

Sir Edmund Hillary: Mountain Climber and Explorer

Introduction

Edmund Hillary's most famous achievement was to be the joint first person to climb Mount Everest in Nepal. This article will tell you all you need to know about the man and his conquest of the mountain!

Childhood

Hillary was born in 1919 in Auckland, New Zealand. His father was in the army and had fought in World War I. Hillary was small as a child and very shy and in school spent a lot of time daydreaming of adventure. At aged 16, on a school climbing trip, he discovered that he was very strong and had a natural climbing ability. He completed his first major climb in 1939, when he climbed Mount Ollivier in the Alps.



Edmund Hillary

The Everest Expedition

In 1951, Hillary joined a British team to investigate whether it would be possible to reach the top of Mount Everest. In 1953, the team received permission from the Nepalese Government to climb the mountain. They were only allowed to make one attempt a year so it was important to get the attempt right. The leader of the expedition, John Hunt, asked Hillary to join the climb.

More than 400 people were involved in the attempt. They climbed the mountain in stages, moving to a higher camp every few weeks and then getting acclimatised to the thin air at high altitude. At each stage fewer and fewer people would continue to climb.



Mount Everest, Nepal

Once they got to the final camp, there were two teams chosen to climb the last stage to the summit. One team was Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, a Nepalese mountaineer. The other team was Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans. Bourdillon and Evans tried first, but they failed to make it to the top. They got within 300 feet of the summit, but had to turn back.

Finally, on May 28, 1953, Hillary and Norgay got their chance to try for the summit. They ran into some difficulties, including a 40 foot rock wall that is today called 'Hillary's Step', but they made it to the top. They were the first to climb to the top of the world! Because the air was so thin, they only stayed at the top for a few minutes before returning to tell the world of their achievement.

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Life after Everest

Edmund Hillary did not stop exploring after his successful ascent of Everest. In his own words: "While standing on top of Everest, I looked across the valley, towards the other great peak, Makalu, and mentally worked out a route about how it could be climbed... it showed me that, even though I was standing on top of the world, it wasn't the end of everything for me, by any means. I was still looking beyond to other interesting challenges."

He continued to climb other mountains and to be a world explorer. He climbed many other peaks in the Himalayas and in 1958, he led an expedition to the South Pole. His team was the first ever group to reach the South Pole using motorised vehicles!



Tractors used by Hillary to reach the South Pole

Fun Facts

- Edmund Hillary was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II after reaching the top of Everest. This is why you often see him referred to as "Sir".
- Mount Everest is 29,032 feet high. The mountain was in the news in December 2020 as it was agreed that the mountain was a little taller than was thought!
- The mountain is on the border of Nepal and China. The Chinese government felt that the top of the mountain was where the rock stopped, but the Nepalese government felt it was the snow on top that is the top of the mountain!
- It is named after a British general who surveyed India named Sir George Everest. The local name for the mountain is Chomolungma, which means 'Mother Goddess of the Sky' in Nepalese.

Conclusion

Edmund Hillary became famous as a result of the achievement. News of the achievement reached Britain on the day of the Queen's coronation in 1953! As well as continuing to explore and climb, Hillary dedicated a lot of his later life to helping the Nepalese people, working with teams to organise the building of schools and hospitals in the Himalayas area – the very place that made him famous.

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Comprehension

1. When was Edmund Hillary born?
2. Where was he born?
3. What was Hillary's father's job?
4. At what age did he realise he was interested in climbing?
5. What was the first mountain that he climbed?
6. In which country is Mount Everest?
7. How high is Mount Everest?
8. What is the Nepalese name for Mount Everest?
9. What does the name mean?
10. Who was the leader of the expedition to Mount Everest?
11. Who tried to reach the summit before Edmund Hillary?
12. How close did these two get to the summit?
13. Name the man who went with Edmund Hillary to the top of the mountain.
14. What is "Hillary's Step"?
15. On which date did they make the climb?
16. Why did they only stay a few minutes at the top of the mountain?
17. How many other people were involved in the attempt?
18. Which mountain did Hillary decide to climb next?
19. In which year did Hillary travel to the South Pole?
20. What was special about this adventure?

Further thinking

21. Do you agree with the Nepalese or Chinese way of measuring the mountain height (detailed in the Fun Facts)? Why?
22. Why do people want to climb mountains?
23. Do you think that Hillary's achievement is useful for mankind? Why?
24. The mountain already had a Nepalese name (Chomolungma) before it was named by the British. Do you think it is okay that the British renamed the mountain?
25. Would you climb Mount Everest if you had the opportunity? Why?
26. What five questions would you like to ask Sir Edmund Hillary?
27. Thousands of people have attempted to climb Mount Everest since Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were successful. What problems could this cause?

Sir Edmund Hillary: Mountain Climber and Explorer

Comprehension

1. When was Edmund Hillary born? 1919
2. Where was he born? Auckland, New Zealand
3. What was Hillary's father's job? A soldier
4. At what age did he realise he was interested in climbing? 16
5. What was the first mountain that he climbed? Mount Ollivier
6. In which country is Mount Everest? Nepal
7. How high is Mount Everest? 29029 feet
8. What is the Nepalese name for Mount Everest? Chomolungma
9. What does the name mean? Other Goddess of the sky
10. Who was the leader of the expedition to Mount Everest? John Hunt
11. Who tried to reach the summit before Edmund Hillary? Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans
12. How close did these two get to the summit? 300 feet
13. Name the man who went with Edmund Hillary to the top of the mountain. Tenzing Norgay
14. What is "Hillary's Step"? A 40 foot rock wall
15. On which date did they make the climb? 28 May 1953
16. Why did they only stay a few minutes at the top of the mountain? The air was thin
17. How many other people were involved in the attempt? 400
18. Which mountain did Hillary decide to climb next? Makalu
19. In which year did Hillary travel to the South Pole? 1958
20. What was special about this adventure? It was the first visit to the South Pole with motorised vehicles