Definition: Everest, Mount from Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary

Highest mountain in the world, in the Himalayas bet. Nepal and Tibet, China, at 27°59′N, 86°56′E; 29,035 ft. (8850 m.); scene of numerous climbing attempts 1921–52; summit first photographed from airplane 1933 and first reached May 29, 1953 by New Zealander Edmund Hillary, Nepalese Tenzing Norgay, and other members of a British-led expedition; summit first reached via east face, 1983.

Summary Article: Everest, Mount from Encyclopedia of Environment and Society

MOUNT EVEREST IS the highest mountain in the world, at approximately 8,848 meters (29,028 feet) above sea level. The mountain is known in the Sherpa language as Chomolungma or Qomolangma, in Nepalese as Sagarmatha, and in Chinese Zhumulangma Feng or Shengmu Feng. The English name was proposed in 1956 by Andrew Waugh, the British surveyor-general of India, after his predecessor George Everest, and was officially adopted a few years later. Before that it was known by the British administration as Peak XV. The summit ridge is the border between Nepal and China. The first attempt to reach the summit of Mount Everest was by a British team in 1921. The first to reach the summit were the Nepalese Sherpa Tenzing Norgay and the New Zealander Edmund Hillary on May 29, 1953. Over 2,000 people have since reached the summit of Mount Everest, and close to 200 have died in the attempt.

Members of the Sherpa ethnic group (from shar, which means “east,” and pa, which means “people”) inhabit the Nepalese side of the Mount Everest region, locally known as Khumbu. Until the mid–1960s, most Khumbu Sherpa households were involved in trade, some in urban centers as distant as Tibet and northern India. However, that trade was undermined by Chinese policies in Tibet during the 1960s, and later gradually supplanted by cash-based formal markets. Tourism has since become the main component of the regional economy, and an important contributor to national gross domestic product. Climbing permits cost between $10,000 and $25,000 per person, and salaries for the crew go from $3,500 for a cook to $25,000 or more for a lead guide for each trek. In the Khumbu region, three-quarters of Sherpa households have at least one individual who is involved in trekking. Tourism has also had an economic impact beyond the region, since many of the construction workers, household servants, and agricultural workers are migrants. However, money has also brought with it more wealth differentiation, since not all households are able to take advantage of the influx of tourism, and trekking has brought with it a general increase in the price of foodstuff and energy.

The main environmental problems in the region are deforestation and the increase of litter by trekkers and Sherpa. In the late 1960s, the local forest management policies were abandoned because of the nationalization of the local forests and the implementation of less strict national policies toward forest use. After the creation of the Sagarmatha National Park in 1976, which contains the southern half of Mount Everest, deforestation slowed. Sherpas are now forced to obtain all timber to build their houses, except the beams, from outside the Sagarmatha National Park.

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Also, since 1979, trekking groups are no longer allowed to use wood for cooking and bonfires; they must use kerosene stoves. However, tourist lodges and the Sherpa still use fuel wood. To reduce litter, trekkers are forced to bring gas canisters and to pay a tax, which is only returned if they return the empty canisters. Litter is the other major environmental problem in the Khumbu area. Since 1979, the Sagarmatha National Park regulations require trekkers to haul out their litter, but few follow these regulations, which has resulted in the continual accumulation of rubbish along the trails to Mount Everest. From the late 1990s, the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee has addressed the problem by establishing long-term disposal facilities along the major trekking routes.

**Sir Edmund Hillary**

Edmund Hillary was born at Tuakau, south of Auckland, on the north island of New Zealand. He became interested in mountain climbing while on a school mountaineering trip when he was sixteen. During World War II, Hillary served as a navigator in the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and in 1951 was a member of the British Reconnaissance Expedition to Everest led by Eric Shipton. This led to Hillary being chosen for the 1953 Everest Expedition. The news of the climbing of Everest was announced in London on the same day as the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and he was subsequently knighted in Britain and given many awards. He also appears on the New Zealand $5 note, the only living New Zealander to appear on any banknote.

After climbing Everest, Hillary continued with mountaineering, returning to the Himalayas in 1956, in 1960–61, and again in 1963–65. In 1958 he also was a member of the New Zealand section of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, reaching the South Pole on January 4, 1958. In 1985 he joined astronaut Neil Armstrong landing a small ski plane on the North Pole, making Hillary the first person to stand at both poles and also climb Everest.

Hillary founded the Himalayan Trust to help the Sherpas, and has been involved in advancing education in Nepal. In 2003 he was made an honorary citizen of the country, the first foreign national to receive this honor.

In 1975 Hillary had taken part in the general election and this was seen as preventing his nomination as Governor-General. However, exactly ten years later he was appointed as New Zealand High Commissioner (Ambassador) to India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, resident in New Delhi. After four and a half years in India, he retired. Edmund Hillary has written extensively about aspects of his life. His son, Peter Hillary, is now a prominent mountaineer in his own right.

**SEE ALSO:**

Deforestation; Ecotourism; Mountains; Nepal.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


