solely through triangulation between invisible points. As the triangulation progressed, chain measurements along the ground were necessary only to check from time to time the accuracy of the exercise. This "trigonometrical survey" resulted in a scattering of locations, or "trig points", usually in the form of a chain zig-zagging across the landscape. As Lambton's

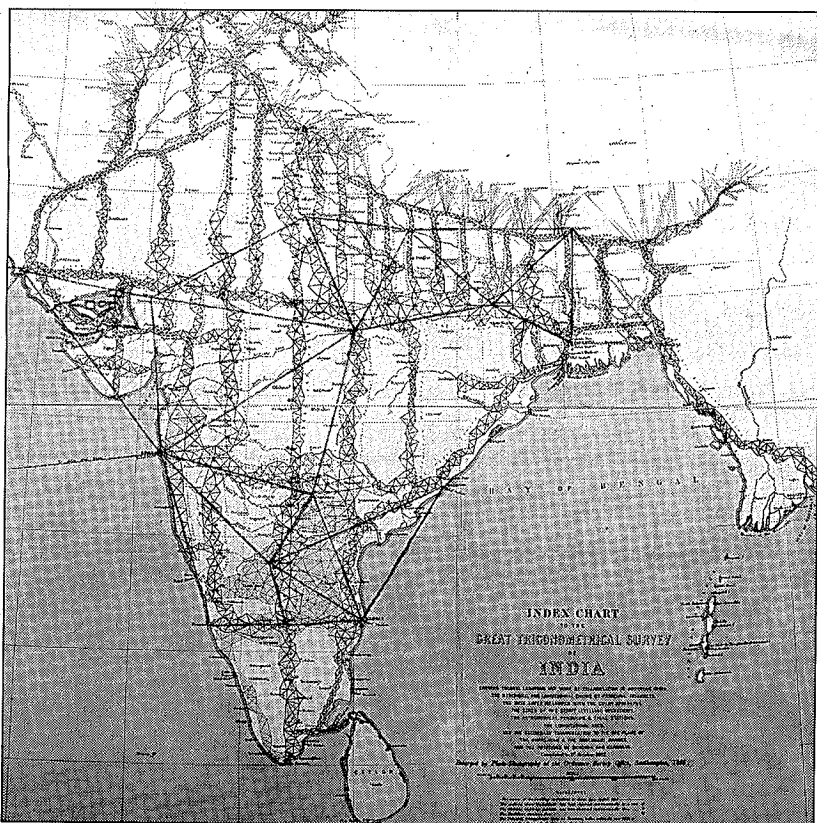
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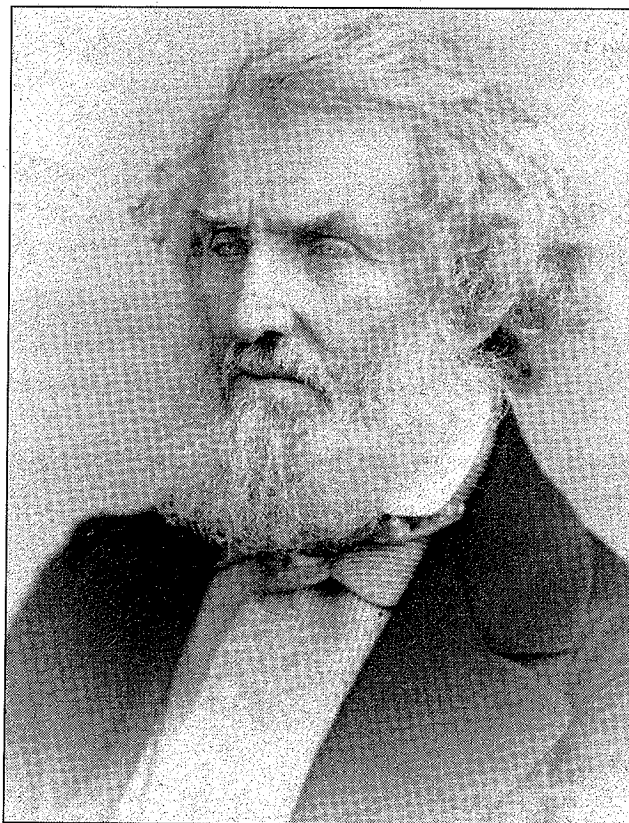
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As British rule spread across the plains of northern India, surveyors followed in its wake. Here, Khan Sahib and Afraz Sul Khan are plane tabling from the Tartar La in Kashmir



The chart showing the extension of William Lambton's triangulation network



Colonel George Everest: never saw the peak

THE ASCENT

▲ How Everest grew 33 feet...

▲ 29,002ft: the height of "Peak XV" as calculated in March 1856 by Andrew Waugh, the successor to George Everest as Surveyor-General of India. This figure remained unchallenged for 100 years

▲ 29,028ft: the revised height of Everest as calculated by Indian surveyors in the 1950s — less than 0.1 per cent higher than Waugh's previous figure

▲ 29,035ft: the current height of the mountain, as measured by Global Positioning Satellite equipment which was placed on the summit by American climbers and Sherpas on May 5, 1999 — and, geologists believe, it is still growing

chain of triangles extended north, with other chains branching off to east and west, they formed a grid that would encompass India.

And Lambton's Great Arc, in addition to giving a new value to the Earth's shape, would also provide the means for unravelling the secrets of the Himalayas and thereby discovering the great peak that would be known as Everest.

It was an arduous process. The Great Arc took 40 years to reach the Himalayas. It generated the most complex mathematical equations known to the pre-computer age; and it cost more lives and more rupees than most contemporary Indian wars. Malaria and other maladies eliminated entire survey parties; porters were devoured by tigers; and where no handy hills existed for establishing the lines of sight required, flag men atop bamboo scaffolding tumbled to their deaths through the jungle canopy. Lamb-

ton himself breathed his last in 1823 when his Arc was about halfway up the spine of India. His successor, who conducted the Arc to its grand Himalayan finale, was already debilitated by malaria and dysentery when he took over. He soon got worse, enduring temporary blindness, recurring paralysis, and several bouts of insanity. His name was Colonel George Everest.

Everest the man never saw Everest the mountain. But when he retired in 1843, the Arc was complete all the way to Dehra Dun in the foothills north of Delhi, and arms of triangulation were being extended east and west along the Himalayan glacier. The eastern arm provided the first precise locations from which the positions and heights of the central Himalayan peaks could be established. In 1847 Andrew Scott Waugh, Everest's successor,

calculated a new height for the great massif of Kangchenjunga. At 28,176ft it far exceeded any peak yet measured, including Nanda Devi, and Waugh duly recognised it as the world's highest mountain (it is, in fact, the third highest).

But Waugh did not publish his findings. For, from the same point, he had glimpsed a much more distant cluster of peaks, more than a hundred miles away, on the Nepal-Tibet border. Later in 1847, and again in 1849, the same cluster of peaks was sighted and angles taken. Each sighting resulted in a new designation for their highest point, and it was soon clear that Waugh's "peak gamma," and the "peak b" and "sharp peak h" of his colleagues in the field were the same.

This peak was unquestionably higher than Kangchenjunga. Still Waugh delayed. He redesignated all the main peaks with Roman numerals, he checked sea level as far away as Karachi,

and he got his staff to go over and over all the calculations. A Bengali number-crunching genius called Radhanath Sikdar was his "chief computer", and Sikdar soon became convinced that "Peak XV," as it was now called, had no rival.

In 1856 Waugh went public. In a letter to the Asiatic Society of Bengal he announced that at 29,002ft "Peak XV" was "most probably" the world's highest mountain. In honour of his predecessor, he also declared that "this noble peak" should henceforth be known as "Mont Everest." "Mont" soon became "Mount" and the height has been revised several times. But, despite objections from some, the name Everest has stuck.

Taken from *Everest: Summit of Achievement* by Stephen Venables. Foreword by Sir Edmund Hillary, published by Bloomsbury, courtesy of the Royal Geographical Society, priced £35

WHEN WRATHFUL DEITIES MADE MOUNTAINS PLACES OF FEAR

TIBET'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS LAND HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED, SAYS ED DOUGLAS

George Mallory's famously flippant rejoinder to why he wanted to climb Everest — "because it's there" — is countered by the Dalai Lama. He said: "I imagine that for most Tibetans 'Because it is there' is a very good reason for not making the attempt. Hillary and Tenzing's triumph was an instance of the human ability to overcome nature, to dominate the world."

"The traditional Tibetan attitude to mountains is quite different. They are treated with respect as the abodes of presiding deities. Tibetans would rather salute their mountains, offering juniper incense smoke in their direction than try to conquer their mountains."

The Tibetan myths about mountains are populated with wrathful deities, ghosts or terrible creatures such as the yeti. They are warnings to stay away. The notion of climbing a mountain was utterly foreign to those nomads grazing their animals on the pastures below. Why expose yourself to unnecessary risks when life is already full of them? They didn't have a word for the apex of a mountain; the summit Mallory was trying to reach didn't exist for them.

For the nomads in the Kama Valley and the monks at Rongbuk monastery, the motivation for those attempting Everest was obscure. Nawang Gombu, the first man to climb the mountain twice, was a novitiate monk at Rongbuk in the late 1940s before he ran away to follow his uncle, Tenzing Norgay, into the expedition game. Trulshik Rinpoche was 14 when the last prewar expedition arrived at Rongbuk in 1938. Gombu asked the monks what the English were looking for. They told him that there must be a golden cow there and they wanted to take it home. In a way, they were correct. Several climbers have become millionaires from lecturing and writing about their experiences.

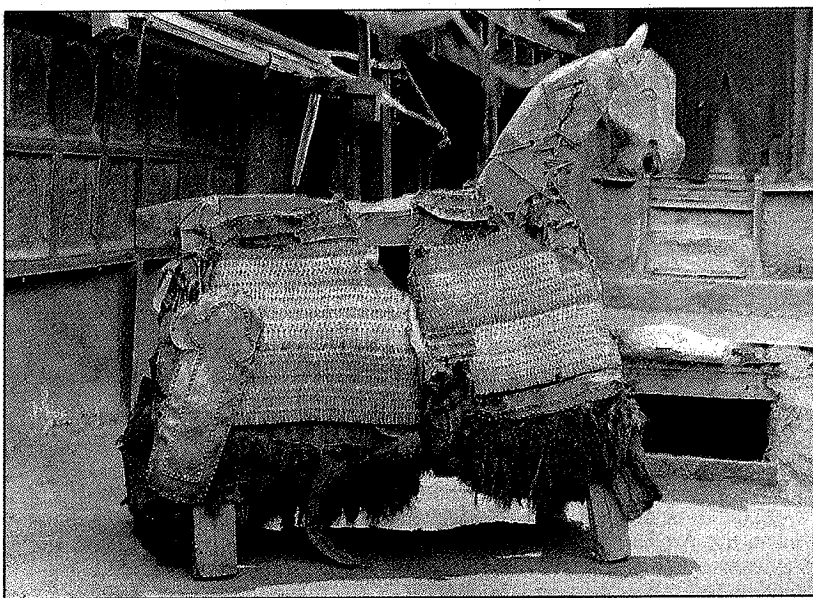
Trulshik Rinpoche became head lama at Rongbuk after the death in 1940 of its founding monk, Dzatrul Rinpoche. In 1921 Dzatrul had been on retreat and did not wish to see the climbers who arrived with their passport from the 13th Dalai Lama. The following year, during the first full attempt on the mountain, Dzatrul received the leader, Brigadier-General Charles Bruce. "When the 13th Dalai Lama gave the first permission to climb Chomolungma, he said that they could come as long as they didn't bring guns and kill any of the animals. Before Buddhism, there was an animist tradition in Tibet that is preserved in its remote valleys. An illustration of this is the legend that surrounds Everest itself, the mountain Tibetans call Chomolungma."

The goddess said to inhabit the slopes of Chomolungma is Miyolangsangma. She is one of five sisters who are associated with mountains, often above sacred lakes, along the Nepal/Tibet frontier. The head of these five sisters is Tashi Tseringma, whose home is Gauri-shankar, a peak to the west that is sacred to Hindus as well, especially in Kathmandu. The "Five Sisters of Long Life", as they are known, are only minor deities; the peak Khumbila, for example, is more important to the Sherpas of Khumba as the home of their patron deity Khumbu'i Yulha, literally the "Home God of the Khumbu". This mountain holds the collective soul of the Sherpas, a repository for their sense of identity.

According to legend, Miyolangsangma was one of a group of wrathful Bon deities, the *srungma*, who was subdued by the evangelising zeal of Guru Rinpoche to act as a servant of Buddhism. Miyolangsangma's character became that of a generous benefactor. Sherpas on Everest go out of their way to keep on her good side; offensive smells, such as roasting meat or burning garbage, rubbish and morally questionable behaviour, can provoke her wrath. Before every



The dzongpen of Kharta and his wife in front of a ceremonial tent. Dzongpen were administrators appointed by Lhasa to collect taxes

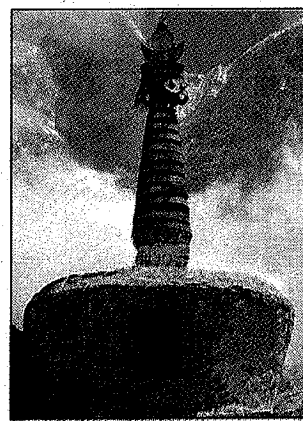


A ceremonial wooden horse inside Shegar Dzong monastery

THE ASCENT

"Everest is like a member of my family ... my life has been driven by my grandfather, Tenzing, and Hillary's historic climb and my own dream to one day stand on top. She is my mountain ... I feel part of her and she of me. Everest is a mountain of dreams, some fulfilled and many lost. She is a living thing. I consider myself blessed to see the world from her summit and can only echo my grandfather's words: 'I am grateful'"

Tashi Tenzing



expedition they will hold a *puya*, building a *lhapso*, which is a kind of altar, and stringing up lines of prayer flags to bring good luck.

In the past her role as the deity of Chomolungma was purely symbolic: a wealth-giver. There are legends of how the people around Everest suffered because they failed to pay her due attention. Now, Everest is a workplace offering employment to the Sherpas and income to the tourist businesses. From being a symbol of wealth, Chomolungma has become the real

source of that wealth, replacing the trade and agriculture that sustained the Sherpas before the Chinese invaded Tibet and curtailed activity across the border.

Religion in this part of the Himalayas has grown organically, blending the old and the new, mixing the practices of competing traditions and faiths as the wheel of history turns. The tourist dollar, like the barley crop or the yak herds, is just one more resource for which Sherpas are grateful, and it is Miyolangsangma herself who

has given them this. Chomolungma is often translated as "Mother Goddess of the Earth", which isn't correct; it is more a translation of what we expect from the world's highest mountain. But however Chomolungma is translated, the important issue is not what it means but the thing to which it refers because within that difference we see just how fundamental the divide is between Western attitudes to Everest and the role of Chomolungma in the lives of those Tibetans and Sherpas who live on the slopes.



The first teams to tackle Everest were journeying into the unknown. No one had any idea if human beings could sleep or even survive at extreme altitude

The climbers who tackled Everest in the 1920s were on a quest which quickly turned to obsession. In their attempts to climb the world's highest mountain, they had to solve myriad political, geographical and physiological problems. Of the seven British expeditions to cross the Tibetan plateau before the Second World War, the 1921 Everest Reconnaissance Expedition was the most inspiring. Nominated by the Mount Everest Committee of the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society, the team represented the rump of an imperial world shaken by the carnage of the First World War.

It is easy now to scoff at the apparent amateurism of this ad hoc band cobbled together through the old-boy network, but in 1921 Nepal was forbidden territory and the only approach was a month-long journey through Tibet by foot and pony all the way from Darjeeling. Apart from one distant photograph taken during Francis Younghusband's 1904 mission to Tibet and the account of Captain John Noel's solo journey in 1913, nothing was known of Everest except that its summit was the highest on Earth. And that represented the other great unknown: no one actually knew whether, if a theoretical route to the summit were found, it would be physiologically possible for a human being to follow that route to 29,002ft above sea level (the then calculated height of Everest).

In 1921 the human altitude record stood at about 24,600ft (7,500m); the highest actual summit attained was Trisul, the 23,385ft peak near Nanda Devi, which Tom Longstaff's team climbed in 1907. But nobody had any idea whether the human body could push itself to nearly 9,000m above sea level or what would

A NETWORK OF HEROIC AMATEURS DETERMINED TO GET TO THE TOP

THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONS OF THE TWENTIES WERE TESTED TO THE LIMITS OF THEIR ENDURANCE. STEPHEN VENABLES CAPTURES THE MOOD OF A GENTLEMANLY ERA

actually happen when climbers tried to sleep at extreme altitude.

The 1921 expedition was strictly a reconnaissance, not a full-scale climbing attempt. Nevertheless, George Mallory did lead a party down on to the East Rongbuk Glacier to the site of what would be Camp III or Advance Base. From there, he cut steps up the hanging glacier wall above, leading Guy Bullock, Oliver Wheeler and three porters up to the broad level snow ridge. At last, on the morning of September 23, 1921,

they had reached the elusive North Col... From Mallory's foreshortened viewpoint the summit looked so close, so attainable. In fact, it was still 6,000ft above him. And, for the first time, he felt the cutting force of the westerly wind blasting across the huge, tilted expanse of the North Face, and realised that with winter approaching and the expedition over-extended, any serious climbing would have to wait until the spring.

The 1922 attempt, led by Brigadier-General Charles Bruce, ended in tragedy. It was while

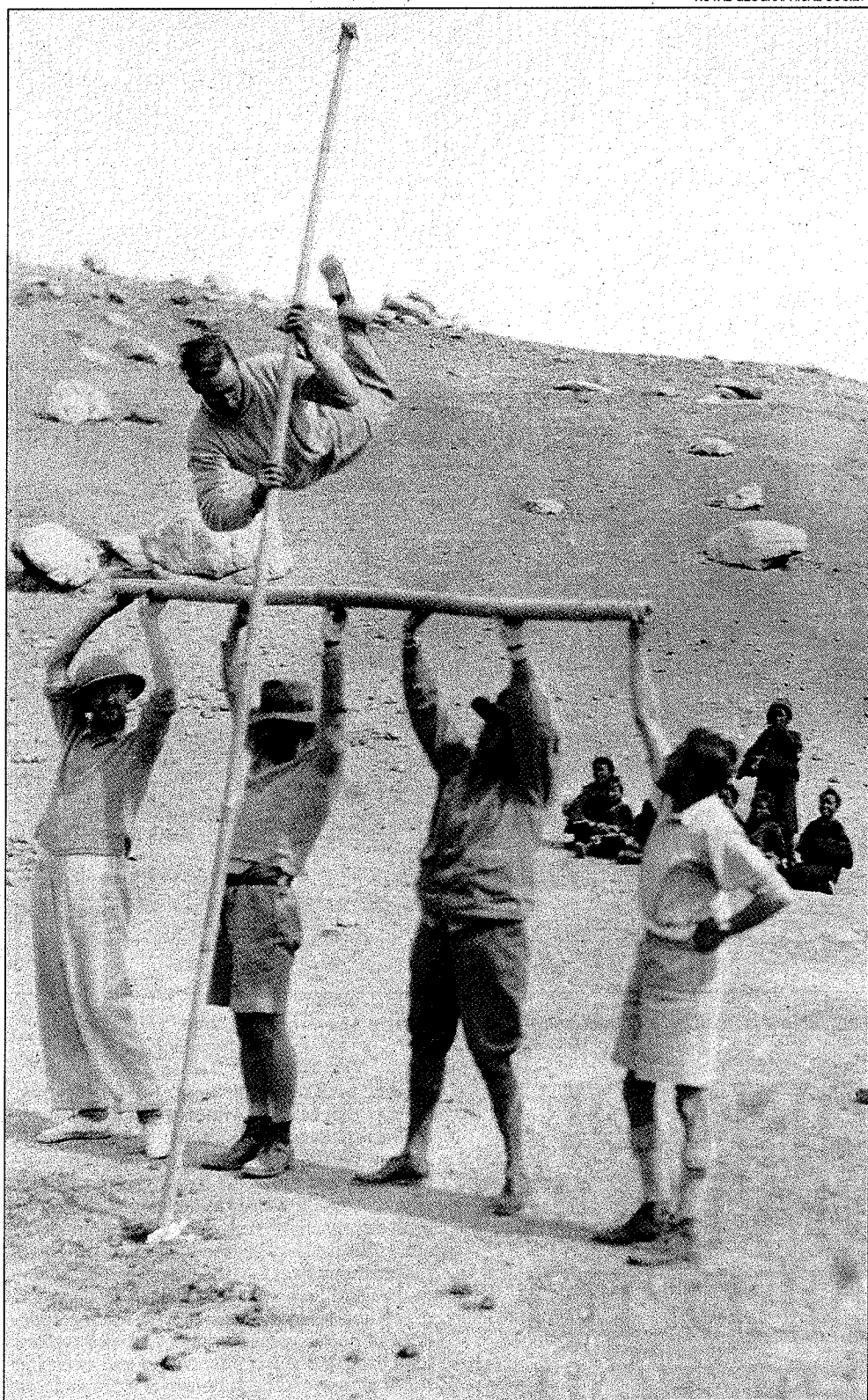
heading back up to the North Col for one final attempt that Mallory witnessed the first disaster on Everest. Everyone knew that the snow slopes leading up the east side of the col were avalanche prone. They also knew that conditions were becoming more unstable with the monsoon approaching. Yet they allowed ambition and enthusiasm to get the upper hand and persuaded themselves that the slope was safe. Mallory, Howard Somervell and Colin Crawford, the expedition's transport officer, were leading a party of 14 porters when a slab broke away with a loud bang, gathering momentum and sweeping the final rope of nine porters over a cliff and into a crevasse. Seven of the men were killed. Somervell, in particular, was stricken by a guilty sense of grief: "Why, oh why, could not one of us Britishers have shared their fate." In 1924 they did.

Like so many of those climbers on the pre-war expeditions, the men making up the 1924 expedition were highly civilised, talented individuals. Somervell, a medical missionary who spent much of his life in India, was a fine painter and musician; he had arranged the Tibetan music for Noel's Everest film when it was shown in London. Edward Norton painted some brilliant watercolours during his two Everest expeditions.

Although he was now official leader in 1924, Norton made Mallory "climbing leader". Both men knew that they were top contenders for the summit, yet there existed a high regard between them. Mallory, careless at times, recognised that Norton, the professional soldier, had a firm grip on logistics and was universally liked. Norton in return praised Mallory's "unique" effortless grace as a climber — and no

ALTHOUGH THEY SHARED LITERATURE, ART MUSIC, PHILOSOPHY AND A PASSION FOR HIGH COUNTRY THEIR DREAM WAS ONLY GOING TO BE REALISED THROUGH BRUTISH LABOUR

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



Jack Longland, of the 1933 expedition, using a bamboo pole to polevault at Tingri Dzong

doubt warmed to the man's literary and intellectual tastes. As a schoolmaster at Charterhouse, Mallory's idealism had impressed one of his pupils, Robert Graves, who wrote in *Goodbye to All That*: "(He was) so youthful-looking as to be often mistaken for a member of the school. From the first he treated me as an equal, and I used to spend my spare time reading in his room, or going for walks with him in the country. He told me of the existence of modern authors. My father being two generations older than myself and my only link with books, I had never heard of people like Shaw, Samuel Butler, Rupert Brooke..."

Literature, art, music, philosophy... the civilised things of life, together with their shared passion for high mountain country, must have helped to sustain those pioneers in their isolation, 5,000 miles from home. But in the end

their wild dream was going to be realised only through brutish hard labour.

After all the delays and much reworking of plans, two summit attempts were staged far later than planned at the end of May. The first attempt, without oxygen, was made by Somervell and Norton. Setting out this time from a realistically high sixth camp, they had some chance of success.

Rather than head straight up to the Shoulder, they realised that the correct route to the North East Ridge led diagonally rightward. In fact, Norton had decided to avoid the skyline completely and, after climbing through the yellow band, to follow a greyer band of rock horizontally rightward, stayed well below the two obvious steps on the skyline.

Somervell and Norton began their climb to



A member of the very first expedition in 1921, which was sent to the Himalayas to

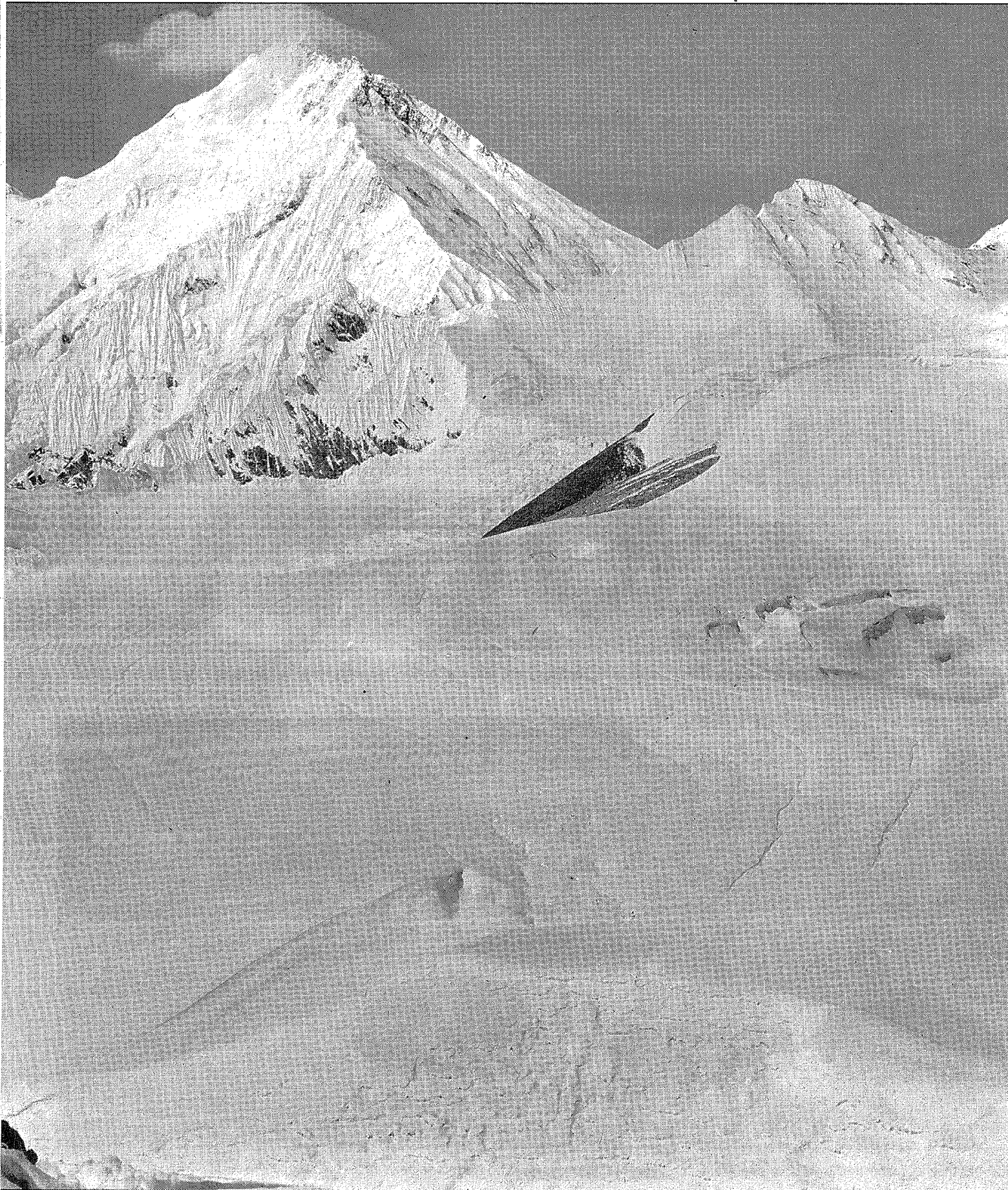
the summit on the morning of June 5, 1924. The scenery around them was overwhelmingly impressive. Looking north along the Nepal-Tibet border they saw the Rongbuk Glacier dizzyingly far below. Even great peaks such as Gya-chung Kang and Changtse were a long way below. Somervell was forced to stop, unable to go any further because of a constriction in his throat. Norton continued alone, his tall figure stooped to hold out a steadying hand on the perversely sloping tiles of Everest's immense tilted roof. Immediately above him, vertical crags barred access to the North East Ridge. But straight ahead the strata led inexorably into the gash of the Great Couloir and, beckoning just beyond, seeming so tantalisingly close, was the final summit pyramid.

Alone and without bottled oxygen, Norton reached the Great Couloir and attempted to

climb the now steeper, snow-covered rocks on the far side. It was precarious and he was acutely aware of the 8,000ft precipice beneath his feet. He also knew that if he were to push on to the summit his chances of returning before dark were almost nil.

We now know that human beings can survive a night in the open on top of Everest. Even without goosedown insulation (only George Finch, the sole scientific voice in the wilderness, had experimented with it, in 1922) and relying only on his many layers of cotton and wool, Norton might have survived a bivouac. But that kind of risk-taking was anathema in 1924, and at 1pm he turned around.

He had reached a point later calculated at 28,126ft, a record for oxygenless climbing that



explore the possibilities of climbing Mount Everest, contemplating the view with the eastern side of the mountain in the distance

was to remain unbeaten for 54 years. On one point he was adamant: he felt capable, despite the lack of oxygen, of climbing the remaining 902ft. The decision to turn around was quickly vindicated. Reversing the dicey traverse, he ended up calling to Somervell to throw the rope to him. Weakness was compounded by his failing vision — he had taken off his snow goggles earlier, mistakenly assuming that they were not necessary on the mainly rocky terrain. Somervell also was suffering from his painfully constricted throat. As they climbed back down to Camp VI and continued toward the North Col, Norton drew ahead. At one point, he noticed that Somervell had stopped behind him. Later he explained that he thought Somervell had stopped to do some sketching high on the North Face of Everest, having just helped establish a world altitude record. It speaks volumes for Norton's

anti-heroic nonchalance, but also for the delusions of hypoxia. Somervell was actually fighting for his life, coughing up the mucous lining of his larynx. Luckily the blockage was evicted and now, breathing more freely, Somervell hurried to join his companion. Darkness fell as they staggered toward the North Col shouting for help. Someone offered to bring up oxygen and Norton shouted, "We don't want the damn oxygen; we want drink!" Exhausted and snowblind, Norton now heard Mallory outline plans for the second attempt.

Desperate to finish the job once and for all, Mallory had decided to boost his chances with oxygen. Aware of his shortcomings in handling machinery, he had decided to take with him the youngest member of the team; 22-year-old Sandy Irvine. Still an under-

graduate at Oxford, Irvine had a pitifully meager climbing record but he had abundant enthusiasm and had proved brilliant at coaxing the temperamental oxygen sets into working.

He had been invited to join the 1924 team at the suggestion of the older, more experienced Noel Odell, a geologist.

Odell must have been surprised and disappointed not to be chosen for the summit attempt himself, but any bitterness was subsumed in a heroic display of support over the next few days. Climbing up and down the North Ridge with apparently effortless ease, geologising as he went, he showed an aptitude for altitude that has rarely been matched. And it was he who witnessed the final, mist-wreathed moments of tragic drama. On the afternoon of June 7 he arrived at Camp V to meet Sherpa Lhakpa descending from Camp VI, where he and three of

his colleagues had just installed Mallory and Irvine for their summit attempt. He showed Odell two notes from Mallory — one for Odell and one to be taken on down to Captain Noel, who was stationed on a rocky perch above Advance Base with his cine camera trained on the upper slopes of the North Face.

That now-famous note, Mallory's last message to the outside world, read as follows: "Dear Noel, We'll probably start early tomorrow (8th) in order to have clear weather. It won't be too early to start looking for us either crossing the rock band or going up skyline at 8.00 pm. Yours ever, G. Mallory."

Taken from *Everest: Summit of Achievement* by Stephen Venables. Foreword by Sir Edmund Hillary, published by Bloomsbury courtesy of the Royal Geographical Society, priced £35.

THE ASCENT

▲ 1852: The Bengali chief computer, Radhanath Sikhdar, announced to Sir Andrew Waugh, surveyor-general of India, that he has discovered the highest mountain peak in the world

▲ 1856: Mountaineering finally gained recognition as a sport when the Alpine Club was formed in London

▲ 1892: The mountaineer and surgeon Clinton Dent was the first to suggest publicly that Everest should be climbed: "I do not for a moment say that it would be wise to ascend Mount Everest," he said, "but I believe most firmly that it is humanly possible to do so"

ATTEMPT TO CLIMB MOUNT EVEREST

PLANS FOR BRITISH EXPEDITION
Reference to a forthcoming attempt to scale Mount Everest, the highest mountain peak in the world, was made by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Francis Younghusband, President of the Royal Geographical Society, speaking at the anniversary meeting of the Society in the Royal Albert Hall last night. Colonel Sir Francis, Major Hadow, and others, he said, had had that project in mind for some time past, and for the last year both the Alpine Club and the Geographical Society had been definitely entertaining the idea of helping toward the achievement of this object. They hoped within the next few years to hear of a British team standing on the pinnacle of the earth.

The first mention of climbing Everest in *The Times* was on June 1, 1920

▲ 1921: As part of the first British expedition sent to climb Everest, Alexander Kellas had the misfortune to become the first man to die on one — from heart failure exacerbated by dysentery and the rigours of the trip. He died at Khamba Dzong, not even making it to the mountain

▲ 1933 Major Blacker and Lord Clydesdale MP become the first men to fly over Everest

▲ 1934: Eccentric ascetic Maurice Wilson made an ill-advised and tragic solo attempt in a bid to draw world attention to his beliefs in abstinence; his body is still spotted occasionally due to the movement of the East Rongbuk Glacier

A SENSE OF ADVENTURE AND DERRING-DO PERMEATED THE EARLY EXPEDITIONS

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



Edward Shebbare, a natural history author, who fell ill



Members of the 1933 expedition make sure that they are cut out for the top with visits to the Base Camp barber's shop



Eric Shipton, left, Michael Ward and Bill Murray form their own umbrella group to shade themselves from the Nepalese heat while bathing in the Arun River

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

Although they couldn't climb Everest in 1933, they could fly over it, Major Stewart Blacker realised. All that was needed was the new turbocharged Pegasus engine and sufficient cash.

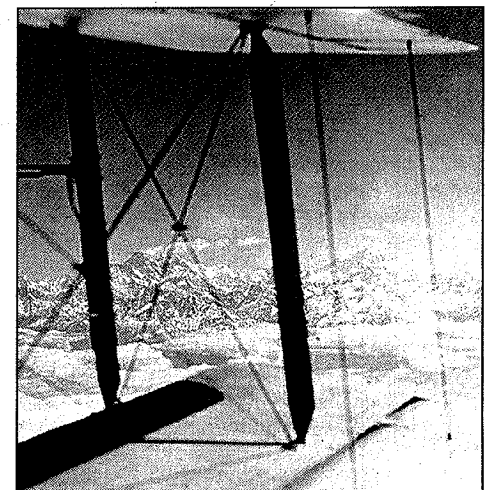
The latter looked like an insurmountable obstacle until the intervention of Lady Houston, who not only provided the money but also her friend, Squadron Leader Lord Clydesdale, MP, to be one of the pilots. Westland supplied two biplanes specially modified for the occasion — both were equipped with heating for the pilots' suits, oxygen supplies and photographic equipment — and the project was in business.

On April 3, taking off from Purneah, India, some 150 miles (240km) south of the mountain, Lord Clydesdale and Major Blacker in one

plane, and Flight Lieutenant D. F. McIntyre and the cameraman S. R. Bonnett in the other.

Despite the haze, they spotted the mountain from about 50 miles away, and soon, as Blacker recalled: "I threw up the cockpit roof, put my head out into the icy slip-stream and there... was the naked majesty of Everest itself."

A downdraught near the South West Face dropped the plane almost 2000ft, and they cleared the summit by a mere 100ft, ice fragments from the plume rattling into the open cockpit, Clydesdale fighting for control as Blacker "crammed plate after plate into the camera". Their colleagues were not so lucky: Bonnett blacked out for lack of oxygen. But, overall, the three-hour flight was a success; the superb photographs were dispatched to *The Times*.



Everest through the wing of one of two Westland biplanes, the first craft to fly over the peak



Weak and frostbitten, Geoffrey Bruce, front left, is helped to descend after his failed 1922 bid with George Finch, behind right

THE ASCENT

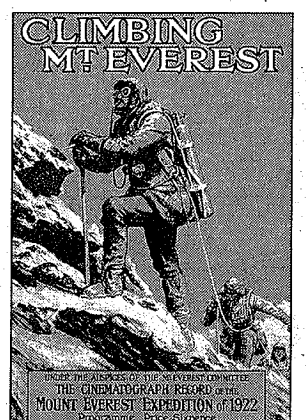
▲ 1935: The fifth British expedition, led by Eric Shipton, turns out to be little more than a reconnaissance mission. Crucially though, Tenzing Norgay joined the team for the first time

▲ 1947: The attempt of a Canadian-born Briton, Earl Denman to climb Everest illegally from the north nearly got him arrested and as far as the foot of the North Col. He was woefully ill equipped; when his boots wore out he was forced to walk part of the way back to Darjeeling barefoot

▲ 1947: The Nepalese Government relaxed its policy of exclusion of all foreigners and permitted some scientific and climbing parties to enter the country

▲ 1950: Chinese Communists seized control of Tibet, and the Dalai Lama was forced to flee to India. It was now no longer possible to climb Everest from Tibet

▲ 1951: When nothing was packed the day before Shipton's party was due to



deliver its climbing equipment to the docks, one of the organisers made a desperate plea to the Women's Voluntary Service. They came to the rescue and had everything packed and listed that same evening

COL. HUNT'S AIM

A SECOND EVEREST FEAT POSSIBLE

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of summiting Everest on May 29, *The Times* is producing a facsimile edition of the papers of the day recording the great adventure with accounts from Sir John Hunt and the original reports from James Morris. It will also include a poster detailing the history of the greatest climbs, tragedies and triumphs. This will appear on May 28

DID MALLORY AND IRVINE MAKE IT TO THE SUMMIT BEFORE THEY DIED?

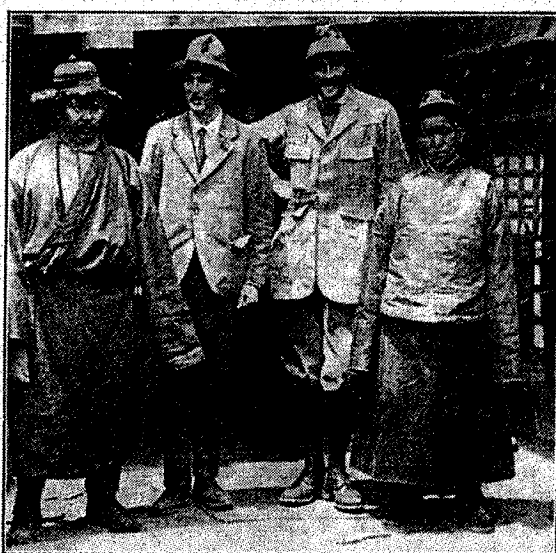
EVEREST CLIMBERS KILLED. INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW.



MR. MALLORY, who was a member of Col. Bury's reconnaissance Expedition in 1921, broke the world's "record" by climbing to a height of 28,785ft. in 1922.



MR. IRVINE, the youngest member of the Expedition, stood at the Oxford boat.



THE LAST PHOTOGRAPH of Mr. Mallory to be recovered in this country was taken with Lt. Col. Norton, the leader of the Expedition, during their visit to the Japanese in China before heading up to the mountain.



WITH THE NEWS THAT A SECOND "ENGLISH BODY" HAS BEEN SPOTTED ON THE NORTH FACE, PETER GILLMAN ASSESSES THE EVIDENCE

At around 12.50pm on June 8, 1924, the clouds that had been shrouding the upper reaches of Everest magically cleared. From perhaps three-quarters of a mile away, the climber Noel Odell saw two men silhouetted against a snow-crest beneath a rock step on the mountain's North East Ridge. As he watched, the first climber emerged on to the top of the step, and the second followed him there. Then, as Odell related, "the whole fascinating vision vanished, enveloped in cloud once more".

The two men were George Mallory and Sandy Irvine, who had left their precarious camp among the shattered rocks of Everest's North Face that morning. Odell, some 2,000ft below, had seen nothing of them until the clouds parted to allow that tantalising glimpse of the two men "going strongly for the top".

Mallory and Irvine were never seen again. It fell to Odell to search their last camp, finding it just as they had left it two days before. Poignantly, he spread out two sleeping bags to make the sign of a cross, indicating to the watchers below that there was no sign of life.

But could the pair have succeeded in reaching the summit? Since 1924, a succession of clues has emerged, culminating in the discovery of Mallory's body on the North Face by American climbers in 1999. It is possible to construct a scenario whereby Mallory and Irvine did make it to the top before dying, although much turns on where they were when Odell last saw them.

Fresh information from Everest suggests that there could be further revelations to come. A Chinese climber claims to have spotted a second English body on the North Face. His assertion, only now revealed, was made to two people who found Mallory's body, the US expedition leader, Eric Simonson, and the team's German historian, Jochen Hemmleb. "If what he says is true," says Hemmleb, "it can only be Irvine."

Mallory and Irvine left their camp at 23,000ft (7,010m) on the North Col at 9am on June 6. They pitched their last camp at 26,800ft on June 7 and sent back their three Sherpas with two notes, one about the oxygen they intended to carry, the other describing possible routes to

the summit. Taking the most optimistic scenario — based on evidence and a degree of surmise — Mallory and Irvine left their tent at sunrise, about 5am. The pair were dressed for the rigours ahead, wearing seven to eight layers of clothing, mostly silk and wool. They were carrying three oxygen cylinders each, enough for 12-18 hours' climbing. At 27,800ft they discarded a spent cylinder, which was retrieved in 1999.

Ahead of them were the great landmarks of the North East Ridge: two intimidating rock buttresses named the First and Second Step, and beyond that a further crag, the Third Step. They overcame the First Step without difficulty but the Second Step was a more challenging proposition, requiring all Mallory's technical ability to climb, and his qualities as a leader to help Irvine to follow, roped by Mallory from above. They then pressed on to the Third Step which they climbed with apparent ease.

Mallory and Irvine were now just 500 vertical feet below the summit, with maybe one oxygen cylinder left each. Gaining strength from seeing their goal nearing, they climbed a snow slope, negotiated some brittle, down-sloping rocks, and reached the summit that afternoon. Irvine, who was carrying at least one camera, photographed Mallory on the summit, then posed himself.

With nightfall due at around 7pm, it was urgent to begin their descent. Although drained of energy, they descended all three steps, with Mallory shepherding Irvine down. Somewhere en route their oxygen ran out. Then, a short distance below the First Step, one of them slipped on the treacherous, snow-covered slabs, dragging the other with him. At some point, the rope between them broke and Mallory slithered down to the rock basin where his body was found 75 years later.

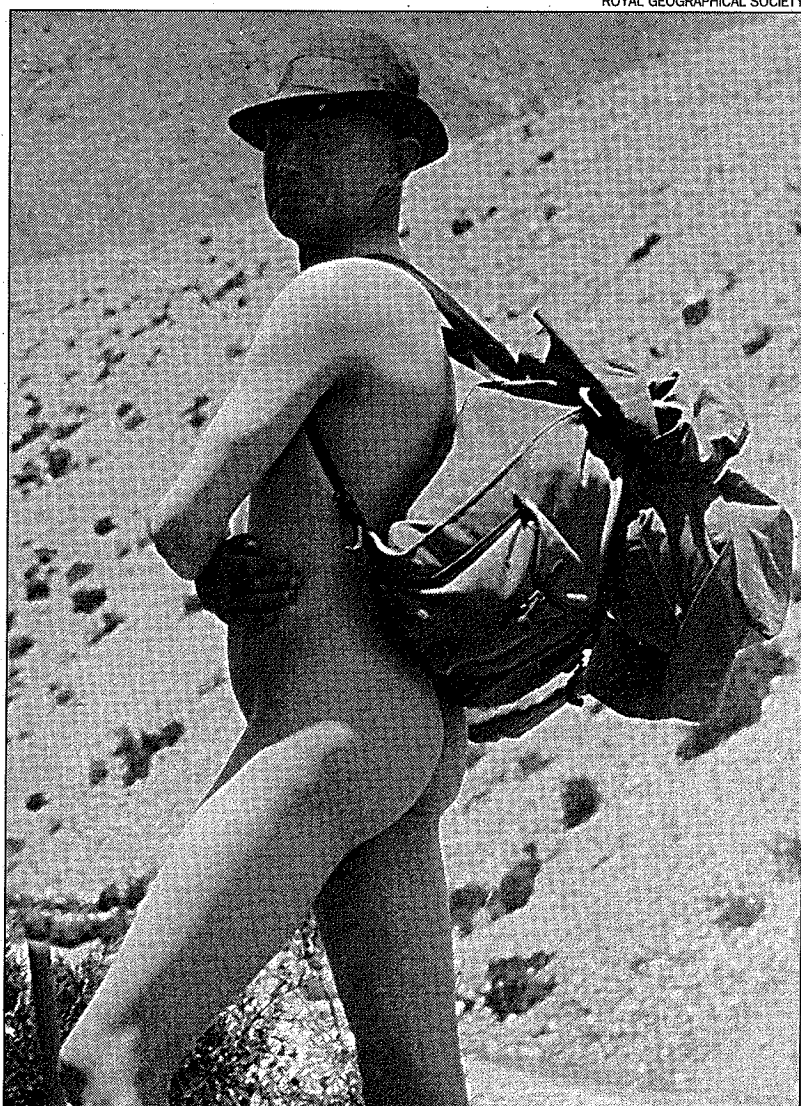
Nobody can say for sure when Mallory and Irvine left their tent, although 5am, sunrise, is a reasonable guess. It is certain that they climbed to the crest of the ridge where the oxygen bottle was found. But the debate revolves around two issues: where were they when Odell saw them? Could they have climbed the Second Step? Odell changed his mind several times. But his

Join us in a toast to
the conquerors of Everest.

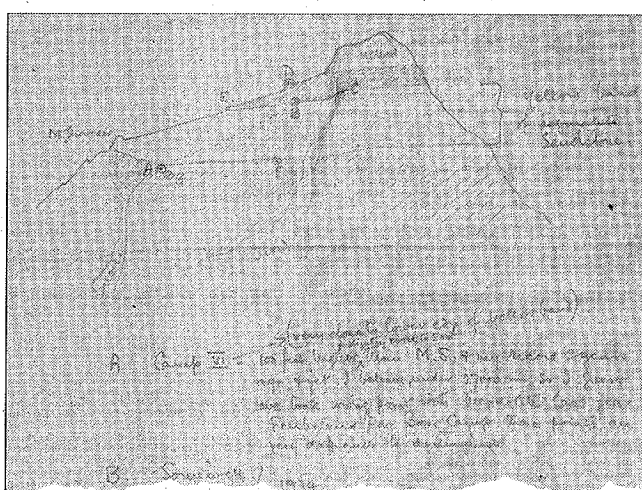


GLENMORANGIE
Gaelic for Glen of Tranquillity

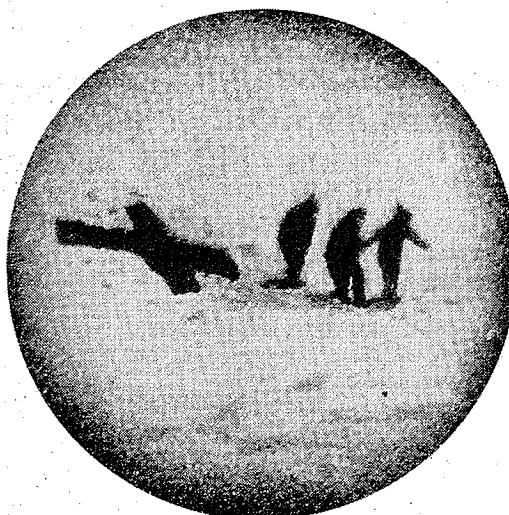
www.glenmorangie.com



George Mallory had no inhibitions about fording a stream naked



A diagram showing Everest and heights scaled in 1924



Sleeping bags laid in a cross warn that the pair are missing

ANNIVERSARY IS CATALYST FOR THE RGS TO OPEN ITS ARCHIVES

The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) is committed to supporting geographical research and learning about the world. This commitment began before Everest was first climbed and is stronger than ever.

The RGS-IBG is working to understand issues about mountain regions in many ways:

- ▲ Funding fieldwork that helps environmental and development studies.
- ▲ Sharing the results of new knowledge through its journals such as the *Geographical Journal* and by holding lectures.
- ▲ Encouraging teachers to take an interest in topical issues by using the recently launched Geography in the News website.
- ▲ Organising seminars focusing on mountain issues.
- ▲ Providing a forum for discussion through the Mountain Research Group and providing the information which will make fieldwork in mountains relevant, safe and of value to the communities.

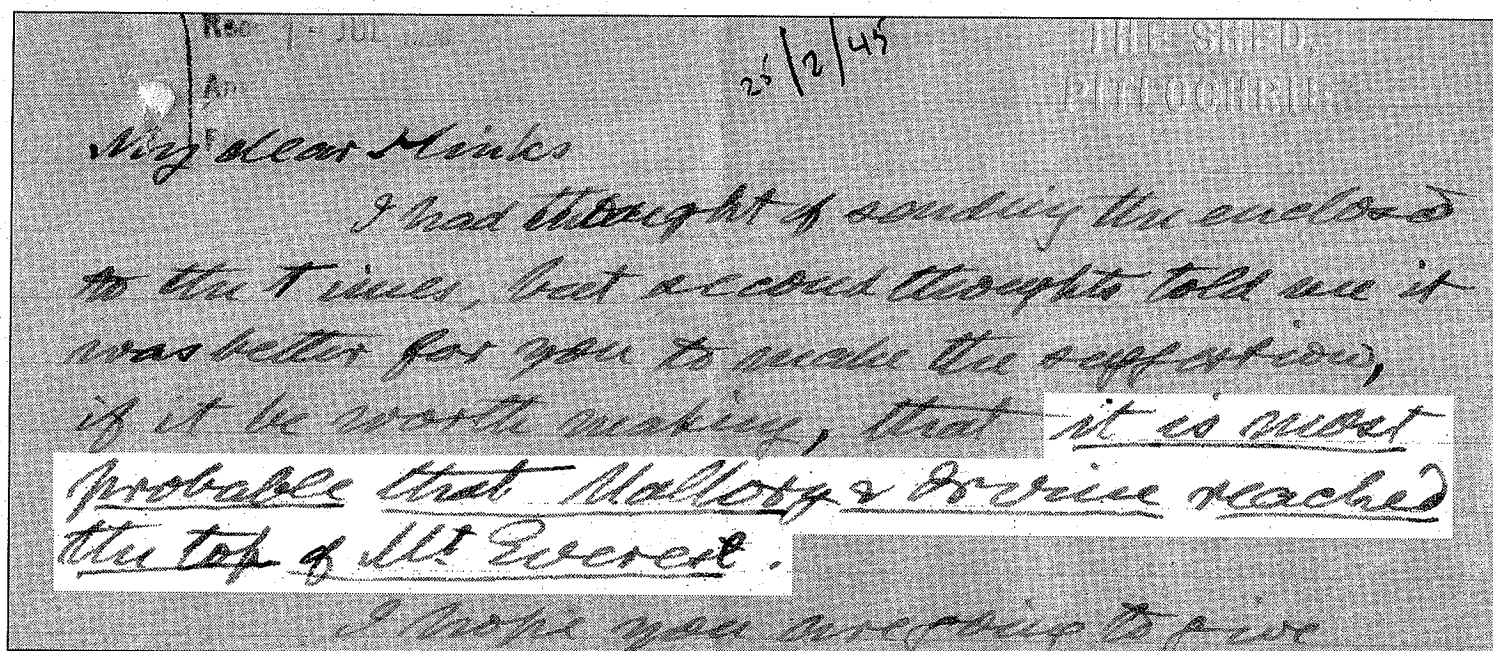
The RGS-IBG works closely with the Mount Everest Foundation and the Alpine Club to share resources as part of the commitment to understanding mountains.

The anniversary of Everest is a catalyst to make the society more accessible.

The society holds a vast resource of materials such as books, manuscripts, maps and photographs — a small number of which appear in this supplement — which give a historic record of the expeditions between 1921 and 1953.

At the heart of the collection is the Everest Archive, a unique collection of almost 20,000 photographs. The Everest Archive is part of the more ambitious £7 million "Unlocking The Archives" project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Project. It plans to give public access to the collections for the first time.

"As part of the project the society is developing online geographical, historical and cross-curricular resources derived from our archives," says Nigel Winsor, the society's deputy director. "The first teaching pack is to be provided on Mount Everest. A second project, Geography in the News, provides online resources that link contemporary issues in the news to the 14-19 curriculum to assist busy teachers in the classroom. Both are available at www.rgs.org."



A letter to Howard Hinks, the honorary secretary of the Mount Everest Committee, which chose the participants

description best fits the Third Step, meaning that Mallory and Irvine had made rapid progress that morning, putting them tantalisingly close to the summit. That entails two further assumptions. First, that they had been able to scale the Second Step, which would have been at the limit of their abilities. Secondly, that they had taken three oxygen cylinders each, when it is more likely — based on notes found on Mallory's body — that they had two each. And although Odell had a clear view of the final stretch to the summit when the clouds cleared later, he never saw the men.

The more likely scenario is that Mallory and Irvine were delayed setting off because they had trouble with their oxygen sets. They climbed the First Step but turned back at the Second Step, which Mallory judged was beyond Irvine's capabilities. They were also out of time to make

it to the summit and back before nightfall. It was a Chinese climber who spurred on the search for Mallory after he spotted the body of an "English dead" in 1975. Years later in Beijing, Hemmleb and Simonson met another Chinese climber, Xu Jing, who is the source of the latest disclosure. He told of seeing a body at around 27,200ft on the North Face during the first Chinese ascent of Everest in 1960.

Since no other climbers had visited that part of the face since 1924, the body could only be Irvine's. This fits in with the assumption that both climbers fell together until the rope broke. While Irvine lodged in the gully, Mallory fell a further 200ft.

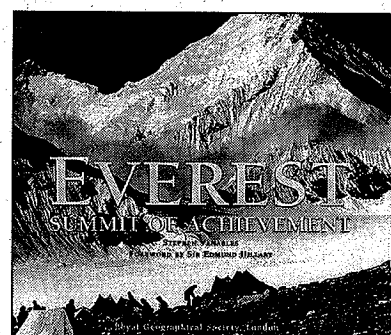
It is also possible that they were descending the gully when Mallory slipped. Irvine tried to hold him but the rope broke. The revelation

about Irvine opens up the possibility that a pictorial record of the climb could yet emerge if the camera he was said to be carrying is found.

Xu also said that Irvine appeared to be wearing a sleeping bag. Mallory and Irvine had left their sleeping bags at Camp VI. But Mallory also mentioned a bivouac bag and it is just possible that they could have carried this with them. If so, it conjures up the poignant scenario of Irvine surviving the accident and snuggling into the bag for warmth until dying of shock, injuries or cold. However, none of these theories fits in with the discovery of Irvine's ice-axe near the crest of the North East Ridge in 1933.

Plans are now being laid to search for the body. Simonson wants to return next spring, while a climber in the 1999 search party is on a North Face expedition this month.

Everest's greatest riddle may yet be solved.



Times readers can buy *Everest: Summit of Achievement* by Stephen Venables, published by Bloomsbury, courtesy of the RGS, priced £30 including p&p (UK only; e-mail for overseas postage) from Bookpost (01624 836000); e-mail: bookshop@enterprise.net. Offer valid until June 30.

For RGS-IBG offers of posters and prints see page 46

BE INSPIRED BY THE VIEW AT THE TOP IF YOU CAN SEE IT THROUGH YOUR TEARS

FOR MANY CLIMBERS THERE IS NO GREAT REVELATION BUT FOR OTHERS THE EMOTION IS OVERWHELMING, SAYS NICHOLAS ROE

When Sir Chris Bonington clambered on to the summit of Everest in 1985 at the age of 50 he performed a small act that helps the rest of us glimpse what it feels like to stand on the roof of the world. He cried. "I was very tired, I was pushing it," the climber recalls. "I couldn't help thinking of the number of mates who had lost their lives on Everest. I'm quite an emotional soul anyway, and with all those thoughts, and being absolutely knackered, and being glad, glad I was there... I collapsed and burst into tears."

No wonder, really. Apart from the incredible achievement, any climber standing on that summit, gazing across Nepal and Tibet in crystal, thin air, is as close to a classic centre of religious and spiritual inspiration as it is possible to be without actually dying — think of Jesus on the Mount, Moses fetching the Commandments; Coleridge deifying mountains as "that visible God Almighty".

When humans seek inspiration they invariably head uphill. Who could not be moved on top of Everest? Yet, if you ask what summiting is like — what it does for those who reach the top — the replies are often inadequate.

In a new book, *Everest — Reflections From the Top*, 120 summiteers present the peak as a distinctly mixed bag: sometimes a cliché — "It is a symbol, a dream and that dream came true for me" (Russian climber, Alexei Bolotov); often a conquest — "Little, insecure, non-athletic geek was standing on top of the world" (American, Michael Brown); occasionally a mystery — "When I am on the summit, sometimes I worry I am stepping on my god" (Nepalese, Chhuldim Dorje).

Clearly, it is not easy to fathom the impact of Everest, even if you have been there. The rest of us should bear in mind the curious state climbers are in when they finally take the last step.

The South African climber Cathy O'Dowd the only woman to have summited Everest from both Nepal and Tibet, speaks of overwhelming physical relief. "You would have been moving steadily for ten hours or longer and there is a release of tension, an end to that drive to push that has kept you taking step after step upwards," she says. There is elation, too — "the very thought of being the highest person on the planet". But even as that thought arrives, confusion hurries in over the horizon: fear.

As O'Dowd explains: "A disproportionate number of climbers die on the way down from the summit. If you have been thinking all the time that the summit is the end, you turn away from it to go home and stumble down the mountain and your mind may be 1,000 miles away." hrow in the need to keep warm, to wipe n from the oxygen mask, and to photoh your sponsors' flags before fleeing after tle as 15 minutes on the Earth's roof, and miting becomes less a moment of triumphant ecstasy, more a matter of fighting for

momentary clarity. Sir Edmund Hillary, describing how he placed those first footprints on the summit, addresses the final triumph in John Hunt's classic book *The Ascent of Everest* in a phrase loaded down with effort and not much else: "A few more whacks of the ice-axe in the firm snow and we stood on top."

In short, the odds are stacked against revelation. And yet, somehow, it can happen.

Doug Scott, in 1975 the first Briton to summit Everest by the South West Face, speaks of fewer stray thoughts "coming in" during the struggle to the top: "There is all this space between thoughts in your head. That is why you feel incredibly at peace with yourself, because in that space you expect to be more aware of everything — which is what happens. But it doesn't happen at the summit, that is on the way to that point of peace. The peace and contentment is a good reference point as to how one can be."

The vastness of the Earth, viewed from the top, struck both Scott and O'Dowd forcibly. "There's a sense of the absolute magnificence of the wild places of the Earth, and the insignificance of people," O'Dowd explains. "We take ourselves too seriously. We don't get the big picture. My strongest feelings were of excitement and a kind of awe at the beauty of it all."

Scott accessed hidden parts of his mind: "It's the third man syndrome: imagining there is someone else walking beside you, a comforting presence telling you what to do next, and it can be as strong as a voice in your chest."

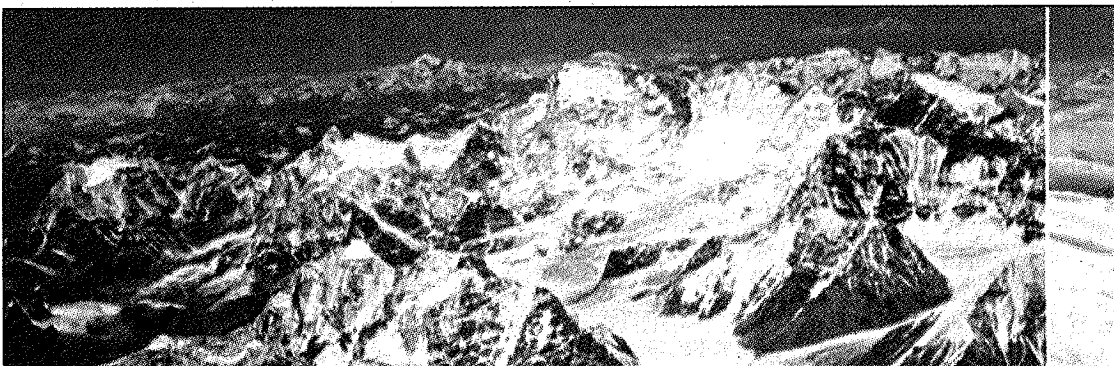
Eighteen years after Sir Chris Bonington summited Everest, he can still describe in detail the "sense of distance and space, the brown rolling hills rather than mountains, the occasional white top" that formed the view into Tibet.

O'Dowd says the experience changed her life, partly in her perception of humankind within its vast context, but also in terms of having made it against the tallest odds: "I realised that I had seriously underestimated myself and what I could do. I took that home with me."

Intriguingly, Scott feels that an aspect of Everest's impact can be experienced by us all on lower slopes where there is less risk, and, therefore, more clarity — "you get it in the Lake District sometimes," he says. And we should try to achieve that awareness, according to Dr Michael Money, a psychologist at Liverpool John Moores University, who says: "It's not surprising that people are motivated to seek environments where logjams are not so great, which match our biological inheritance more closely."

From that perspective, mountain tops do not just give us a simpler vision of the world, they remind us where we came from. It really is an inspiring view — if you can see it through the tears.

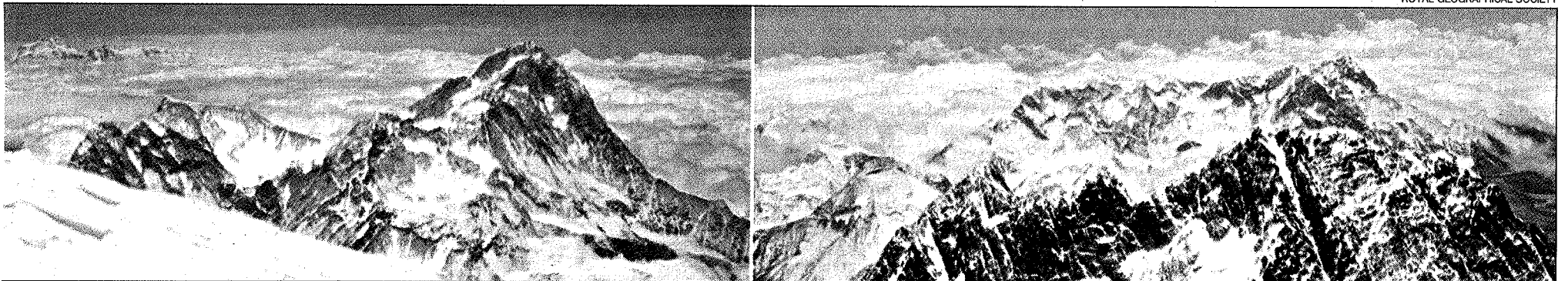
Everest — Reflections From The Top is published by Rider, priced £8.99.



Rising majestically above the clouds is Mount Everest (top) from the summit of which Edmund Hill



ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



any photographed this panorama of peaks to the West, East and South. Awestruck climbers say the vista underlines for them the vastness of the Earth and the insignificance of people

HOW THE SACKING OF BRITAIN'S TOP MOUNTAINEER SPARKED A MUTINY

ERIC SHIPTON HAD HIGH-ALTITUDE EXPERIENCE, HE WAS REVERED BY HIS COLLEAGUES AND SEEMED A NATURAL TO LEAD THE TEAM. BUT TOO MUCH WAS AT STAKE, SAYS PETER GILLMAN

For years Everest had been a British preserve. However, when Tibet was closed by the Chinese Communists in 1950 and the British could no longer rely on the support of the Dalai Lama, the rush to the summit took on a new urgency. Not only did the Nepalese Government grant the 1952 permit to the Swiss, but the French and Germans were waiting in the wings for 1954 and 1955. To the British, 1953 wasn't just Coronation year, it was also, quite possibly, their last chance at Everest.

But the mountain slopes weren't the only scene of feverish competition: there was another, equally dramatic battle going on at home. In the autumn of 1952, when preparations were well under way, the members of the Himalayan Committee, drawn from the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club, delivered a coup which looked as if it might just put the entire expedition in jeopardy. The original leader, Eric Shipton, was deposed, to be replaced by John Hunt, a serving Army officer of far less Himalayan experience.

Shipton's sacking provoked strong emotions and there was a near-mutiny among the prospective British members of the team, while in New Zealand Ed Hillary came close to withdrawing. It was to take all Hunt's diplomatic skills to win the dissenters back.

Eric Shipton is one of the most colourful characters in the Everest story. With twinkling eyes and a gnomish face, he was an adventurer and explorer, driven by new challenges and the lure of the unknown. He took part in all four British Everest expeditions of the 1930s, which attempted the mountain from the North via Tibet, and was leader of the 1935 team. When Tibet was closed he was prominent in the search for an approach through Nepal, and in 1951 led the reconnaissance group which pushed a way through Khumbu Icefall, the mile-long river of ice which offers the key to the summit from the south. He attracted intense personal loyalty from fellow climbers, who relished his informal, romantic approach and his preference for light-weight groups rather than military-style mountain sieges.

Shipton had long coveted Everest, and in 1938 came within 2,000ft of the summit before being turned back by heavy snow. After the hiatus caused by the war, he was one of the first to push for attempts to be resumed. He had identified a potential route via the Khumbu Icefall and the Western Cwm, even though earlier climbers had dismissed it as impassable. But Shipton persevered, and in autumn 1951 led a six-man team to the top of the icefall, where their way was barred by a crevasse. The climbers retreated, confident that they had prepared the way for a full-scale attempt in 1952 — only to discover that they hadn't been awarded the permit.

The postponement in fact gave the British vital breathing space, and Shipton led an expedition to Cho Oyu, near Everest, to test equipment and conduct physiological trials. To immense British relief, the Swiss failed. Shipton was thus fully confident that he would lead the 1953 expedition.

The Himalayan Committee, however, had numerous objections, fuelled by reports they had received from the Cho Oyu trip. His attachment to light-weight expeditions did not necessarily suit him for the large-scale logistic venture that a first ascent appeared to require. His leadership tended to be too democratic, often shaped by his colleagues' preferences rather than an overall strategy. He was notoriously disorganised, even forgetting his rucksack when he set off on the 1951 reconnaissance. Crucially, he was prone to self-doubt, and seemed to lack the unrelenting



Eric Shipton with Sherpas at a glacier lake on the main Rongbuk Glacier. He held the record for taking part in the most Everest expeditions

drive vital for success. The committee believed that it had found a suitable alternative in John Hunt, who had several key attributes. He was known as a strategist with a gift for planning and as a respected and decisive leader. Although his mountaineering experience could not match Shipton's, he had climbed in the Himalayas.

It was through its next actions that the committee attracted the greatest opprobrium: having decided that Shipton should be deposed, it appeared unwilling to do so. On July 28 it endorsed Shipton as leader. Six weeks later, it prepared to deliver the *coup de grâce*. Although Shipton attended the meeting, he was excluded when the leadership issue was discussed. The members lined up to cite their criticisms: the expedition "needed a more forceful and dynamic personality"; Shipton spent too much time "writing, lecturing etc"; and "as the expedition was of

national importance", a leader "of drive and enthusiasm" should be appointed.

Even now the committee hesitated. It suggested that Shipton and Hunt should act as co-leaders, with Hunt taking charge on the mountain. Shipton recognised this shabby compromise for what it was, and resigned from the expedition.

Shipton was outraged by the "subterfuge and clandestine lobbying", making his feelings clear in a letter to the committee: "There is no precedent in the field of mountaineering and exploratory expeditions for a man with such long and intimate acquaintance with every aspect of a particular enterprise taking a position subordinate to one who, whatever his qualities of character and leadership, has no personal experience of the project." He accused the members of having "little appreciation of the

powerful personal and psychological stresses" that could result from a twin leadership.

One of those most dismayed at the turn of events was Tom Bourdillon, a government scientist who had been with Shipton on the 1951 reconnaissance. Bourdillon died in the Alps in 1956 but his wife Jennifer still recalls his strength of feeling. "Tom was shocked," she says. Bourdillon, Jennifer insists, bore no ill-will towards Hunt. But his mountaineering record in no way matched Shipton's and there was a whiff of the old boys' club about his appointment, as he was a personal friend of the committee secretary, Basil Goodfellow.

News of these machinations soon reached Hillary. "I had a great warmth for him and an admiration," Hillary says of Shipton. "I had never heard of John Hunt and I was very disappointed to hear that Eric had been replaced by

Dear Claude,

I have given most careful consideration to the Himalayan Committee's invitation to join the expedition. You will, I think, understand how difficult it was for me to disentangle my personal feelings from considerations affecting the welfare of the expedition, particularly since the circumstances arising from last Thursday's meeting came as a complete surprise to me. I therefore took the liberty yesterday of discussing the matter fully with General Norton, partly to clarify my own ideas and partly to obtain the benefit of his valuable judgement. I have now come to the reluctant but firm conclusion that I shall not join the expedition.

There is no precedent in the field of mountaineering and exploratory expeditions for a man with such long and intimate acquaintance with every aspect of a particular enterprise taking a position subordinate to one who, whatever his qualities of character and leadership, has no personal experience of the project. It seems to me obvious that such an arrangement would be attended by grave risks. I believe that my presence on the expedition would be an

"Owing to a difference of view with the Joint Himalayan Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club regarding the composition of the party, Mr. Eric Shipton has relinquished the leadership of the British Mount Everest Expedition 1953. Colonel E. Hunt has been appointed in his place. Mr. Shipton will continue to advise the Expedition on technical matters." Knowledge experience

In my view, any more general statement including such a non-committal phrase as "for personal reasons" would greatly increase the suspicions of the Press and cause a deeper probing of the whole affair. The above statement has the advantage of being both true and reasonable and the concluding sentence should give the impression that there is no ill-will.

4. Letter from Mr. Bourdillon.

Mr. Goodfellow read out a letter he had received from Mr. Bourdillon. This was almost exactly what he had said before the Meeting on the 24th of September. Mr. Bourdillon asked the Committee to release him from any obligation he may have incurred by being a member of the Cho Oyu Party to accept membership of any future Everest Expedition led by Colonel Hunt, should he be invited. The Meeting agreed to release him from this obligation and Mr. Goodfellow was asked to answer his letter on these lines.

5. Draft Appeal for Funds.

This Draft was passed by the Meeting with two minor amendments. It was agreed that the Appeal should be

An exchange of views on the Shipton affair sent to the RGS

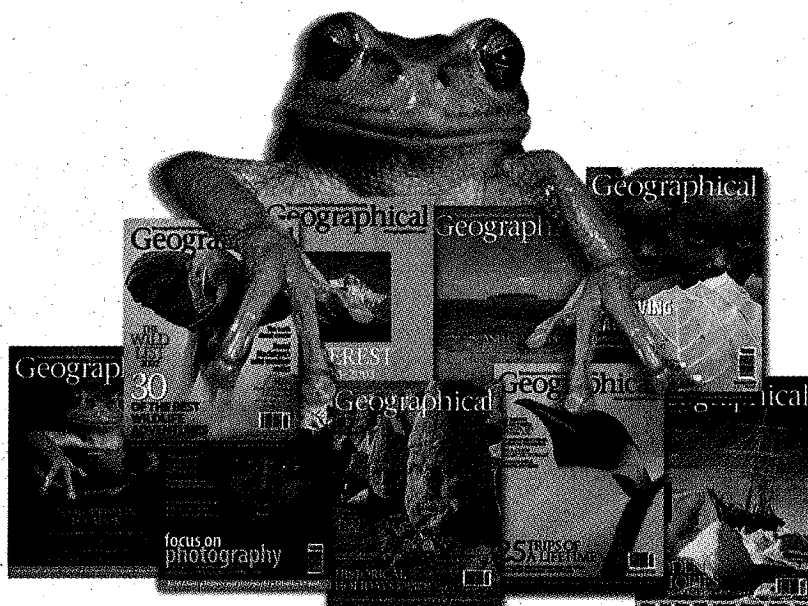
him ... I did think of pulling out." Within days, Bourdillon protested formally. "We were all upset," confirms Alf Gregory, climber/photographer. But the committee was not to be swayed and Bourdillon withdrew. Shipton asked Bourdillon to reconsider and Hunt asked to meet him; Bourdillon then gave Hunt his support.

Hunt won universal praise for his leadership, and Shipton was at Heathrow to greet them although the rejection had shaken him profoundly and he went through a series of crises. He divorced and at one time struggled to find work. Hillary says that "quite possibly" the mountain would have been climbed with Shipton as leader: "We had a good group of climbers, working together with Eric we would have done quite well." Gregory is less certain: "I had a sort of inner realisation that he may not have been the right leader for that climb."



Tom Bourdillon: made a formal protest

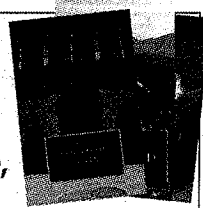
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THE IMPORTANCE OF RIGOROUS MILITARY TRAINING AND DIPLOMATIC SKILLS

JOHN HUNT'S JOB WAS DIFFICULT. HE HAD TO SOOTHE AN OUTRAGED TEAM AND DELIVER A NATION'S HOPES, SAYS JOANNA HUNTER

With internal skirmishes put aside, John Hunt set about what he did best: planning. "With his clear thinking and experience as a planner," Charles Wylie observed, "John very soon produced a masterly plan, agreed and understood by all concerned. In the event, on the mountain the plan was followed in virtually every detail." Despite Edmund Hillary's prejudices, there is no doubt that Hunt's rigorous military training proved invaluable in the initial stages of the expedition.

"John had a very clear idea of what was needed at the outset," said Wylie. "First, a comprehensive plan for the whole expedition from start to finish, embracing all concerned: planners, suppliers, climbers, porters, technical experts (eg, high-altitude physiologists), oxygen technocrats, the Foreign Office, the media and many others." All this was in stark contrast to Eric Shipton's plans scribbled on the back of an envelope.

Hunt believed that those who were going to take part in the expedition should be involved in the planning of it. "They would have a very personal interest in the preparations, since they would later be taking part in the venture," he wrote in his memoir, *The Ascent of Everest*, and so his first task was to select the climbing party.

Hunt was heavily involved in Allied manoeuvres in Germany when he was appointed expedition leader on September 11, 1952. Even so, by November 1 all team members had been officially invited to take part, and, by November 5, he had drawn up a memorandum, Basis for Planning, with appendixes A: The Ascent (Build-up and Assault), B: The Preparatory Period, and C: The Expedition Timetable.

Even at this early stage, Hunt took in everything from oxygen requirements to potential weather conditions, the size of the climbing party (six for the assault, four for support, a physiologist and a photographer) the number of camps, and the number of sherpas at each camp.

"It may seem absurd to have drawn plans up in London against the distant moment when a final attempt could be made on the top of Everest," Hunt wrote. "Yet only by making some such plan and entering into considerable detail, only by making certain assumptions based on an unfavourable combination of circumstances, could we work back to the size of the party, the quantities of food, equipment, and in particular, oxygen required to achieve success."

Hunt was renowned for his personal charm and diplomacy; he was also an excellent delegator. Wylie was put in charge of overall co-ordination; Anthony Rawlinson, assisted by Wilfred Noyce, took charge of mountaineering equipment; Emlyn Jones and Ralph Jones, were responsible for clothing; Michael Westmacott looked after structural equipment and tents; George Band was set to work on wireless equipment, food (the least popular assignment of all) and weather forecasts; Tom Bourdillon contin-

ued his work on oxygen equipment; Edmund Hillary took on sleeping bags and cooking equipment; Alfred Gregory took on travel arrangements and photographic materials. Even the Hunt family found much of their Christmas taken up with packing at warehouses in Wapping. "We spent hours putting on clothes tapes and writing the names of the men on their mugs," remembers Hunt's daughter, Sally. "I remember piles of ice-axes and crampons, huge gloves and socks that were so big we later used them as Christmas stockings. People sent in huge numbers of bobble hats, you couldn't move for them, and my sister and I added to the pile by knitting Dad a hat." Evans, Noyce and Ralph Jones were also enlisted to help with the packing so that some of the party would know where to find things when they got to India.

Earlier that December, Hunt, Wylie, Gregory and Pugh headed for Switzerland to test their equipment against the blizzards of the Bernese Oberland. In mid-January the team tried out their oxygen at Helyg in North Wales; they then went to Farnborough to use the Royal Aircraft Establishment's decompression chamber. Hunt visited the returning Swiss team to see if there was anything he could glean from their failure. Nothing, in short, was left to chance.

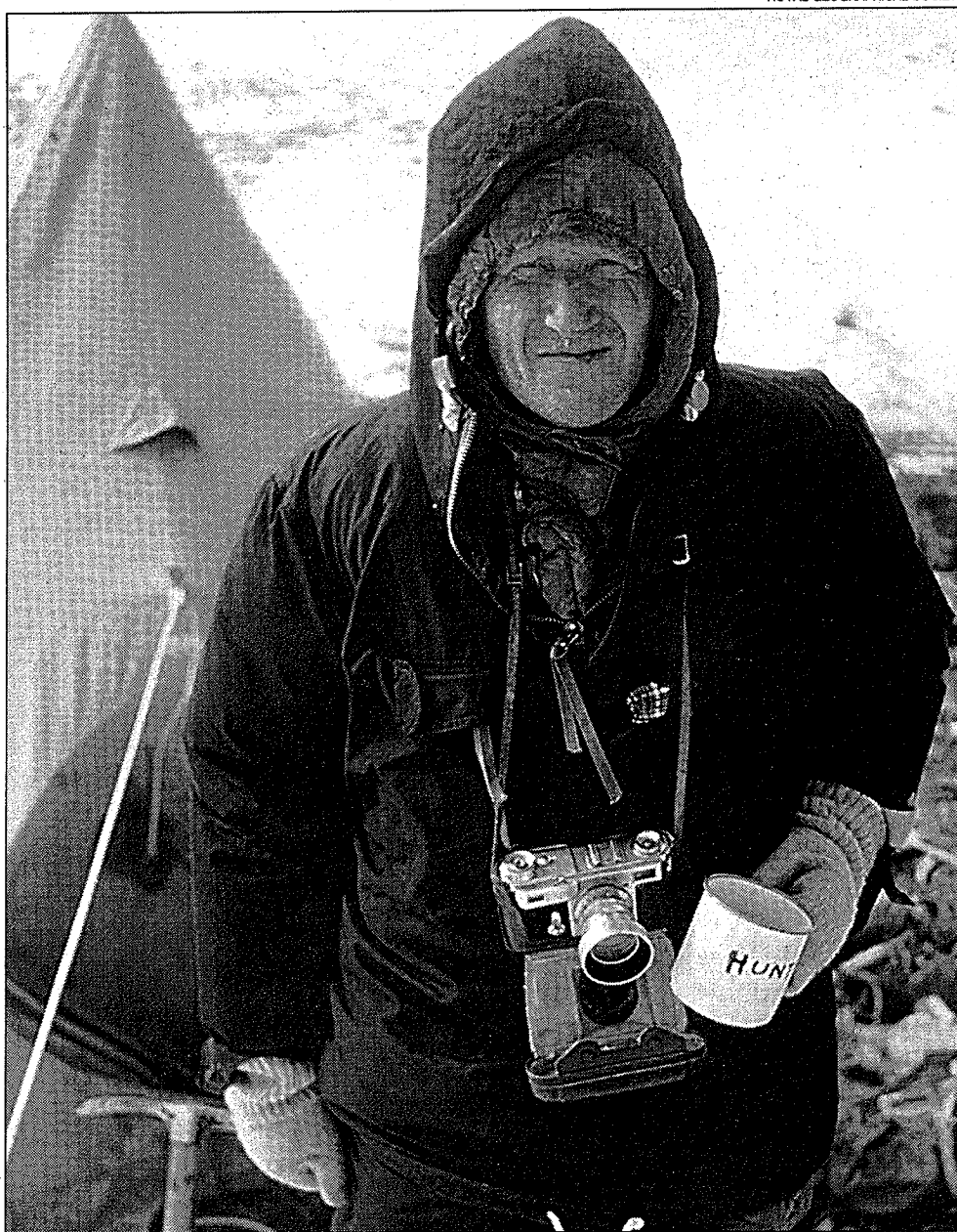
Hunt's training had arguably started a long time before. Born in Simla, India, on June 22, 1910, his father, Cecil, also a keen mountaineer, met John's mother, Ethel, when he joined the 34th Sikh Pioneers, the regiment formed by her father.

Cecil Hunt was killed in 1914 when John was only four, leaving his mother to raise him and his brother on her own. Hunt was sent to Marlborough, where by his own account he excelled at very little except French and German. This was thanks largely to the regular excursions to Switzerland that he made with his mother from 1920 onwards. It was here, at the age of 15, that Hunt completed his first climb, Piz Palü. It was an experience that was to intoxicate him for the rest of his life.

"I soon became wedded to the notion that mountains were there to be climbed," Hunt wrote in his biography, *Life Is Meeting*, "precisely because they made demands on my will-power and fitness, and because the effort was so rewarding. I began to realise that there were intriguing challenges beyond that snowline, and up those beetling rock buttresses, which would require skills and entail risks. For me, the satisfaction of these discoveries was the greater for the fact that I was an indifferent performer at competitive games, to which so much importance was attached at my school."

On finishing school, Hunt was accepted at Sandhurst. Here he won the King's Gold Medal for best results in military and practical subjects and also the Anson Memorial Sword, which is given to the best cadet of the year overall.

Hunt received a commission into the 60th



John Hunt, looking exhausted, at South Col after descending from the South East Ridge

EXPEDITION TIME TABLE

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. <u>Mid-February</u> | Advance Party leaves by air.
Main Party leaves by sea. |
| 2. <u>End of February</u> | Rear Party leaves by air. |
| 3. <u>March</u> | Journey to Katmandu.
Approach march to Namche. |
| 4. <u>April</u> | Acclimatization period. |
| 5. <u>By 1st May</u> | Establish Base Camp. |
| 6. <u>By Mid-May</u> | Establish Advance Base. |
| 7. <u>After Mid-May</u> | The Assault. |

The expedition timetable was planned with meticulous precision by John Hunt

Foot The King's Royal Rifle Corps (now part of Royal Greenjackets Regiment) and a year later, in 1931, he was posted to India. Here he was able to spend a great deal of his time exploring the Himalayas. Even at this stage, he showed a passion for exploring and a tenacity that would, no doubt, have bemused his contemporaries.

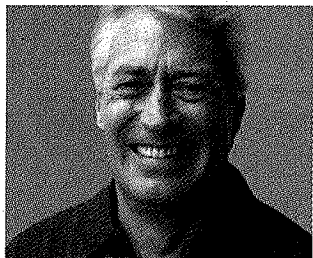
Hunt recalled spending his leave in Leebong in an article for the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) in 1997: "I pushed myself, for the sheer joy of being in the mountain area, to the point of exhaustion. Indeed, I recall hav-

ing resorted to crawling on all fours along the final stretch of the bridge track up the hillside, on returning to Leebong at the end of one of these marathon walks."

Doubtless it was these qualities that led to his selection for the 1936 Everest expedition. Selection proved a short-lived triumph, however, when doctors advised that his heart condition meant that he should be careful climbing stairs, let alone Everest.

While in India, Hunt served for 18 months as a plainclothes officer in district intelligence branch. With them he helped gather information on underground independence movements

Henry Matthews
Explorer



When I was 5, it was holidays with my parents

At 11, holidays with the school

At 21, holidays with the lads

At 35, holidays with my kids

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THE ASCENT

▲ The Everest expedition was funded in part by several private donors, including staff at the Savoy Hotel, Blackpool

▲ Despite all the research done into oxygen supplies, donated provisions included three different types of cigarettes — from Carreras Ltd, W D & H O Wills, and John Player & Sons — and two different kinds of tobacco, from Imperial Tobacco (Ogden Branch) and Stephen Mitchell & Son

▲ The Indian Army donated two-inch mortar bombs and rum. The group received a further selection of two-inch mortar bombs from the British War Office, as well as a 12-man tent

▲ The Yorkshire Ramblers Club donated a rope ladder

▲ Other donations included micro-cellular boot soles and tent floors from Dunlop Rubber Co; woollen mitts from Jaeger; Grape-Nuts and coffee from Alfred Bird; canned rich cake from Huntley & Palmer; goggles from Lillywhites; and even a little something from the French — saucissons from the Société d'Alimentation de Provence

▲ Luxury boxes of food (chosen by climbers as what they would like to eat at altitude) contained: Nescafé, sardines, glucose tablets, Sun and Green Label chutneys, Marmite, onion flakes, Ovosport bars, self-heating soups, white pepper, mixed herbs, Klim milk powder, ham, rum, brandy, Cheddar cheese and saucisson

▲ Generally, climbers found that altitude reduced their appetite but they were known to have cravings, too. High up on Everest in 1933 Shipton had a longing for eggs; Smythe wanted frankfurters and sauerkraut; in 1924 Somervell's favourite diet was strawberry jam and condensed milk

FOR THE HIGHER SLOPES
THEY CHOSE GRAPE-NUTS!

▲ Food cravings were specific from year to year: Pemman and Grape-Nuts, while perfectly acceptable for the Cho Oyo expedition in 1952, were vetoed by the team for Everest



Thirteen tons of baggage and equipment was dispatched for the 1953 expedition to make sure nothing was left to chance

and was also influential in proposing activities aimed at undermining terrorist recruitment among school pupils. For this he was awarded the Indian Police Medal.

Hunt described himself as shy with women, a condition that earned him the nickname "the aloof blond" from the girls at his club. Nevertheless, he married Joy Mowbray-Green, a Wimbledon tennis player and a keen mountaineer, in 1936. When their daughter Sally, the first of four, was born shortly afterwards Hunt climbed Tiger Hill to celebrate.

On his return from Everest, Hunt wrote *The Ascent of Everest*, which took him only 30 days but was translated into more than 20 languages and became the most popular mountaineering book of all time. He was also to write *Our Everest Adventure* as well as his autobiography.

Hunt chose to leave the Armed Forces in 1956. He then indulged his great and enduring interest in young people, becoming secretary of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme until 1966, and chairman of the National Recreation Centre in Snowdonia of the Central Council of Physical Recreation. He was also president of the Royal Geographical Society from 1977-1980. He took part in courses aimed at developing young people's climbing, camping and orienteering skills.

Naturally, Hunt also indulged his love of mountains, becoming president of the Alpine Club from 1956-58. He went on to lead a party to the Caucasus in 1958, where it climbed two peaks of more than 17,000ft.

Hunt was knighted in 1953, and created a life peer in 1966. He was appointed chairman of the Parole Board for England and Wales in 1967, and from 1968 to 1974 held the presidency of the

Council for Volunteers Overseas. The Government also sent him to investigate policing in Northern Ireland, and to Biafra, where he advised on postwar aid requirements. From 1974-77 he was a member of the Royal Commission on the Press. In 1979 he was appointed a Knight of the Garter. Despite his public service, he was not afraid to express his beliefs: Hunt joined the SDP, and spoke on environmental subjects for the Liberal Democrats in the Lords.

His greatest ambition, however, was to inspire others. As he wrote in *Our Everest Adventure*: "I hope that the moral which may be read into this story of the long drawn-out struggle to reach one of the ends of the Earth will have its effect in shaping the characters and steering the actions of our young people, both now and for generations to come."

John Hunt died on November 8, 1998.

PURISTS TAKE ON PRAGMATISTS IN DEBATE OVER USE OF OXYGEN

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



An early version of the oxygen cylinder, some of which weighed 47lb

Of all the key advances that made the ascent of Everest possible none was more important and more vital to success than the use of bottled oxygen.

John Hunt wrote: "But for oxygen, we should certainly not have got to the top."

Its use has always been a bone of contention. Reinhold Messner, the first man to conquer Everest solo without oxygen in 1980, refused to climb with anybody using it. "In reaching for the oxygen cylinder, a climber degrades Everest," he wrote in his book, *Everest: Expedition to the Ultimate*. "A climber who doesn't rely on his own strength and skills, but on apparatus and drugs, deceives himself."

The 1922 expedition was divided over the use of oxygen. Some thought it indispensable, with physiologists, researching it for the RAF, urging the use of oxygen masks.

For the 1953 British expedition, it was agreed that no prima donna purists would be tolerated and everyone had to learn to use oxygen. The expedition took eight closed-circuit systems and 12 open-circuit sets, where oxygen flows constantly at a rate chosen by the climber. These had lighter and smaller cylinders and were used most.

George Band recalls being put in a decompression chamber and fitted with an oxygen mask while the air was pumped out to simulate conditions at 30,000ft. The mask was taken off and he instantly slipped into unconsciousness.

The first summit bid was made from the South Col by Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans, using closed-circuit apparatus. Their main objective was the South Summit but, if they had enough oxygen, they would press on to the peak.

However, there were problems with the apparatus — a frustration compounded for Bourdillon because he had helped to design it. The following day, Hillary and Tenzing, succeeded using open-circuit oxygen equipment.

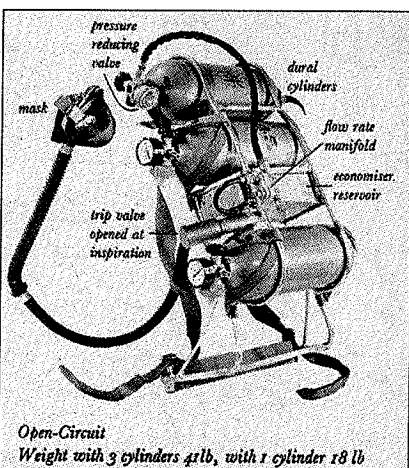
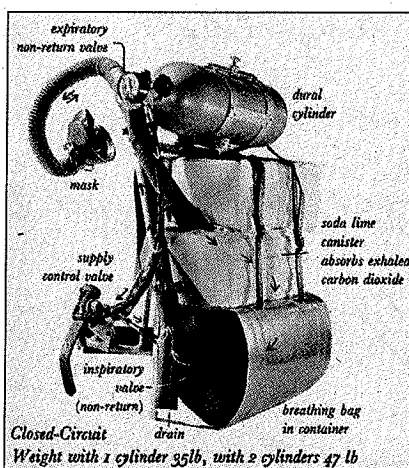
Modern cylinders are now made from lightweight carbon-fibre, wrapped round an aluminium tube, and can withstand oxygen at very high pressure. A single modern light cylinder can produce more than 12 hours of oxygen. The latest equipment can even sense a climber's inhalation before releasing a dose. Less oxygen should be used and so the cylinders last longer.

Even today, though, the philosophy that no supplementary oxygen should come between climber and mountain has its supporters.

In the 1970s the strongest advocates were Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler, who arrived at Base Camp in March 1978. Habeler became ill with

food poisoning and reconsidered oxygen but Messner believed that climbing as high as possible without oxygen was more important than reaching the summit. Messner testified into his tape-recorder that "breathing becomes such a serious business that we scarcely have the strength to go on".

However, on the afternoon of May 8, 1978, they achieved what was thought to be impossible — the first Everest ascent without oxygen. "In my state of spiritual abstraction, I no longer belong to myself and to my eyesight," wrote Messner. "I am nothing more than a single gasping lung floating over the mists and summit."



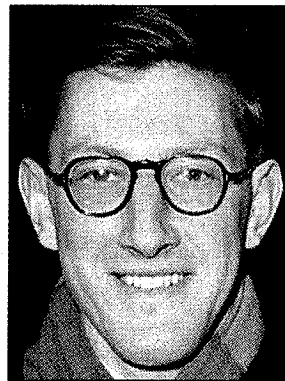
The team could choose between closed-circuit oxygen, above, or open-circuit oxygen

Pheriche is a one-day trek from Base Camp and at 14,600ft it is the highest hospital in the world. It was built 30 years ago and thanks to the Everest Memorial Trust its refurbishment has been a triumph. Porters carried smaller items, but a Russian helicopter, costing \$3,500 a load, ferried heavy equipment from Kathmandu, including solar panels and a £20,000 wind turbine. Other items, like plumbing gear, were flown in to the airstrip at Lukla but they, too, had to be carried for days over tough terrain. In the end transportation proved more expensive than construction.

Andrew Morgan

THE ASCENT

▲ **Ang Nyima** (1931-1986). Ang Nyima was the only Sherpa, with the exception of Tenzing, to carry a load to the top camp. Later he enlisted in the 10th Gurkha Rifles and served in Malaya and Borneo



▲ **George Band** (1929-). Band (above) was the youngest member of the expedition. In 1955 he and Joe Brown became the first men to reach the world's third highest peak, Kangchenjunga. He worked in the oil industry and was also president of the Alpine Club and of the British Mountaineering Council

▲ **Thomas Bourdillon** (1924-1956). Bourdillon was largely responsible for developing the closed-circuit oxygen used by Evans and himself on their pioneering climb to the South Summit. He was in charge of all oxygen equipment in both 1952 and 1953. He died while attempting a route on the Jaghorn, in the Bernese Oberland

▲ **Sir Charles Evans** (1918-1995). A neurosurgeon, Evans was deputy leader, and with Bourdillon, made the first ascent of the South Summit. From 1958-84 he was Principal of Bangor University; he began to suffer from multiple sclerosis shortly after his appointment

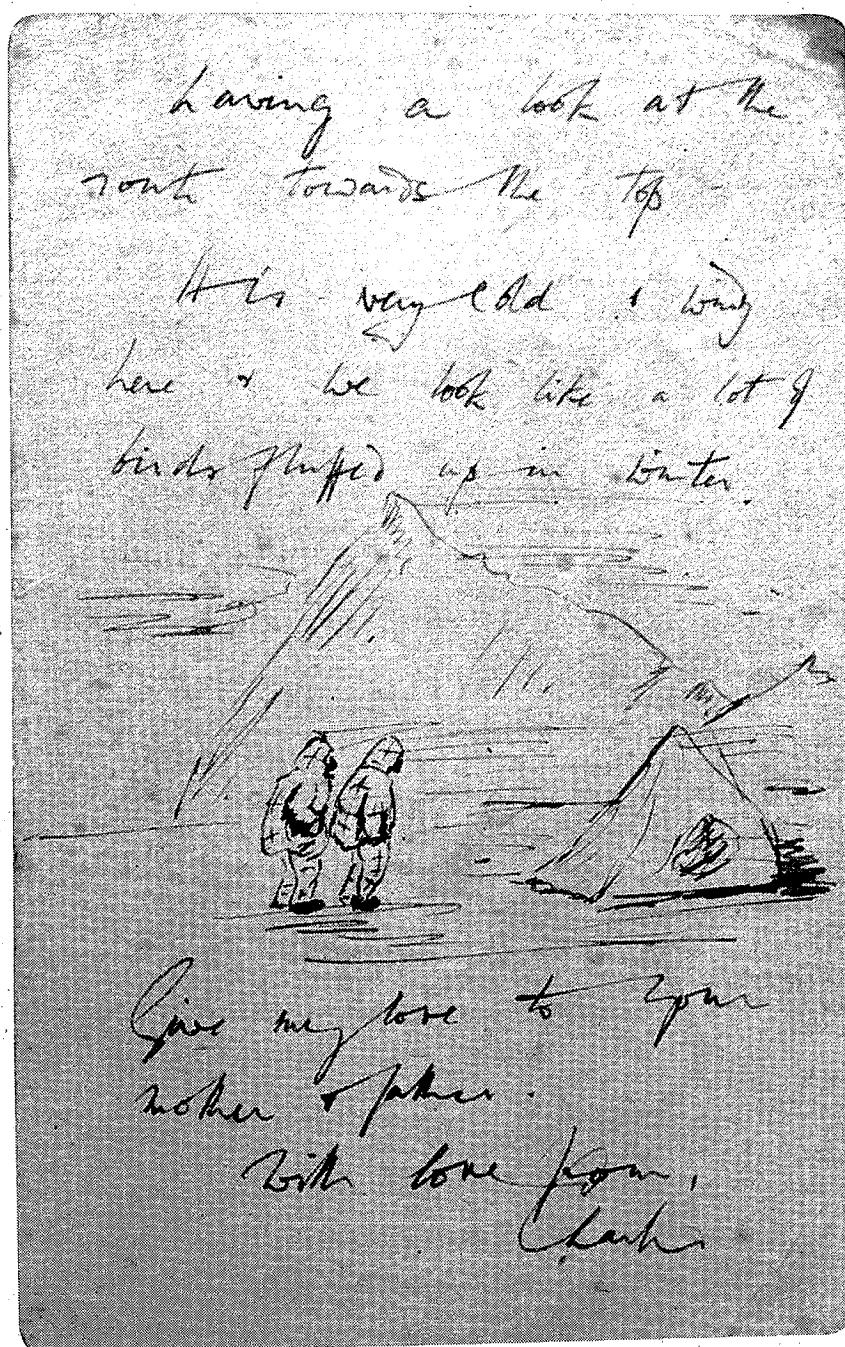
▲ **Alfred Gregory** (1913-). Gregory went to 27,900ft in support of Hillary and Tenzing; he was also in charge of stills photography. As a professional photographer he has travelled extensively and now lives near Melbourne

▲ **George Lowe**, OBE, CNZM (1924-). Lowe helped to establish the top camp. In 1957-58 he made the first crossing of Antarctica with Sir Vivian Fuchs's party, meeting Hillary at the South Pole. He taught at Repton, and later was a headmaster in Chile, returning to the UK in 1973 to become an inspector of schools. He is chairman of the UK branch of the Sir Edmund Hillary Himalayan Trust



BOURDILLON GETS WITHIN 300 FEET BUT HAS TO TURN BACK; THE WAY IS CLEAR FOR HILLARY AND TENZING

THE ATTEMPT AT THE SUMMIT BEGINS. BUT SUCCESS IS FOUR DAYS AWAY



Charles Evans, who made the first attempt, found the time to send postcards to his nephew, Martin, in Kent, one of which has a drawing of his camp

The morning of May 26 dawned bright and clear over the camp at the South Col as the first of the two teams to climb, Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans, supported by John Hunt, Da Namgyal and Ang Tensing, prepared for the attempt at the summit.

MAY 26

5AM Bourdillon and Evans, the pair picked by Hunt for the first assault, wake and breakfast (two flasks of lemon juice). Both have limited their morning preparations to an absolute minimum: Bourdillon need only tighten his boot laces and put on his goggles.

6AM Conditions are not great: high winds and tensely cold, but both are ready to start as planned. However, Evans's oxygen isn't working properly. It's so cold that taking gloves off for more than a few seconds could risk frostbite,

but there is no point in their going anywhere until they have fixed it.

7AM Hunt and Da Namgyal go ahead.

7.30AM Bourdillon manages to fix Evans's oxygen, but at a dramatically less economical rate. The time loss and oxygen problems are a serious setback, and Bourdillon and Evans know it.

9AM Bourdillon and Evans reach the South East Ridge, 27,200ft. Things are looking up: they have climbed quickly.

11AM Conditions have worsened. The climbers change their oxygen cylinders and absorbent canisters. It soon becomes clear that Evans's second canister had been damaged, severely affecting his ability to climb.

1PM Bourdillon and Evans reach the South Summit, 28,703ft: higher than anyone had ever reached before. Tantalisingly, they can see the

last part of the ridge, and seriously consider pressing on to the top. However, they are running out of time, oxygen and energy; reluctantly they realise that they have no choice but to turn back. Their hopes for the summit are over.

4.30PM Almost dangerously exhausted, Bourdillon and Evans return to Camp VIII, where they are able to describe the last ridge to their successors, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay.

MAY 27

4AM Hillary and Tenzing awake to relentless winds.

8AM The ongoing weather conditions remain very bad. Progress today looks unlikely.

9AM Hillary climbs into Hunt's tent where they agree that there is no question of attempting the summit in these high winds — any attempt is delayed for at least the next 24 hours.

NOON Bourdillon, Evans and Ang Temba, who is too sick to continue, begin their descent to Camp VII.

12.10PM Evans reappears. Bourdillon cannot get up the slope to the Eperon. He is in a critical condition and needs help. After much deliberation Hunt decides that he is the obvious choice to help him; his sacrifice saves Bourdillon's life.

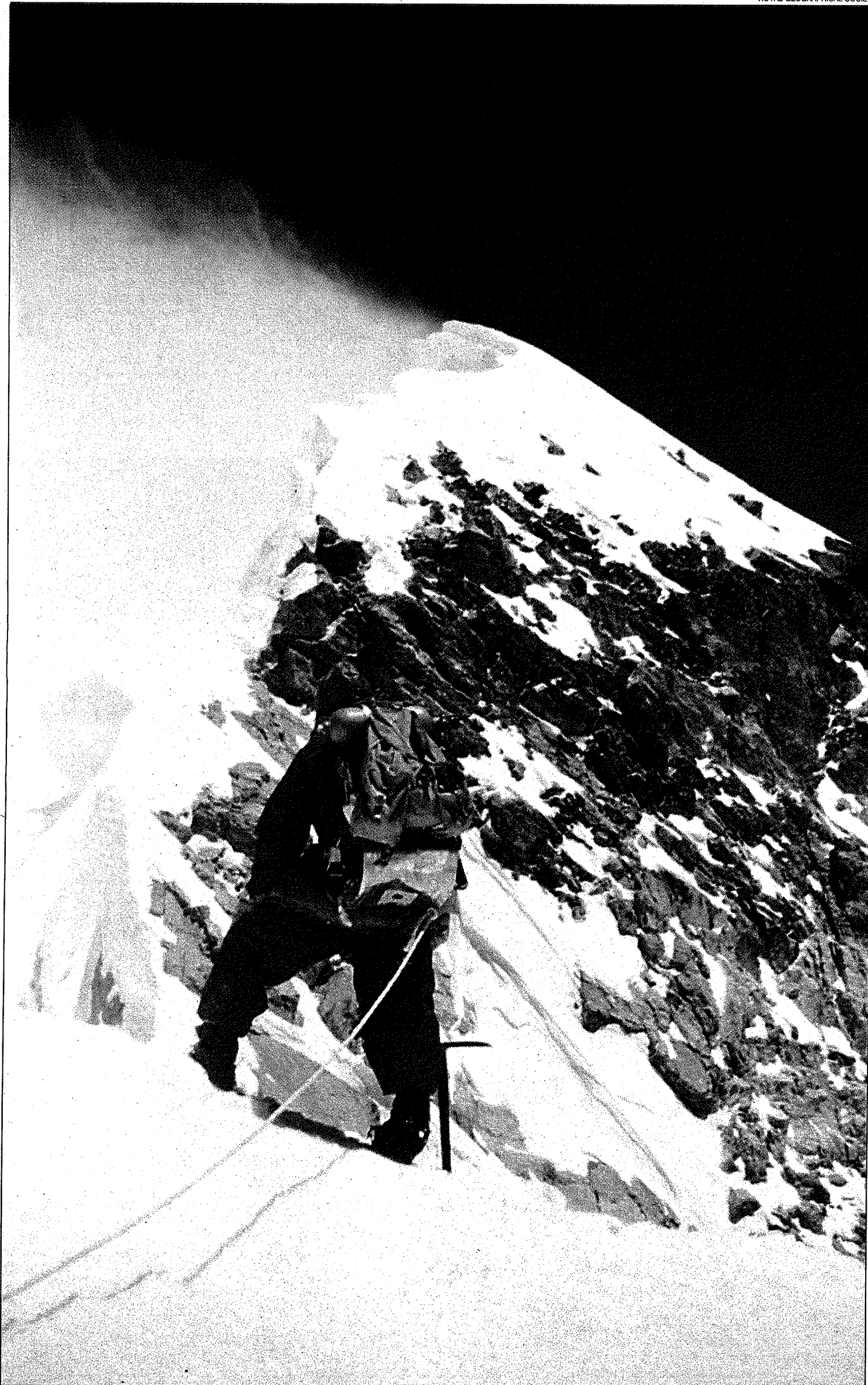
MAY 28

5-6AM The group wakes. Once again, the winds are very strong, without signs of letting up.

8AM Conditions have eased, and the group decides it is safe to press on. However, Temba, a Sherpa, has been ill in the night, and is not fit to continue. Non-essential items — and some oxygen supplies — have to be abandoned so that the remaining five can manage the load.



LONG LIVE DREAMS™



So close yet so far. Charles Evans gazes at the peak, less than 300ft above, before he and Tom Bourdillon were forced to give up.

THE ASCENT

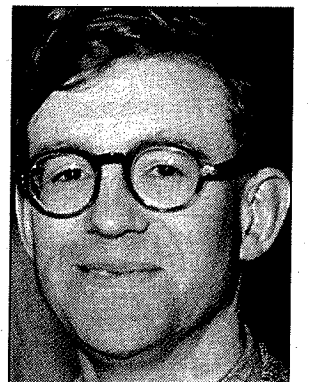
▲ **Nawang Gombu** (1936-). Tenzing's nephew, and one of the youngest Sherpas, Nawang carried a load twice to the South Col and went on to become the first man to reach the summit twice (in 1963 and 1965). Nawang became field director at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute on his uncle's retirement.

▲ **Wilfred Noyce** (1917-1962). The first man to reach the South Col. Noyce taught at Charterhouse for ten years and then retired in order to concentrate on writing. He died on Mount Garmo in Tajikistan.

▲ **Dr Lewis Pugh** (1909-1994). Pugh's research was largely responsible for solving the "problem of the last thousand feet" on Everest. An Olympic-class skier, Pugh was a physiologist who specialised in the reaction to the body in extreme conditions.

▲ **Thomas Stobart, OBE** (1914-1980). The cameraman producing the official film, *The Conquest of Everest*. He was crippled while filming in Ethiopia but continued with his film career and also wrote five books.

▲ **Michael Ward, CBE, MD, FRCS** (1925-). Medical officer and climbing member. He has continued with mountain exploration in Asia, and with high-altitude medical research. He has also been Master of the Society of Apothecaries of London.



▲ **Michael Westmacott** (1925-). On the 1953 expedition Westmacott (above) focused on the Khumbu Icefall: pioneering the route and finally descending it with James Morris to get the news home. He was later President of the Alpine Club and the Climbers Club.

▲ **Lt-Col Charles Wylie OBE** (1921-). Fluent in Nepali, Wylie was the organising secretary and in charge of the Sherpas, leading 15 of them to the South Col. After retirement he worked for the Britain-Nepal Medical Trust, and was Chairman of the Britain-Nepal society.

HILLARY AND TENZING FACE THE LAST 40FT. BOTH MEN BEGIN TO TIRE; WILL THEY REACH THE SUMMIT?

8.45AM George Lowe, Alf Gregory and Ang Nyima set off first, carrying more than 40lb each. It is agreed that Hillary and Tenzing will follow using the others' steps to save energy.

10AM Hillary and Tenzing set off. Each is carrying a load of 50lbs.

NOON Hillary and Tenzing join the others at the South East Ridge.

2PM The group is beginning to tire, but there doesn't seem to be a place to camp. Fortunately, Tenzing remembers a nearby traverse from his climb the year before.

2.30PM They arrive at a relatively flat spot beneath a rock buff at an estimated 27,900ft. Lowe, Gregory and Ang Nyima deposit their loads and return to the South Col.

SUNSET Hillary and Tenzing crawl into sleeping bags. Their supper is sardines on biscuits, tinned apricots (defrosted over the Primus cooker), dates, biscuits, jam and honey.

9-11PM Thanks to oxygen supplies at one litre per minute, Hillary and Tenzing are able to snatch some sleep.

MAY 29

1-3AM The men allow themselves another dose of oxygen in a bid to get some sleep.

4AM A perfect dawn. To beat dehydration they drink large amounts of lemon juice with sugar, and breakfast on the last tin of sardines with biscuits. Hillary also had to cook his boots — he had taken them off because they got wet and had frozen solid overnight. The climbers wear waterproofs and three pairs of gloves: silk, woollen and windproof.

6.30AM Hillary and Tenzing climb out of their tent. "OK?" asks Hillary, to which Tenzing replies: "Acha — yes, ready." The two begin their final assault.

9AM Snow conditions are very dangerous, but Hillary and Tenzing persevere until the South Summit. Things are actually going very well — already they have reached where Bourdillon and Evans had been forced to turn round only three days before.

10AM Hillary and Tenzing reach the Rock Step. It may be only four feet high, but it is the much the most difficult part of the ridge.

11AM The Rock Step behind them, Hillary and Tenzing face the last 40 feet — a rock wall soon to be known as the Hillary Step. They wriggle up it but both men are beginning to tire; they wonder if they will ever reach the summit.

11.30AM Suddenly the climbers notice that instead of continuing to rise, the ridge has suddenly dropped away: Hillary, followed by Tenzing, become the first men to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

11.30-40AM Tenzing and Hillary shake hands and then embrace. Hillary takes pictures of the surrounding area and, most famously, three of Tenzing as he poses with his axe decorated with British, Nepali, Indian and United Nations flags. Tenzing sets about digging a hole in which to bury some chocolate, biscuits and lollies as a gift offering to the mountain gods. Hillary also buries a small crucifix that Hunt had given him to take to the top.

11.45AM The men look for any signs that Mallory and Irvine might have got to the summit before them, but they find nothing. Hillary and Tenzing then begin their descent.

Ahead of them still was a long and dangerous climb. It took more than two hours to get back to their camp from the previous night, and they were close to collapse by the time they reached the South Col. Greeted by Lowe, who welcomed the climbers with hot soup and emergency oxygen, Hillary made his now famous report: "Well, George, we knocked the bastard off!"



Bourdillon and Evans sit exhausted at South Col after their unsuccessful bid

THE ASCENT

Other routes:

▲ North Ridge from North Col (Chinese route), 1960

▲ West Ridge by Hornbein Couloir (American route), 1963

▲ South West Face, 1975; West Ridge Direct (Yugoslav route), 1979

▲ North Face by Hornbein Couloir (Japanese route), 1980

▲ North Face from North Col (Messner route), 1980

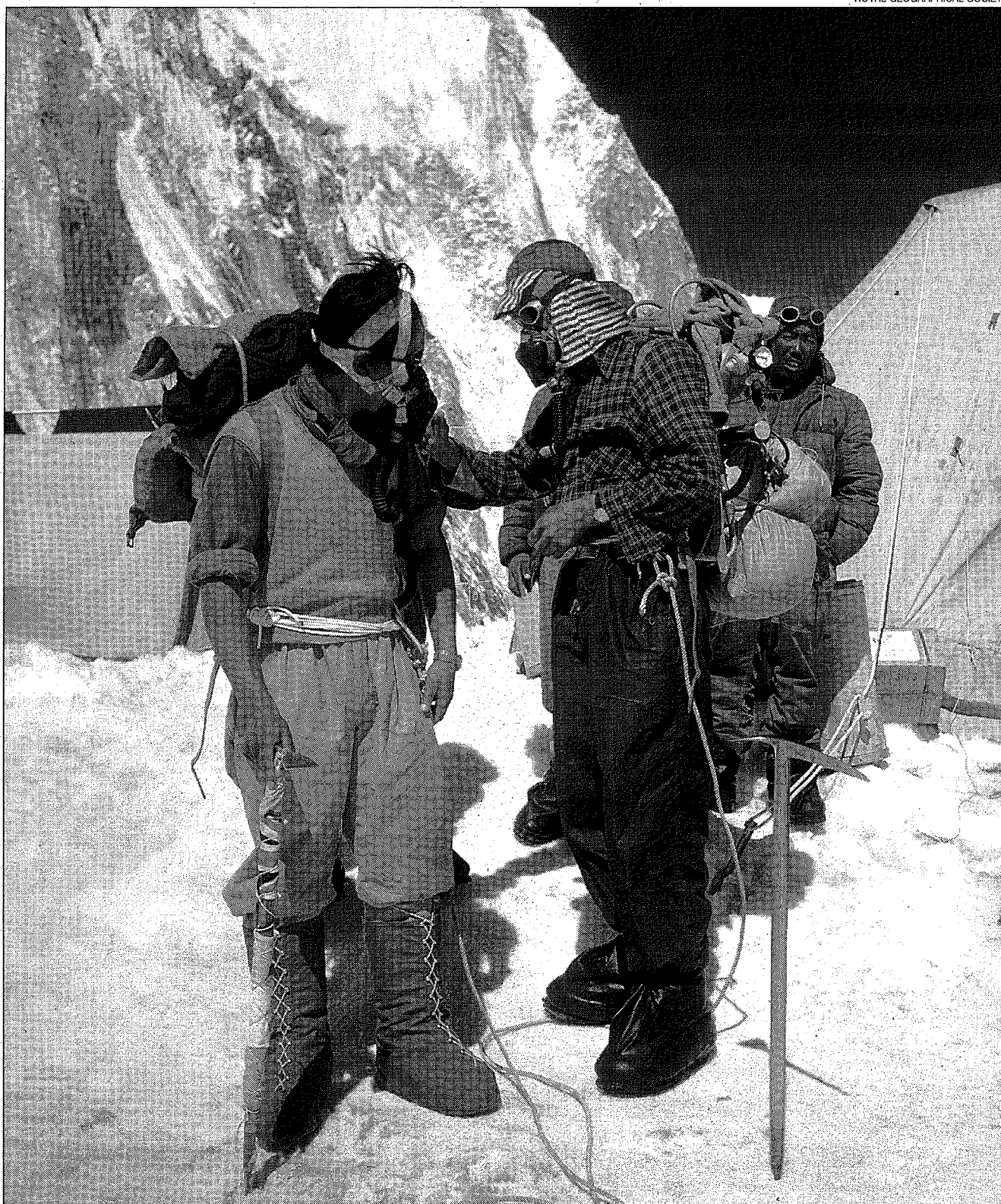
▲ South Pillar (Polish route), 1980

▲ South West Face Central Pillar (Russian route), 1982

▲ East Face by Central Pillar, 1983

▲ North Face by Great Couloir, 1984

▲ East Face and South East Ridge, 1988



Hillary checks Tenzing's gear, which includes summit flags wrapped round his ice-axe, as they prepare for the second assault



THE ASCENT

John Hunt, expedition leader, took time out from the mountainside celebrations to record the events in his diary

30 May Our anxieties as to Ed and Tenzing's safety

was ended when five figures appeared in the Couloir, making for the traverse; at least this was the total number of persons on or above the South Col.

We had to wait until 2pm, however, for news of the second assault when George Lowe, Ed and Tenzing came in to Adv Base. Most of us went out to meet them and, when we realised by their unmistakable gestures that they had been to the top, we temporarily went mad.

I found myself embracing Ed and Tenzing, weeping not a little and I think the others did much the same. James Morris of The Times had come up and was there in time to scoop the story

Hillary leads Tenzing at 27,500ft on the South East Ridge, the day before they made their historic assault on the summit

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



Charles Evans, left, next to Edmund Hillary, who is still roped to Tenzing Norgay, return to Camp IV with Tom Bourdillon and George Band

HUNT'S TEAM OF HEROES HAVE THE WORLD AT THEIR FEET AS THE NATION CELEBRATES

SALLY NESBITT
RECALLS THE JOY OF
HER FATHER'S TRIUMPH

The phone rang shrill in the quiet of our house on the Radnorshire/Shropshire border. It was 11pm; my sister Sue and I should have been in bed long since, but it was the night before the Coronation and we had been allowed to stay up and help with the final preparations for the village revue that my mother was putting on. We stopped splashing each other in our huge bath and sat still, listening. The steam swirled eerily in the flickering light of the oil lamp.

My mother's voice came in breathless squeaks. "I think they've done it," I said — footsteps pounded up the stairs and the next minute my sister and I were dancing naked, dripping wet and hugging each other.

Something amazing had happened, and the word had swept round the globe. Everest, the highest mountain in the world, had been climbed. The moment remains clear and vivid, encapsulated in time. My mother, Joy, phoned all our friends who, in turn, phoned more friends, and suddenly our house was full of people opening bottles. The party went on till the early hours.

We woke the next morning to find journalists and photographers in our garden. The press had arrived. Our world had changed, and my father, John Hunt, had become a celebrity. It was several weeks before the Everest team returned to cheering crowds. My mother flew to meet them in Kathmandu, and we plotted their journey home, which was marked by tumultuous welcomes whenever they touched down.

It is difficult now for people to understand the excitement that the event generated. The team were all heroes, hailed wherever they went; every village fête had a Hunt, a Hillary and a Tenzing in their fancy-dress parades, and two tiger cubs at Edinburgh Zoo were named Hunt and Hillary. Invitations and letters poured in from around the world, keeping our long-suffering postman very busy.

My father sat in an annexe in our garden writing his book, *The Ascent of Everest*, which was translated into more than 20 languages, and answering the mail. Then came the putting together of the film of the same name and its premiere. They were exciting times for us.

Climbing and mountains had always featured large in our lives. My father was often off on some expedition, so it was no real surprise when he was invited to lead the 1953 Everest expedition. We were all thrilled, of course; it had been his lifelong ambition to climb Everest.

But it nearly didn't happen. He had an opportunity as a young man to join the 1936 expedition but was terribly disappointed when he was thwarted by a supposed heart murmur (which turned out to be incorrect). So this time, when he developed severe sinus problems, it looked as if history was going to repeat itself, for sinus would have presented real problems at altitude.

Gloom and despair descended. Various remedies and cures were tried and failed, then my mother was told of a so-called Magic Box, apparently a form of faith healing. Supposedly, a

THE VICTORS OF EVEREST: FAMILY REUNIONS, AND DEMONSTRATIONS



AT THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY: EDMUND HILLARY DESCRIBING THE GREAT ADVENTURE, WHILE COLONEL JOHN HUNT AND TENZING, SEATED AT HIS RIGHT HAND, LISTEN SMILINGLY. ALL THREE HAVE BEEN HONoured BY THE QUEEN FOR THEIR ACHIEVEMENT.



HOW THEY REACHED THE ROOF OF THE WORLD: EDMUND HILLARY, COLONEL JOHN HUNT AND TENZING DEMONSTRATING AT THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY ON A MODEL OF MOUNT EVEREST. THEIR ROUTE TO THE SUMMIT IS INDICATED.



WITH HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTERS FEMBER AND NEMA: THE SHERPA, TENZING, WHO REACHED THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT EVEREST WITH HILLARY, ACKNOWLEDGING GREETINGS ON ARRIVAL IN ENGLAND. HER MAJESTY HAS APPROVED THE AWARD OF THE GEORGE MEDAL TO HIM.



A HAPPY, SMILING GROUP: EDMUND HILLARY, DESIGNATED A K.B.E. BY HER MAJESTY (LEFT), COLONEL HUNT, DESIGNATED A KNIGHT BACHELOR; WITH HIS DAUGHTERS SALLY (LEFT), AGED FOURTEEN, AND SUSAN, AGED TWELVE, ON EITHER SIDE OF HIM.



WITH HIS FAMILY, INCLUDING THE NEW BABY BORN DURING HIS ABSENCE: MAJOR WYLIE, A MEMBER OF THE EXPEDITION. THE



AT LONDON AIRPORT ON ARRIVAL: DR. L. B. C. PUGH, A MEMBER OF THE BRITISH EVEREST EXPEDITION, WHOSE SPLENDID WORK WAS A

A pictorial record of how the team members and their families celebrated their return home after the successful ascent in 1953

drop of blood was put into this "box" which then somehow "broadcast" a cure. My parents were definitely not into radical, alternative medicine and this sounded more like mumbo-jumbo, but desperate times called for desperate measures, so the blood was sent off and, to everyone's astonishment and relief, the remedy worked.

My father was granted a sabbatical by the Army and preparations began in earnest. The house filled up with equipment, and there were frequent trips to take it to Tilbury docks, where we were allowed to paint the names of the team on tin mugs. There were farewells at the airport, my sister and I posing

sheepishly for photographers, and then they were gone. I have been asked so often if I had been worried, but the truth is I wasn't. Perhaps I was too young to worry and, after all, climbing was what my parents did. I'm sure that my mother was concerned, although she never showed it, except once, just before the news broke — she hadn't heard from my father for some time, and the monsoon was due, which would have made things difficult and dangerous.

Fifty years on this has become history. My father and Tenzing Norgay have now gone, as have many of those who took part in the expedition, their names settling gently into the pages of the past. With half a century of incredible techni-

cal advances in sport, and the need to find more extreme forms of adventure and endeavour, perhaps the triumph of that time seems diminished.

Everest is still magnificent, despite the piles of rubbish discarded by queues of would-be "summiters", who pay a fortune to scale the ladders that hang from the steep slopes and ridges of that once unconquered mountain.

I am not a mountaineer but I feel privileged to have been part of what was a golden moment in history, and my heart still skips a beat when I look at those now-faded headlines... HER CROWNING GLORY... EVEREST IS CLIMBED.

'I WAS ON THE RIGHT MOUNTAIN AT THE RIGHT TIME'

SIR EDMUND HILLARY CLAIMS TO BE AN ORDINARY MAN. REBECCA STEPHENS DISAGREES

If Everest is the one mountain every layman knows, so Sir Edmund Hillary is the one mountaineer. He is a living icon, with his face on New Zealand's \$5 note and a new exhibition focused solely on him and his life's work.

On my first encounter with the great man, as an Everest groupie hovering outside the Royal Geographical Society, I felt compelled to push aside the crowds and shake his hand — very uncharacteristic. But then we are talking about a man who was the first to stand on the highest point on Earth.

Now in his autumnal years — he will be 84 in July — Hillary appears a contented sort of fellow, still travelling across continents, to Windsor once a year to attend the Knights of the Garter ceremony, and to Nepal, where he continues his lifetime's work helping the Sherpa people.

Undoubtedly, Hillary will always be defined by his accomplishments half a century ago. But what was it about the young Hillary that made him the winner of such a coveted prize? Was it, as he once said, simply that he was on the right mountain at the right time?

I don't think so. Photographs of him then reveal him as a man of immense physical presence: that long, handsome face and rangy body, towering head and shoulders over Tenzing Norgay.

"I tended to create challenges for myself — didn't wait around for recommendations from other people. Mountains just seemed to fit my frame of mind," he says.

It was George Lowe, Hillary's lifelong friend and compatriot climber on the 1953 expedition, who set the two of them on their path to Everest. But it was Hillary who wrote to Eric Shipton suggesting that a couple of climbers from their New Zealand team might make a valuable contribution to the expedition planning to reconnoitre the south side of Everest in 1951. It was Hillary who got to go, and Hillary who was a key player in pioneering a route through the Khumbu Icefall.

It was while sharing a rope with Tenzing that he took a tumble down a crevasse and was immensely impressed by the man's lightning belay and eagerness to keep going hard and fast. So he set about proving to Hunt how fit a partnership they would be for the summit.

But for Hillary, as for any climber, the significance of whether it was he or his partner who was the first to place his boot on the summit was lost. "It is so unimportant that we never think of it," he wrote to his fiancée Louise Rose. Until, that is, others kicked up a fuss. "Nepal (and India) have gone completely mad over Tenzing's success and he has become almost a God," he wrote. "Unfortunately, the Communists have been trying to get Tenzing to say that he got to the top first and then dragged me up. Actually, I did all the leading for the last couple of hours and did in actual fact reach the summit a rope length ahead of Tenzing."

In the event, the two of them agreed to compromise. "We reached the summit almost together," they told the world.

But if there was some confusion over the nationality of Tenzing (both India and Nepal wanted him as their own) there was none over that of Hillary. In the postwar years he, like most citizens of New Zealand, was still a British subject. But did he have any sense of climbing Everest for Britain? "Never, I just wanted to climb the mountain," he said, a sentiment common to many a mountaineer. "Hunt was probably one of the few who wanted success for the Coronation."

But on the expedition's triumphant return to England, Hillary was in for a surprise. "A taxi-driver pulled up and said, 'Thank you for climbing Everest!'" he recalls. "I didn't expect that."

It would be difficult to imagine how any of



The beekeeper from New Zealand will always be defined by his achievements half a century ago

them might have anticipated the response: crowds, lining the streets for the Coronation, crying, "Everest has been climbed, for the Queen!"; and the headlines, "All this, and Everest too!" For the team there was a whirlwind of receptions, and for Hillary a knighthood.

Everest had an impact on everything he did. The achievement catapulted him into a world of further expeditions, books, lectures, a somewhat specialised job as an adviser on camping equipment and a posting as New Zealand High Commissioner in India.

Nevertheless, he regards his subsequent work with the Sherpas as the most important part of his life. "I've built up a very warm relationship with the Sherpas and spent a lot of time in their homes, with their families. One day I was with a group and asked them if there

was anything I could do for them. They told me they'd like a school in Khumjung."

From this one request sprang his Himalayan Trust, which has established 27 schools, two hospitals and 12 clinics in 40 years. If Hillary is something of an icon around the world, he is something close to a saviour to the Sherpas.

In an otherwise blessed life, the story of his family is the one tragedy. In 1975 his first wife, Louise, and younger daughter, Belinda, were killed in a plane crash in Kathmandu; in 1989 he married June Mulgrew.

With festivities here, in Nepal, New Zealand and around the world, could Hillary possibly have imagined the interest that would be generated 50 years on? "I thought mountaineers might be interested," he says. "I didn't feel the public and the media would be interested."

Yet he seems to take it in his ample Antipo-

dean stride. When I spoke to him he had just attended in Auckland the opening of the exhibition dedicated to his life. "It was very good," he says, matter-of-factly. "People seem to like it."

He's also got used to seeing his face on a \$5 note but he does not like being called an icon.

"I know that I am really a very ordinary person," he says. "I think I've taken advantage of opportunities, many of which I've thought up myself, but so have many people." As if to verify his ordinariness, Hillary lives in the same house that he built and moved into as a newlywed in 1953. He tells me how, while out on a walk recently, a Maori passed him by. "He said, 'Good morning, Ed', and treated me with respect and warmth, as one of the gang. I rather liked that."

Rebecca Stephens was the first British woman to reach the summit of Everest

THE ASCENT

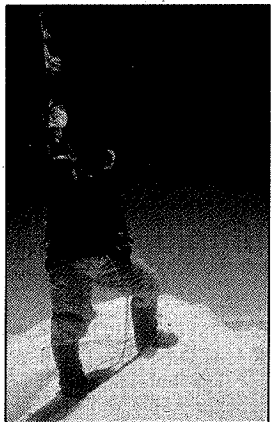
▲ Both Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's sons followed in their fathers' footsteps to reach the summit of Everest; Mallory's grandson was also successful in his attempt

▲ The youngest person to reach the summit so far is Temba Tsheri, who was 16

▲ The oldest person to reach the summit is Tomiyasu Ishikawa, who was 65

▲ The first woman to reach the summit was Junko Tabei, in 1975

▲ A record 89 people reached the summit on one day on May 23, 2001. A further 93 climbers also reached the summit that year, the highest annual number to date

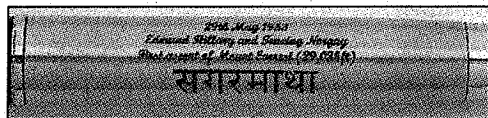


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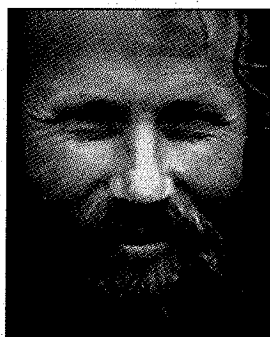
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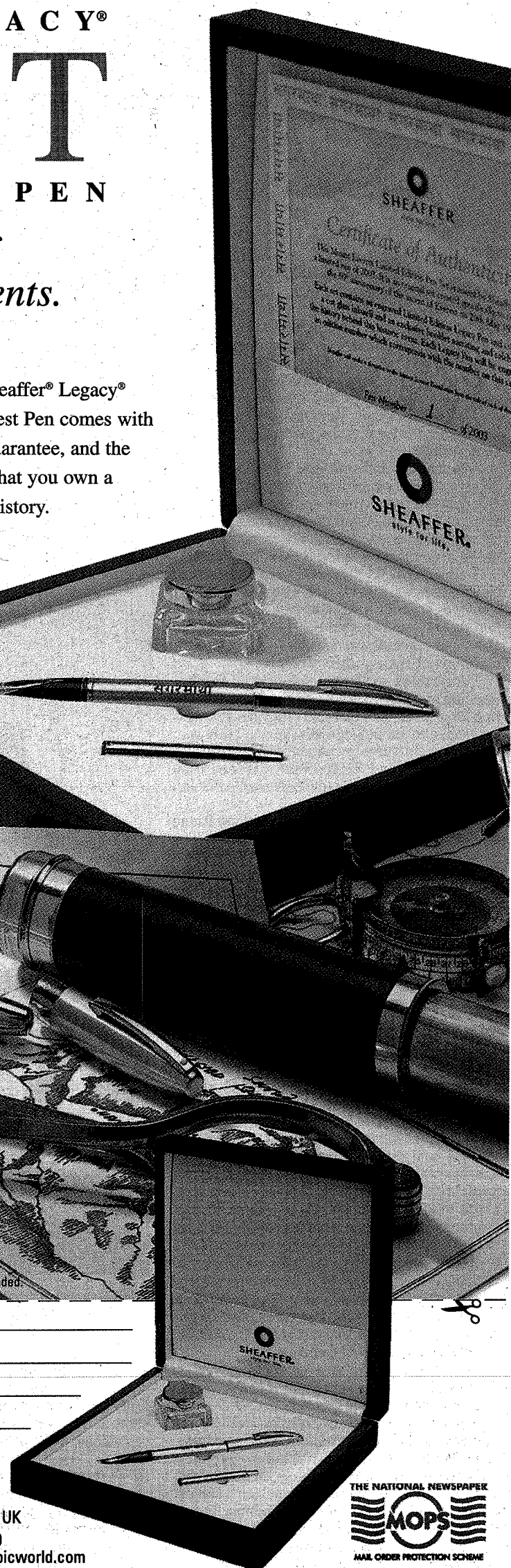
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THE 'GOLDEN CALF' THAT TENZING PURSUED CLAIMED HIM IN THE END

JONATHAN GORNALL TRACES THE SHERPA ICON'S DESCENT INTO DISILLUSION AND DEPRESSION

The moment Tenzing Norgay set foot on the summit of Everest, he stopped being a man and became a symbol and a brand name. At 39, after a life of hardship and poverty, this simple son of a Tibetan yak herder had achieved the goal that had eluded generations of wealthy, advantaged Europeans.

As a child, he had heard the talk that the Europeans were bent on climbing the sacred mountain because they believed a golden calf awaited them on the summit. At about 11.30am on May 29, 1953, as he and Sir Edmund Hillary stood there and gazed about them, the pair found their golden prize.

But as Hillary's eyes took in the vista of tall peaks, Tenzing's gaze instead fell fondly on the slopes and valleys below — the landscape of his life. Yes, he would make money — more money than a Sherpa could ever dream about — but the more he saw of the wide world the more he realised, and the more he resented, that his reward would never equal that of Hillary's.

His disappointment, his sense of anticlimax, was best summed up in the remark he made to one of his sons, who later asked his permission to follow in his footsteps. "You can't see the entire world from the top of Everest," he cautioned Jamling in 1983. "The view from there only reminds you how big the world is and how much more there is to see and learn."

Tenzing was born in 1914 in a poor village nestling in a remote Tibetan valley only a day's march from Everest and close to the border with modern Nepal. Despite becoming the man who would give the world Sherpa vans, Sherpa boots and a hundred other products whose makers sought identification with the "noble spirit of the plucky hillmen", he was not even a Sherpa. His family had moved to Khumbu, where Tibetans were looked down upon, and where the once snuffy locals now revere and claim him as their own: "Tenzing Sherpa".

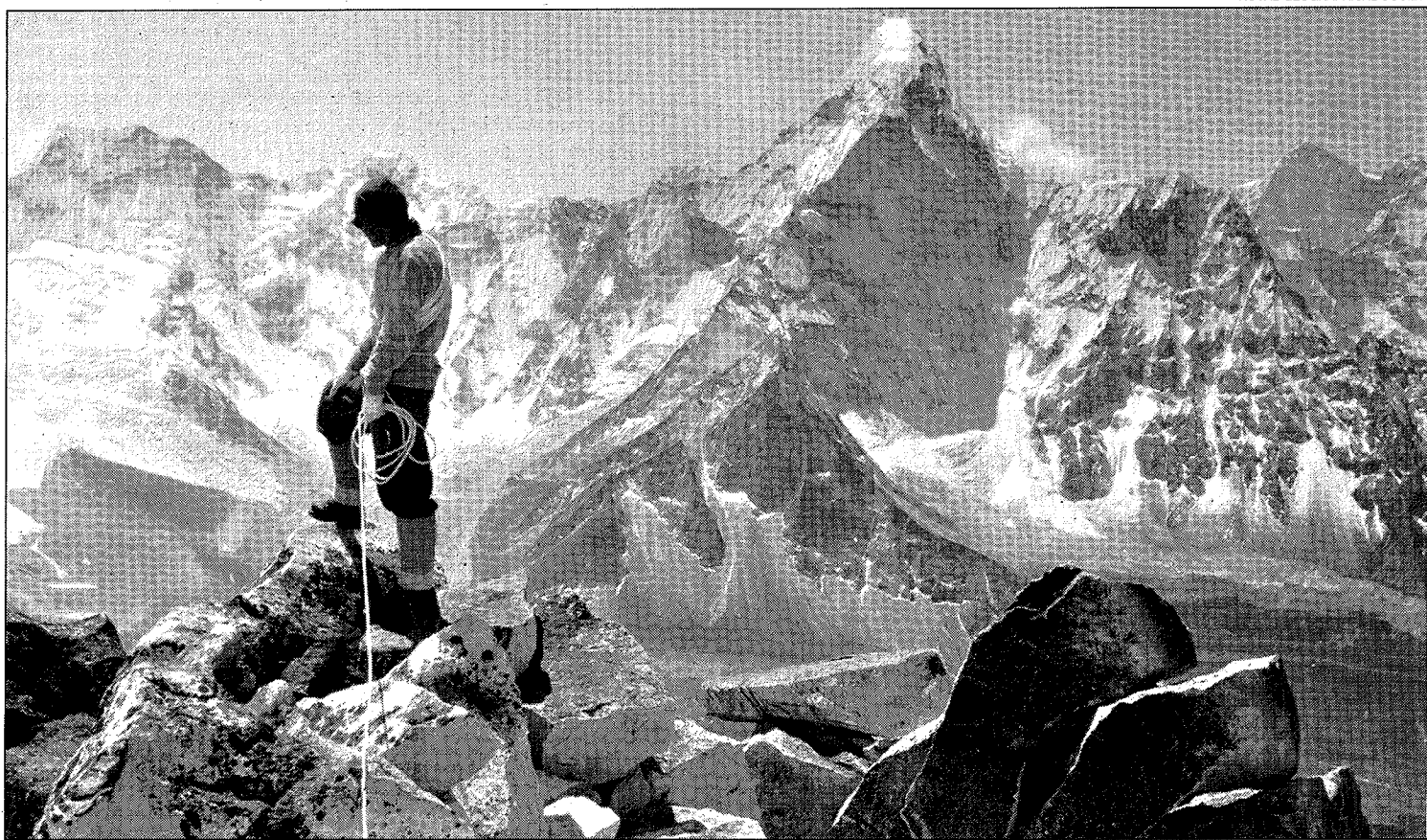
"His was the most astonishing life," says Ed Douglas, a climber himself and author of a new biography of Tenzing. "He was the first humbly-born Asian to become globally famous, and this is a man who has literally come from nowhere. Yet he is now an icon for achievement: reaching the summit of Everest is the most obvious metaphor there is."

"On balance, I think he should be regarded as a great man. For him, even getting to the foot of the mountain was an achievement. In the Twenties you'd have thought it would be some effete Englishman from Cambridge who'd have got to the top of Everest first."

And yet, as Tenzing discovered, the view from the top wasn't quite as enchanting as he had imagined. Sherpas had been the mainstay of Himalayan forays since the Twenties. On the whole, they were treated well, but there was only a harsh living to be made from climbing until Tenzing broke the mould. Lhakpa Chgedi, who carried loads for the 1924 Mallory expedition, ended his days as a doorman for a Calcutta department store. Others, crippled by frostbite, descended even further, often into alcoholism.

Tenzing was only a child when Bentley Beetham, on Everest with a British expedition in 1924, said of the Sherpas — the men upon whom they relied utterly: "It has been said that these men could easily reach the top if they themselves really wished to. I do not believe it for one moment... they lack the right mentality."

The child who grew up to prove him wrong had been entered into a monastery as a trainee monk, destined to become a lama. But after being struck by a tutor he ran back home. One consequence of his flight was that he never learnt to read or write. He became obsessed by the idea of education, and, thanks only to climb-



Tenzing Norgay on the summit of the peak, Chukhung. He did not find the view from the top of Everest as enchanting as he had imagined

Tenzing Norkey, the celebrated Sherpa sirdar, who reached the summit of Everest with E. P. Hillary on May 29 is singularly attractive. He is fundamentally a simple man, an illiterate, who thro' many years of success has notably retained his personal charm + modesty.

An extract from a letter written by John Hunt giving an appreciation of Tenzing Norgay and his attitude towards the climb

ing Everest, put all six of his children through school. As he said to Jamling in 1983: "I climbed Everest so that you wouldn't have to."

There was little glory for the Sherpas but large helpings of death. One calamity seems to have charged the imagination of 19-year-old Tenzing. The Germans in the Thirties became obsessed with Nanga Parbat in the Indus valley, at 26,656ft (8,125m) the ninth highest mountain in the world. In 1934 an expedition got to within 900ft of the top before a storm blew in. Six Sherpas and four of the Germans died. Tenzing arrived in Darjeeling shortly after the tragedy, and the sense of pride in the community fired his ambition to climb. By the time the Swiss so nearly beat the British to the summit in 1952, Tenzing had become the sirdar of choice. It was while climbing with the Swiss, who, unlike the diffident British, treated him as a climbing

equal, he realised he had a chance of making the summit. "He was the first Sherpa to figure out that if he climbed Everest he would make a lot of money," says Douglas, author of *Tenzing: Hero of Everest*.

But Tenzing's golden calf proved to be tarnished. Despite the adulation, he felt a sense of anticlimax, Douglas says. "The more he travelled the bigger he realised the world was, and instead of being satisfied with what he'd done and accepting there was always going to be somebody with more than him, it gnawed away at him that the western climbers had done better, particularly Hillary."

Tenzing lived into his seventies. His young third wife took to spending more and more time away. He suspected she was having affairs and, lonely and disillusioned, he turned increasingly

to alcohol to take the edge off his depression. Visitors to his home in Darjeeling were often surprised to see that a picture of him with Raymond Lambert, his Swiss friend from the 1952 expedition, took pride of place, rather than his Everest photo. Tenzing had climbed with the English in 1953 because it was the surest way to achieve his ambition, but in his heart he wished he had stood on top of the world with Lambert.

He died in 1986, apparently of a brain haemorrhage. When Hillary came to pay his respects to the great Sherpa he remarked: "I looked for the last time on the still, waxy face of my friend who had shared that great moment some 33 years before. He seemed so much smaller than the strong, vigorous person I had known."

Tenzing: Hero of Everest, National Geographic, £18.99.

CHARITY DEVOTED TO THE PEAKS OF THE WORLD

The Mount Everest Foundation (MEF), the UK charity for mountain exploration and science, was set up in 1953 by the Alpine Club and Royal Geographical Society. The MEF is the only major national mountaineering charity in the world.

Initially financed from the surplus funds and subsequent royalties of the 1953 expedition, the MEF was founded to encourage climbers in their understanding and exploration of the world's mountain regions.

Since its inception, the foundation has dispensed £750,000 in grants. Most go to small expeditions organised by adventurous young people. Often the grants are just enough to pay for an air fare, but the support of the MEF is valued in the climbing community and expeditions with MEF support can usually find sponsorship elsewhere. MEF grants keep British teams at the forefront of exploration and endeavour.

Present policy is to maintain this. Some 30 or 40 expeditions are supported each year. The MEF's screening committee tries to support small expeditions to unexplored areas, which is important because to



date only half the peaks at 7,000m (nearly 23,000ft) or more have been climbed.

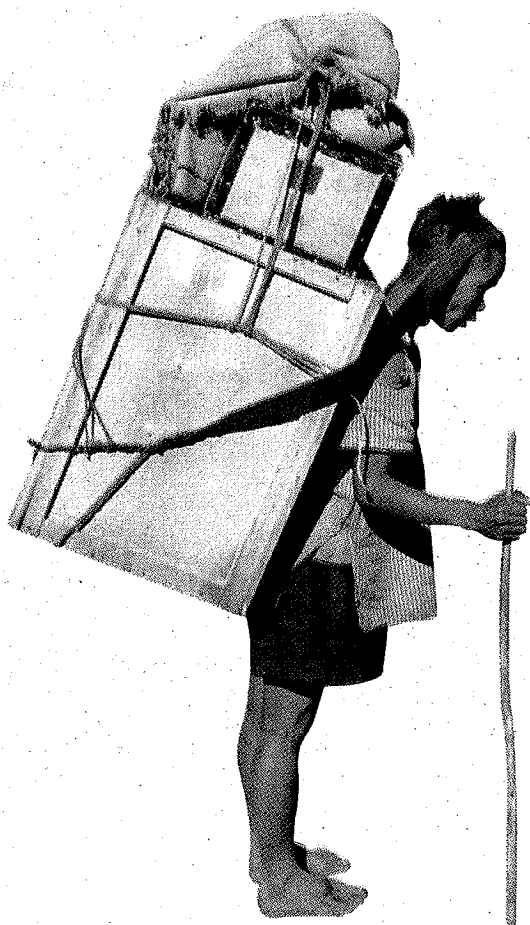
The MEF has supported expeditions to the Earth's highest peaks including first ascents and new routes on Everest, Kangchenjunga and Annapurna. Many expeditions are devoted to scientific and exploration work. Notable among these were the RGS Mulu (Sarawak) Expedition, the RGS International Karakoram Project and high-altitude physiological studies on Kongur.

The foundation, which encourages the protection of mountains, their people, culture, fauna and flora, requires teams to follow strict environmental policies.

The MEF relies on donations, and it is hoped that the 50th anniversary celebrations will generate enough income for it to continue its valuable work. (www.mef.org.uk). Win free tickets to the MEF gala evening. Page 46

THE MEN WHO CARRY A COUNTRY'S ECONOMY ON THEIR BACKS

THE TREATMENT OF SHERPAS IS POOR, SAYS DOUG MCKINLAY



In the five decades since Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay ascended Everest, Nepal has evolved from being an isolated mountain kingdom to one of the world's premier mountaineering and trekking destinations. It is an activity that is the backbone of the country's economy, an economy carried on the back of Nepal's thousands of mountain porters.

The porter labour force isn't new. For centuries it has been the principal means of moving goods around the high alpine reaches of the Himalayas. What is new, however, is the modern economy in which they now work. After Hillary reached the summit of Everest, the trekking industry exploded. It was to be both boom and bust for porters.

Since trekking became such a lucrative industry, Nepal's porters have been treated, as Sir Edmund remarked, "like tins of beans" — once used, they are tossed on the rubbish tip. However, the issue of how porters are treated is complex. It is a valuable industry that provides jobs in one of the world's poorest countries on the one hand, while at the same time it has them working under conditions described by a Pakistani tour operator as tantamount to slavery.

Myth has played a big role in their lives. For years Western trekkers were fed the notion that porters were almost superhuman, that they carried massive loads in harsh conditions, dressed in minimal clothing because that was the way they liked it. Nothing was further from the truth.

The reality is that most porters are lowland farmers trying to earn extra income to feed their families. Very few understand the difficulties of working at high elevations. And, until five years ago, both Western and Nepalese trekking outfits treated them like beasts of burden.

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

PAYMENTS	
1. Thanda	Rs. 510/-
2. De Nangyal	Rs. 360/-
3. Ang Tappa	Rs. 560/-
4. Tappa	Rs. 560/-
5. Pasing Dawa	Rs. 560/-
6. Ang Nangyal	Rs. 560/-
7. Ang Nima	Rs. 510/-
8. Dawa Thendup	Rs. 510/-
9. Ang Dawa	Rs. 750/- Rs. 100/- Rs. 475/-
10. Pasing Phurta	Rs. 40/- Rs. 30/- Rs. 88/-

15th May 1953

Lt. J. H. Duff
Ang. Jang.

Sherpa thumbprints acknowledging receipt of payments during the 1953 expedition

The greatest danger porters and trekkers alike encounter is the affects of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) compounded by freezing temperatures. AMS occurs when trekkers gain altitude too quickly and don't drink enough water. The symptoms can be as minimal as a bad headache and nausea, or as severe as a pulmonary oedema, a dangerous accumulation of water in the lungs.

In 1997 a young mountain porter employed by a Western trekking company fell sick and was dismissed while still at high altitude. After being paid off and sent down on his own, he died at the side of the trail.

Out of this the International Porters Protec-

tion Agency (IPPA) was formed. Although not an easy task, its goal is to try to prevent such incidents from occurring again.

IPPA's founder, Jim Duff, believes that it is up to Western trekking companies to lead by example but, at the same time, care must be taken.

"If we handle the situation the wrong way everybody will be out of work," he says. "A good example is Nepal's carpet industry. Not long ago it was a thriving trade but the Western media got its hands on it and labelled it a hotbed of child labour. Within a very short time the industry all but crashed. What didn't make the news though was that many of those factories were providing work as well as education, food and

often places to live. Kathmandu's number of street kids increased by 300 per cent. We don't want that to happen to the porters."

"There is a benign indifference to the needs of the lower-caste porters, not just from Sherpas but also from many in the travel business," he adds. "Western trekking companies, by and large, now have policies that include proper treatment of porters. Nepalese trekking companies have no interest other than making money."

Pal Tashi Tamang is 38 and has been a porter for the past 18 years. He says conditions have improved but not in every company. He is employed by the London-based World Expeditions and says he gets fair treatment. But he has harsh words about a former employer.

"It was very difficult," he says. "They didn't provide us with any proper clothing, not even boots. We were never fed. We either carried our own food as well as the clients', or had to pay for it in teahouses along the way. We never had a place to stay at night, so we often had to sleep in caves or huddle together. And if any of us got sick, we were just left to our own devices."

The Welsh mountaineer David Durkan has been guiding treks and climbs in the Himalayas for the past 32 years. He says one of the problems is that everything is too easy. Tourists turn up for a few weeks but never really get involved with the porters who struggle with their gear; a situation that further removes porters from the process of the hike, leaving them open to abuse.

"What trekking companies promise is the instant Everest — go up, throw up and come down. And none of it is possible without the lowly porter," he says. "I can lie in a sleeping-bag designed for -40°C and my fingernails won't even crack, while the guy outside, the guy who packed that sleeping bag up the mountain for me, freezes to death."

But it is not just Nepalese trekking companies which come under fire for mistreating their staff. Western backpackers have also been blamed.

"They are the ones who take the most liberties with porters," says the trekking guide Rinzin Sherpa. "They often share one porter and overload him. The porter won't say no because he needs the money and gets paid by weight. And when the porters have worn themselves out, they are paid off and left to fend for themselves."

Although overall conditions for porters working for companies have improved greatly, it is not the same with independent porters. Estimates vary but there are approximately 100,000 employed directly by companies and double that who are freelancers. This unseen 200,000 are, according to Durkan, the real engine behind Nepal's trekking industry. "It is on the back of those 200,000 that Nepal's tourist industry rides," he says. "These are the guys carrying the infrastructure of tourism — the food, the beer, the toilet paper."

"IPPG has no authority to take action against anyone. All they can do is advise," says Rinzin Sherpa. "Not even the Government can take action. You cannot improve the life of the independent porters. They are hired by small business people who are operating at the margins."

Nepal's economy is also at a crossroads. In the last two years tourism has dropped 70 per cent. The killing of members of the Royal Family followed by September 11, and a continued uprising by Maoist rebels has made Westerners wary of visiting Nepal. As tourism dries up, so improving working conditions will take a back seat only adding to the stress under which porters work.



For many Sherpas providing services for the climbing and trekking industries is a necessity in an area where there are few job opportunities

FAME ALSO MEANS DEATH AND HUMILIATION

Danu Sherpa is a bitter man. "We'd got them to the top after two weeks of carrying their tents, supplies and then, for the summit attempt, the extra bottles of water and oxygen, and they said, 'Stop there! You mustn't come any further'. We were only a few metres from the summit but they wouldn't let us go with them. They like to say they did it alone. They don't want us in the summit photo!"

He is describing a German expedition he took up Everest in 1999. A slight man in his early forties, he looks much older. He sits surrounded by his climbing photos in his house in the Sol Khumbu area of Nepal. He is one of 100 elite Sherpas hired by the expeditions. A Sherpa gets

about £2,000 for each expedition and an extra £1,000 if he gets it to the top. "They promised us a bonus as compensation for not going to the top," Danu continues. "When we got to Base Camp we found that they'd taken a helicopter back to Kathmandu. When we got there we found they'd flown home. We never got the money."

The success of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay transformed the lives of the Sherpas but, as Danu Sherpa suggests, the Everest experience has also brought problems. He takes me to visit his namesake, another Danu Sherpa. He has been to the top of the mountain three times and will join one of this year's memorial expedi-

tions. "The British, Canadian and American groups are OK," he says. "It is the Koreans and Russians who push us. Even if there has been an avalanche, they say, 'We've paid you. You've got to go on'. The worst bit is the bodies. After the expedition, we are paid to go back up and collect the rubbish and the bodies of the foreign climbers. But there is not the money or time to collect Sherpa bodies. I don't like it."

Forty-seven Sherpas have been killed, while more than 100 climbers have lost their lives. The difference is that the latter willingly take the risk while, for many Sherpas, it is a job opportunity in an environment where there are few others.

Sue Lloyd Roberts

COMING TO A NEPALESE CYBERCAFE NEAR YOU: 'THE EVEREST EXPERIENCE'

THE TREKKING INDUSTRY IS TO BLAME FOR DISNEYFICATION, SAYS MALIKA BROWNE

For a few weeks every March, Kathmandu's legendary Fire and Ice Pizza Parlour becomes the unofficial carbohydrate filling station for climbing expeditions before they set off for Everest. With Nepal's tourism industry plummeting because of the seven-year Maoist insurgency, this year's teams in their T-shirts emblazoned with sponsor logos and website addresses were more welcome than ever, and even the most cynical of Kathmandu's expatriates found it in themselves to overcome "Everest fatigue" and wish them well.

Since 1953, climbing Mount Everest has become a universal metaphor for personal achievement. Among this year's 64 expeditions are a Sherpa with no hands; a blind Sherpa; a third Sherpa attempting to become the fastest climber — 15 hours; a Royal Marines and Royal Navy expedition, complete with Blue Peter badges, who are hoping to be the first to broadcast live from the expedition as well as from the summit; five Ulster farmers who sold their cows to fund the trip; and a gaggle of snowboarders planning to snowboard down the South Col. In addition, there will be a Highest Altitude Live Music Concert, an Everest marathon and the much-publicised wireless cybercafé at Base Camp from where one can now send the world's highest — and no doubt most expensive — e-mail.

All the expeditions have one thing in common. Since 1960 Elizabeth Hawley, a cantankerous septuagenarian American and resident of Kathmandu, has met and recorded the data of every expedition. She has met more than 1,000 climbers and has noticed some changes. "It is still very expensive to climb, of course — \$70,000 if you follow the Hillary route, \$50,000 if not — but you now have commercial expeditions, and they are both a good and bad thing. Nowadays you also get 'peak-baggers', who attempt all seven summits on seven continents and who want to be famous back home."

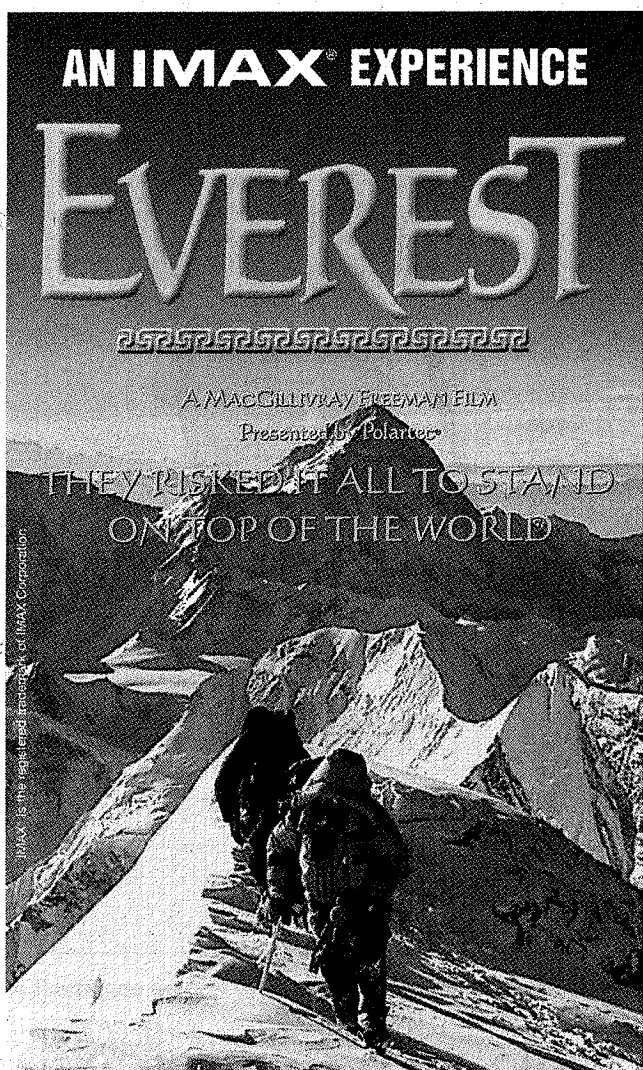
Alan Hinkes, one of Britain's top mountaineers, is on his 13th peak in his attempt to be the first Briton to climb all "eight-thousanders". He climbed Everest in 1996. "The Nepalese authorities have opened up some virgin peaks this year and even waived the fees but no one's interested. All they care about is Everest," he says. "I quite like there being lots of people this year. It is the highest point on the planet, after all."

P. T. Sherpa, the executive director of Kathmandu Environmental Education Project, disagrees. "Once upon a time, Everest was just 'there'. Now she has become like a dirty prostitute. She is sick and tired of all these record attempts, and she needs to be closed for three years to rest and recover for her value to go back up. In the three main villages of the Everest region, Kumbhu, Lukla and Namche Bazar, the population has almost the same standard of living as Singaporeans. The inflation is incredible; the problem with this wealth is that the richer people grow, the more individualistic and less community-minded they become."

Ever since the pyramids of discarded oxygen cylinders labelled the region "the world's highest rubbish tip", pollution has become a cliché. Everyone has a different opinion: some say the problem is over-exaggerated and that Sherpas have done all the clearing up; others claim that the South Col is immaculate whereas the area around Camp II is a disaster but that only climbers ever lay eyes on it. Most people agree that the foreign press has never bothered to print pictures of the enormous piles of rubbish that permanently line the streets of Kathmandu itself.



So crowded: There were record crowds at the top in 1996, a year of tragedy



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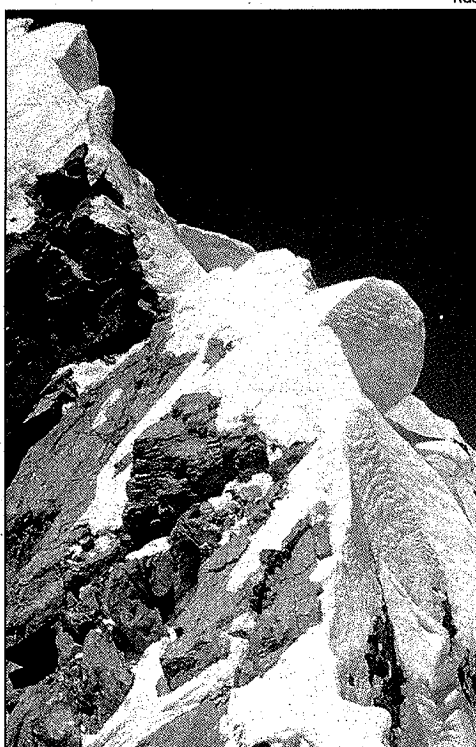
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So empty: Hillary and Tenzing's tracks

"It is not about rubbish, anyway," adds Hinkes. "It is pure aesthetics. An abandoned tent does not harm the environment, it just doesn't look nice. When I was on the summit, it was covered in metallic bits, Chinese Dalek-like tripods and Buddhist prayer flags and offerings. You could say that doesn't look very nice either. The problem with the clean-up operations is often that although they raise a lot of money, they are causing as much dirt as they're cleaning up. For example, a clean-up team of 100 still has to crap once a day, and if you multiply that by the time they are there, that's a lot of crap."

Sherpa agrees: "Human excreta is a real prob-

THE ASCENT

▲ This year a British duo are carrying an ironing board with them to the summit in an attempt to beat the world record for altitude ironing

▲ Japanese and South Korean clean-up teams find Everest rubbish so fascinating that they exhibit the collected debris upon their return home

▲ In May 2000 Bob Hoffman's American environmental expedition brought down 631 oxygen cylinders from the South Col, including their own.

The group also arranged for a further 12kg of batteries, 168kg of burnable and 35kg of non-biodegradable matter, 832kg of human waste and 750kg of waste food to be disposed of

▲ "I was in continual agony; I have never in my life been so tired as on the summit of Everest that day. I just sat and sat there, oblivious to everything" Reinhold Messner

▲ "I can't understand why men make all this fuss about Everest — it's only a mountain" Junko Tabei



Once part of an ancient secluded kingdom, the Himalayas today are very much part of the modern world and all the technology on offer

lem. At sub-zero temperatures it doesn't decompose; nor do dead bodies, which are a form of pollution themselves."

"Disneyfication", however, is about more than pollution. Just as important is the lack of commonsense and planning that have accompanied the trekking industry. The 1996 disaster in which a storm killed two of the world's greatest mountaineers, Scott Fischer and Rob Hall, along with several clients, does not seem to have changed the nature of ascents nor devalued the dream of those doing it seriously. Although no trekking companies or mountaineers wish to be drawn on the subject, some admit that this year there are

many people who have a lot of money but little sense or experience. The real danger is the trekking industry since climbers are thought to be self-sufficient, responsible and well equipped.

Those who trek to Base Camp simply to glimpse Everest are those who require hot showers, "Western" food and accommodation. Each shower costs three trees in firewood, and lodges demand vast amounts of wood and stone. The subsequent deforestation has been responsible for the landslides and soil erosion. The Government has banned glass beer bottles and is trying to ban plastic water bottles.

Although there has been an unusual demographic move in the past 30 years, from plain to hill instead of hill to plain migration, the infrastructure of the region is not manned by indigenous people, but rather by army, police and education personnel from other parts of the country, and there is no incentive to protect the area.

Base Camp, according to Hinkes, is a "medieval tented camp". "It's a great place, really social, and you can catch up with old friends and meet new ones." The fact that there are souvenir shops, bakeries and cybercafés is irrelevant; that's the case in the Annapurna trekking region as well as in the Terai jungle and Kathmandu.

NEITHER MAN NOR BEAST: THE ELUSIVE YETI

Part man, part beast, ranging from the very small to more than 7ft and covered in dirty grey, brown or red hair, the yeti — or the abominable snowman — is a chapter of the Everest story that continues to intrigue.

The word yeti comes from the Nepalese, and is an evolution of the Tibetan *Metohkang-mi*, which means "filthy snowman". The elusive creature rears his (or her) ugly head through out the annals of Tibetan history but the first western encounter was in 1834 when a British resident at the Nepalese court reported that his workers had been terrified by a ferocious creature that was neither man nor beast.



Shipton's photographs of yeti footprints appear to confirm its existence

There were more encounters in 1921, when 36 members of the British Himalayan expedition claimed to have spotted a yeti. But it wasn't until 1951, when the expedition leader Eric Shipton brought back photographs of footprints, published in *The Times* on September 6, 1951, that the world began to take the story seriously. Measuring 13 inches by eight inches, with a clearly defined heel with one big and three small toes, this was a print that had never been documented. The Natural History Museum suggested it might belong to a giant monkey; others theorised it could be a form of bear or ape. This, it seemed, might be the first concrete proof of the fabled yeti. Or just another of Shipton's practical jokes.

Since then there have been hundreds of yeti sightings but, despite a number of expeditions in search of the beast — two of which were led by members of the 1953 Everest party — when it comes to scientific proof, the abominable snowman is remarkably shy.



Dougal Haston nears the top of the Hillary Step on the day he and Doug Scott reached the summit in 1975. Haston died two years later while skiing alone in the Swiss Alps

THE RISK OF PAYING THE ULTIMATE PRICE IS JUST AS REAL TODAY

CLIVE TULLY LOOKS AT THE PERILS FACING INEXPERIENCED CLIMBERS WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Remembering the date of the historic first ascent of Everest has always been easy for Doug Scott, the first Briton to reach the summit. He was 12 when Hillary and Tenzing stood on the roof of the world — May 29 happens to be his birthday. His 62nd birthday this year will be a little different, too. Scott will be taking one of the starring roles in the Royal Gala Celebration of the Everest jubilee in the presence of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh at the Odeon in Leicester Square.

Scott, appointed a CBE in 1994, is not just an institution in British mountaineering. Having made some of the most difficult climbs over a 30-year career, he has beaten the odds. Many of his climbing partners did not, including Dougal Haston, with whom he made the first British ascent of Everest "the hard way" in September 1975. The fact that they came down from the

summit at all was a surprise. Having topped out late in the day, there was no time to get back to camp before night fell. Haston and Scott dug themselves into a snowhole at 28,700ft (8,747m), just below the South Summit. Their overnight bivouac without oxygen remains the highest on record, and the climb up Everest's formidable South West Face is still seen as an all-time feat of high-altitude mountaineering.

These days, climbers using supplementary oxygen have the benefit of lightweight Russian cylinders. They are half the weight of the British aluminium tanks used by the 1975 expedition. Weight wasn't the only problem. There was an anxious moment when Haston's system iced up and Scott used his Swiss Army knife to undo a jubilee clip and prise out the lump of ice. He considers that enough subsequent ascents have been made of Everest and the other peaks over

26,000ft without oxygen that it is no longer a consideration for serious mountaineers. "When I went to Kangchenjunga, which is only 800ft lower than Everest, it was marvellous to be up there without the weight of the bottles. I realised that the contents simply weren't worth the extra effort required to carry them," he says.

Other aids cannot be avoided. The Khumbu Icefall is a vast cascade of ice which guards the approaches to the Western Cwm and South Col. It is the most dangerous part of the South Col route, where blocks of ice the size of houses tumble down without warning. Larger crevasses are bridged by aluminium ladders, sometimes using two or three bolted end to end, with fixed rope handrails. Scott's 1975 expedition used 60 six-foot aluminium ladder sections and more than 1,000 feet of rope

to make a safe route through the icefall. In 1975 a Chinese assault on the northern side of Everest led to an aluminium ladder being placed on the Second Step at 28,250ft, taking some but not all of the problems out of a steep and crumbly 100ft rock face. While no one today would dream of making a rock pitch easier, the ladder was climbed by subsequent expeditions because it might as well be used. It survived for more than 20 years before storms swept it away.

Fixed ropes are safety lines used to connect one camp with another higher up the mountain, as aids to scaling steeper slopes when climbing, and to guide weary climbers as they descend. A single expedition aims to get its fixed ropes in at the start of the climb to enable people to move up and down the mountain more easily. Where expeditions share the same route, there may be an attempt to share the responsibilities of

ANCIENT LANDS MARKED BY STRIFE AND ISOLATION

For generations Nepal was a land as inaccessible as the highest and most famous mountain on its border. The ancient kingdom cut itself off from the outside world in an attempt to protect its culture and independence from powerful neighbours — the British, and, later, an independent India in the south and the Chinese in the north. Indeed, exploration of Everest was severely restricted by the long ban on foreign travel in Nepal, and the country began to open up only after the first successful assault on the mountain had been completed.

For centuries Nepal was ruled by various Hindu dynasties. It was not until the 18th century that powerful rulers were able to consolidate their hold, establishing their capital in Kathmandu. From 1775 until 1951 Nepalese politics was characterised by confrontations between the Royal Family, the Shah dynasty, and several noble families, the most important of which was the Rana family.

For two centuries the British conquest of India had presented Nepal with its greatest external challenge. The rulers came to various accommodations, among which was the recruitment of the Nepalese for the highly valued Gurkha units in the British Indian Army. In 1950 the sovereignty of the crown was restored and the revolutionary forces of the Nepali Congress Party predominated in the administration.

Democracy proved hard to introduce, however. A Constitution was finally introduced in 1959, and the Nepali Congress Party won an overwhelming victory and formed a government. It soon fell out with King Mahendra, who dismissed it in 1960, imprisoned most of its leaders and dissolved the Constitution in 1962. A new Constitution concentrated all real power in his hands. He died in 1972, succeeded by his Eton-educated son Birendra. The new King formed a strate-



The funeral pyre of a member of the Nepalese Royal Family who were murdered two years ago

gic alliance by marrying a prominent member of the Rana family. Throughout the 1970s he tried to speed up economic development while maintaining his father's "non-party" political system. In 1982 he proposed direct popular elections for the National Assembly and also allowed limited freedom to some outlawed parties, including the Nepali National Congress. Unrest rumbled, however, and underground communist parties began to win support.

In the 1980s tensions rose, the Government periodically cracked down hard on agitators, the press and demonstrators. In 1990 the King announced a general amnesty and published a new Constitution allowing political parties while making him a constitutional monarch. Throughout the 1990s a series of unstable governments tried to fight Maoist agitation in the countryside while speeding internal development.

The most cataclysmic event, however, was the massacre on June 1, 2001, when the drunken Crown Prince Dipendra turned a machinegun on his father, mother, brother and other senior royalty before killing himself. Only the King's brother Gyandendra, out of the country at the time, survived. He was proclaimed King.

Nepal has scarcely recovered. The Maoist rebellion gathered pace. Thousands of Nepalese have been massacred by the Government and Nepal now faces a cloudy future.

The other ancient land that guards the approaches to Everest is Tibet. Its history has also been marked by isolation and strife but since the Chinese invasion and occupation in 1950 it has ceased to be a separate country and is now a province of China.

Before the 1950s, Tibet, covering the "roof of the world" plateau north of the Himalayas, was an an-

cient, poor, isolated land dominated by a Buddhist religious hierarchy that owed its loyalty and legitimacy to the Dalai Lama. The Chinese attempted to modernise the country and build new infrastructure, but their presence was deeply resented and in 1959 a general uprising broke out in Lhasa. The Dalai Lama fled to India. The revolt was forcibly suppressed, and since then China has attempted to remodel Tibetan society, undermine the power of the monasteries and flood the province with immigrants.

Tibet, like all China, was shaken by the Cultural Revolution and periodic repression. But in recent years Beijing has attempted a more relaxed policy and tried to win local loyalties. Special restrictions on travel still apply, however, and China is extremely sensitive to outside criticism, foreign acknowledgement of the Dalai Lama or questioning of its policies in Tibet.

Michael Binyon

fixing ropes or ladders, although it is easy to wait for another team to do all the work. It is more likely that if serviceable ropes are in place, an expedition will improve security by using its ropes to fill in gaps. But depending on someone else's fixed rope could endanger your life.

Even on guided trips, where there is extensive use of fixed lines, it is possible for people to get disorientated and lost if there is not a continuous rope guiding them all the way back to their camp. "Basically, if they haven't served an apprenticeship on the mountains, when things go wrong, they're far more exposed to paying the ultimate price," says Scott.

As he sees it, people trying to climb Everest as tourists pay their money and absolve themselves of personal responsibility, expecting others to bail them out when things go wrong. "But

at extreme altitude it's simply not possible," says Scott. "Before they pay up, clients should be made aware that there's very little that can be done for anyone if they hit problems high up in the death zone. Basically, that's summit day — anywhere above the South Col at 26,000ft."

He also considers the gimmicky notion of claiming records to be dangerous and pointless, along with more spurious claims for climbing solo, or for speed ascents. "Many have claimed solo ascents, but, in reality, other expeditions have been around them, so they haven't had to break trail for themselves, and they were using their fixed ropes. It's hardly the same as when Messner first soloed Everest in 1980, with only his pregnant girlfriend waiting below."

Looking back, Scott regards his ascent of Everest as a milestone. It proved that if you have enough experienced climbers, which they

did (six had been to the South West Face before), you are well led (an excellent job by Chris Bonington), you have reasonable weather, and you have enough backup, you can do anything. But the climb also marked a turning point in the approach to big Himalayan peaks.

"Climbing is about facing up to uncertainty," he says. "Repeating someone else's ascent would be a waste of time. When we went back to the Himalayas to do other mountains, we went back to climb in a more lightweight, Alpine style. That was the case on Kangchenjunga — just four people, lightweight, without oxygen. And that for me was far more satisfying than climbing Everest with the full Monty."

Doug Scott is the founder and operations director of Community Action Nepal, a charitable trust; www.canepal.org.uk.

THE ASCENT

▲ 1960: Chinese climbers claim that they have made the first summit from the North

▲ 1975: Junko Tabei, from Japan, became the first woman to climb Everest, via the South East Ridge

▲ 1978: The first ascent without oxygen was made by the Italian Reinhold Messner and Austrian Peter Habeler, via the South East Ridge

▲ 1980: Reinhold Messner went on to make the first solo ascent, this time via the North Col to North Face

▲ 1990: The Australian Tim Macartney-Snape became the first man to make the journey from sea level to summit, without oxygen. Starting at the Bay of Bengal he reached the summit via a two-mile swim across the Ganges and the South Col

▲ 1990: Yugoslavs Andrej and Marija Stremfelj and the American Cathy Gibson and Russian Aleksei Krasnokutsky became the first married couples to reach the summit on October 7

▲ 1991: Leo Dickinson and Chris Dewhurst became the first men to fly in a hot-air balloon over Everest on October 21. The flight, which took off at 6.40am landed less than an hour later at 7.30am

▲ 1998: Tom Whittaker, from Wales, who has an artificial leg, became the first single amputee to reach the summit

▲ 1999: Babu Chiri Sherpa made the highest possible bivouac by spending a total of 21 hours atop the summit without oxygen

▲ 2000: On May 24, Appa Sherpa became the first person to have climbed Everest 11 times. Each climb was made without oxygen

▲ 2001: Babu Chiri Sherpa made the ascent in 16 hours and 56 minutes, the fastest ever

▲ 2001: A record 89 people made the summit in one day. An overall total of 182 reaching the summit also made it a record year

▲ 2001: Marco Siffredi, a 22-year-old Frenchman, became the first snowboarder to complete the descent on May 23



WIN A 14-DAY TREK TO BASE CAMP

Mountain Travel is offering *Times* readers the chance to win a 14-day trek from Lukla to Everest Base Camp in Nepal. The prize, which is for two people, includes return flights from London to Kathmandu, on Qatar Airways; it also includes three nights' accommodation in the five-star Dwarika's Village hotel in Kathmandu; return flights from Kathmandu to Lukla with Yeti Airlines, the services of a porter as well as an English-speaking guide on the trek. The winners will be accommodated in teahouses along the way, food (excluding drinks and



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will spend a day at Base Camp before returning to Kathmandu. The prize can be taken at any time of year until May 31, 2004, inclusive. For your chance to win, tell us in 15 words or less why you would like this prize.



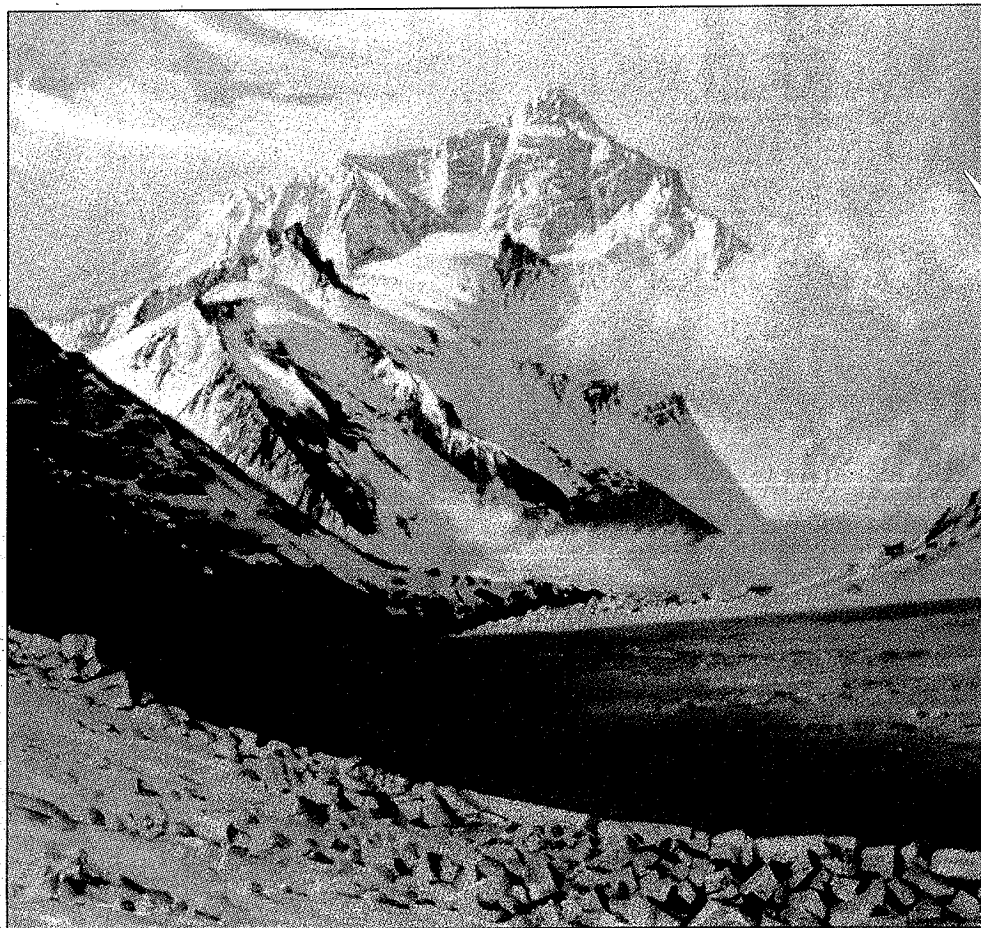
snacks), the hire of a sleeping-bag with liner, trek staff insurance, a trek permit fee, government tax and Mountain Travel's back-up support in case of emergency. The total value of the prize is about £4,000 and cannot be exchanged for cash. The winners

RULES

Terms and conditions

1. No purchase necessary. 2. Closing date is May 29, 2003. The winner will be the entrant deemed by the judges to have answered in the most interesting way. 3. The winners will be notified. 4. Winners will receive the prize as described above. The prize is non-negotiable, non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative. 5. The promoter reserves the right to substitute prizes of equal value in the event that circumstances beyond its control make this unavoidable. 6. The judges' decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. 7. Entry is conditional on acceptance of these terms and conditions. 8. This competition is not open to employees of News International, their families, agents or any other person connected with the competition's administration. 9. The submitted entry must be no longer than 15 words and must be accompanied by the entrant's name, address and daytime telephone number. 10. The name and county of winners can be obtained by sending an SAE to: The Times Competition Department, 1 Pennington Street, London E9 8JL. 11. Winners may be required to participate in publicity. 12. Only one entry per person. Entrants must be aged 18 or over. 13. The promoter accepts no responsibility for entries that are lost or delayed in transit. Please keep a copy of your entry as they cannot be returned. The prize may be taken any time until May 31, 2004, inclusive. All transfers, taxes, visas, surcharges and other expenses not specified are the sole responsibility of the winner. The winner is responsible for providing full passport and any other relevant travel documents. The airline's usual terms and conditions of carriage apply.

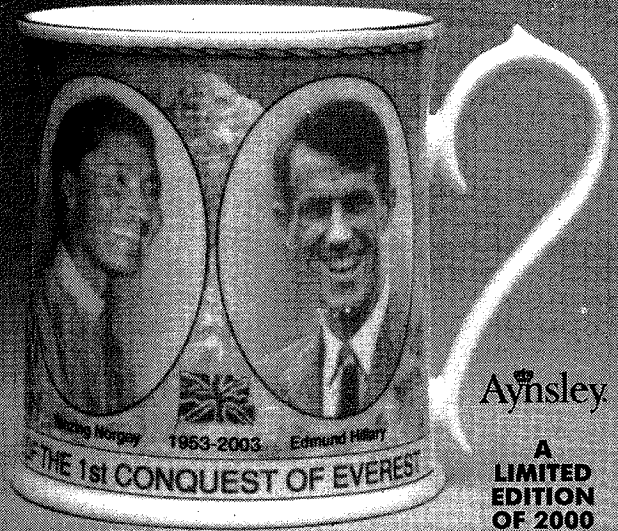
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JOIN IN THE CELEBRATIONS

TIMES readers can win two tickets to the Royal Gala evening on May 29 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ascent of Everest.

The evening (5.40-7.15pm, tickets: £50 each) will be held with the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and other members of the Royal Family as guests. During the celebration, hosted by Sir David Attenborough, 1953 veterans will give first-hand accounts of their experiences on Everest, with slides and excerpts from the 1953 film *The Conquest of Everest*. Sir Chris Bonington (leader of 1975 South West Face expedition) and Stephen Venables (the first Briton to reach the summit without supplementary oxygen) are also speaking, along with Jan Morris, *The Times* reporter who met up with the 1953 expedition.

There will also be a matinee (between 1pm and 2.30pm, tickets: £25 each) with George Band, Sir Chris Bonington, Doug Scott (the first Briton to reach the summit of Everest) and Stephen Venables.

Nawang Gombu, a Sherpa from the 1953 expedition and Tenzing Norgay's relatives will

LIMITED EDITIONS

From photograph to limited edition: *The North Face of Everest* by Keith Shackleton. This spectacular work is based on photographs taken by the official 1922 and 1924 Everest expedition photographer, Captain J. B. Noel (1890-1989). The resulting print is a faithful reproduction of the original, which was later destroyed by fire. Each print has been signed by John Noel; Noel Odell (1880-1987), the last person to see Mallory and Irvine alive on the fateful 1924 expedition; Lord Hunt of Llanfair Waterdine (1910-1998), leader of the 1953 expedition; Sir Chris Bonington, who led the South West expedition in 1975; and Doug Scott, the first Briton to get to the top. Prints are

£300 each, proceeds to the Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) and the Mount Everest Foundation; e-mail: everest@rgs.org.

EXHIBITIONS

The society, in conjunction with the British Council, has produced an exhibition, *Imaging Everest*, which is being held at the British Council in Kathmandu. There is also an online *Imaging Everest* exhibition which can be accessed through the society's website, www.rgs.org/imagingeverest.

Because It's There, an exhibition of Everest photographs, is on at the Atlas Gallery, London. Limited edition prints are for sale, www.atlasgallery.com.

POSTERS AND POSTCARDS

If you would like a collection of posters and postcards capturing the era, they are available on special offer to *Times* readers. The two A2 posters — Camp at 20,000ft and Tenzing on the Summit — have been reduced from £10 to £8 each. A further set of 16 postcards from the 1953 expedition, Nepalese and Tibetan culture, and pictures of the mountain itself are available for £5. To order telephone 020-7591 3072; e-mail: everest@rgs.org.

MEMBERSHIP

The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) welcomes those with an enthusiasm for geography, travel, and exploration to join as fellows or members.

There are more than 100 lectures every year, as well as scholarly conferences and seminars. Access is also available to the society's resources of more than two million books, maps, photographs and manuscripts, and advice is available to those planning expeditions. Grants can be obtained for research, education or expedition projects. For details telephone: 020-7591 3000; e-mail: membership@rgs.org; www.rgs.org.

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Explorers: A History in Photographs. This work celebrates the major explorers and expeditions since the late 19th century. Save 20 per cent with our offer price of £14.39 (rrp £17.99) plus £1.95 p&p. To order call 0870-1919937, quoting FH416 or visit www.timesonline.co.uk/booksdirect

also be attending. To book: call the Everest Secretariat on 020-7591 3034, or e-mail everest@rgs.org, or send a cheque made payable to MEF Endeavours Ltd, and a SAE to MEF Everest Events, c/o RGS-IBG, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR.

These events are in support of the Mount Everest Foundation, the UK charity for mountain exploration and science, a joint venture of the Royal Geographical Society-IBG and the Alpine Club, London.

To win tickets to the gala evening send your name and address to The Times/Everest competition c/o RGS-IBG, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR, before May 19, 2003. The first card chosen will be the winner.

George Band has written *50 Years on Top of the World*, published by HarperCollins, priced £20. Proceeds go to the MEF.

Stephen Venables has written *To the Top*, published by Walker Books, priced £7.99.

Websites: www.mef.org.uk; www.rgs.org/everest

WHY CLIMBERS CAN'T KEEP AWAY DESPITE THE TERROR OF THE DEATH ZONE

REBECCA STEPHENS EXPLAINS WHY SHE WAS PREPARED TO LOSE TWO FINGERS — MAYBE MORE — FOR THE SAKE OF SUCCESS

For all the fun and gimmicks that surround Everest now, climbing her remains a dangerous occupation. We should not be surprised by deaths on Everest. For every six or seven climbers who have stood on the summit, one has died. That is 175 people over the years. Yet one such incident — that involving a British photographer, Bruce Herrod — touched me in a way that felt uncomfortably close to home.

Bruce was climbing in the spring of 1996. I was in London and, late one Saturday morning, picked up the telephone and called his girlfriend. "Bruce has just summited," she said.

"Fantastic news," I responded. Until I heard what she had to say next. Bruce had called her in the last few minutes from the top of Everest via satellite. This meant he was actually on or close to the summit at the exact moment we were speaking, alone, he had said — and in the Himalayas it was almost dusk. If he was forced to bivouac at 28,000ft — maybe 29,000ft — his chance of survival was slim.

In the next few days the news seeped back to me: Bruce was assumed dead. I cannot say that I knew Bruce's girlfriend well — he only a little better — but, perhaps because of that phone call made at such a poignant moment, my sympathy was almost entirely with her, and my feelings for Bruce, frankly, were of anger. How dare he? What of his promise to turn back if his progress was slow? What the hell was he doing on the summit so late in the day?

I raged for days, until a friend, another Everest, cut me short, telling me: "But Rebecca, you would have done exactly the same."

That is the problem with mountaineering. You are totally immersed in it one moment and then removed the next. When you are in the big mountains death surrounds you and, brutal though it sounds, is almost the norm. When I made my climb in 1993 five people died while we were on Everest, another 13 on McKinley. Then you step back into daily life and the whole thing seems a nonsense.

Was my friend right? Would I have pushed as hard to make it to the summit?

I don't doubt that we are prepared to take greater risks the closer we get to our goal. One morning at Base Camp, for instance, I woke up to discover an ugly blistering of the little finger on my left hand. Frostbite. I found myself asking, would I be prepared to lose a finger for Everest? Or two? And the answer, casting an eye up at the mountain — in a different world, there in the Himalayas — was yes. While here in London I think that is mad.

On the South Col, too, my judgment was coloured by the proximity of the summit — just half a day's climb away, tantalisingly close. The weather was not great but, with the Sherpas Ang Passang and Kami Tsering, I went for it anyway and was lucky that a forecast storm held off just long enough for us to return safely.

It might have been very different. The weather might have deteriorated. The Britons Doug Scott, Dougal Haston and Stephen Venables — all strong, experienced — bivouacked within a stone's throw of the summit and survived, but many more have died in similar circumstances.

In time, my opinion of Bruce's actions softened. Risk and its relationship with danger and fear is perplexing, particularly when the aim is so unnecessary. If mountains are so dangerous, why go there? Because — talking only for myself — it is invigorating, because the



A climber whose hands have been affected by frostbite, which starts off with blistering

landscape inspires, because there is nowhere I feel more alive. You know if you mess up you are in trouble. It sharpens the senses — an antidote to our suburban lives.

I have been very, very frightened in the mountains. I keep going back for more only because I forget the bad bits, and the memories of the good bits are so intense. On Everest there were times when my heart was in my mouth. I didn't much like teetering over gaping crevasses on wobbly aluminium ladders in the Khumbu Icefall, or sitting out a storm on the South Col with the wind, screaming, buckling the poles of our tent. It was the violence of it all that got to me. But, oddly, on the summit day — the most dangerous leg of the journey — I was not scared. I found myself calculating risks but I never truly believed that I would be one of the unlucky ones. I have been petrified climbing a rock face in Gloucestershire



Stephens: judgment affected by summit's proximity

— palms dripping, legs juddering out of control, despite the security of a bombproof rope and anchor. Rationally, I know it is safe but, emotionally, hanging a couple of hundred feet above a void, I need some convincing.

As I set off from Everest's South Col on summit day, the rational part of my brain understood that the danger of extreme altitude lay ahead, but my instinctive brain was not alerted because, on the normal route, the upper reaches of Everest look so innocuous, like a Snowdonian hill. On our descent from the summit, still a long way from our high camp, there was half an hour or so when cloud engulfed us, visibility deteriorated virtually to zero, and, on a narrow ridge, we dared not move. For the first time I believed that our luck might finally have run out. Yet, with nowhere to fly, and no reason to fight, I felt no fear — only an overwhelming acceptance and calm.

THE ASCENT

▲ Approximately 175 people have died in the attempt to reach the summit

▲ The most likely cause of death on Everest is avalanches (49 deaths), followed by falls (40 deaths). Other recorded killers include frostbite, brain and internal haemorrhages, pneumonia, exhaustion, pulmonary oedema, falling rocks, ice and serac, collapsed snow bridge, cold, exposure, drowning, cerebral thrombosis, cerebral oedema and altitude sickness

▲ Forty-one climbers who reached the summit died on their descent, including the Russian Sergei Arsentiev and his American wife Francys, who made the 999th and 1,000th ascents together in 1998. Francys collapsed and Sergei fell while trying to fetch help

▲ Above 26,000ft is known as the Death Zone — with a third of the oxygen available at sea level, climbers will only survive a limited time without extra oxygen

▲ 2000 was the safest year to date on Everest, when 145 climbers reached the summit and only two people died. The worst year on record was 1996, when 98 people made the summit but 16 people died

▲ Unsurprisingly, Sherpas have suffered the most casualties on the mountain with an estimated 55 deaths. The Japanese have had 13 casualties, and the British 12

▲ There has been a death on Everest every year since 1969, with the exception of 1977

▲ The most dangerous part of the mountain is Khumbu Icefall. Eighteen people died there up to 1986; however, there has only been one death since

▲ Altitude makes the removal of dead bodies an almost impossible task. Some 165 corpses remain on the mountain

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▲ "Getting to the summit is optional, getting down is mandatory"
Ed Viesturs

Gemma Summers
Conqueror



When I was 4 it was Brussels sprouts

At 14, algebra

At 21, the thought of never getting married

At 28, the thought of getting married

At 35, becoming a mum

Now I'm conquering my fear of letting go

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