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EVEREST



DAS ABENTEUER VON
EDMUND HILLARY
UND TENZING NORGAY

VORWORT VON RANULPH FIENNES

MIDAS

< INTRODUCTION >

At 11.30 in the morning on 29th May 1953, a beekeeper and a former yak herder took a final few weary steps on to a snowy dome.

Exhausted and breathing hard, they could go no further – there was nowhere further to go. It was then that Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay realised they had done it. They had climbed on to the roof of the world. Satisfied – and perhaps a little surprised – the pair gazed down on the earth below from a height at which no person had stood before.

The sun shone in the piercing blue sky and a gentle breeze was blowing. The gods of Mount Everest were smiling on them. Their incredible success had come after months of painstaking preparation, years of training and a lifetime of ambition and dreaming. Along the way they had battled perilous physical conditions, illness and intense fear.

This book tells their story – the story of two unlikely heroes from humble backgrounds whose grit, determination and modesty captured the hearts and imaginations of the world: two ordinary men who battled against the odds to be the first to achieve an extraordinary feat. But as brave, resourceful and determined as they were, success, when it came, did not belong just to Hillary and Tenzing.

This was a hard-won victory built on the experience, knowledge and efforts of hundreds of people from around the world.

< This is their story too. >



Hillary and Tenzing prepare for their greatest challenge, conquering Everest.

WHY CLIMB EVEREST?

'Because it's there' – George Mallory, 1923

What made Hillary and Tenzing's achievement all the more remarkable was that they had triumphed where so many others had failed before. Climbers had been trying to reach the top of Everest for more than 30 years.

A huge amount of time, effort and money – not to mention national pride – had been invested in these attempts. Despite this, each one had ended in disappointment and some, even, in death.

As the highest mountain in the world, Everest would remain the ultimate unconquered climbing challenge, until 1953, when Hillary and Tenzing became the first humans to set foot on its summit.



Part of the Himalaya mountain range, Everest sits on the border of Tibet and Nepal.

Everest was first measured by the British Survey of India in the 1850s and identified as the tallest mountain in the world – standing at 29,002 feet (8,840 metres) above sea level.

More recent measurements put Everest at 29,029 feet (8,848 metres) high. However, debates about its exact height still rumble on.



This Himalayan jumping spider is one of the few animals that can survive high up on Everest, where it lives at 22,000 feet (6,700 metres). Its name *Eurphyra omnisuperstes* means 'standing above everything'.

Colonel Sir George Everest



After they had made their initial measurement, the British named the mountain in honour of a former British Surveyor General of India – a Welshman called Colonel Sir George Everest.

Locally, however, it was known by several different names. To the Nepalese, it was *Sagarmatha*, meaning 'Goddess of the Sky'.

In Tibet, it was known as *Chomolungma*, which to some means 'Goddess Mother of the World.' To Tenzing, however, it meant 'The Mountain So High No Bird Can Fly Over It'.

Whatever people choose to call it, one thing is certain: Everest is an extreme place. At the highest points on the mountain, conditions are so harsh that no animal or plant can survive there.

Temperatures can plunge to -60°C and powerful winds of more than 100mph buffet the summit for most of the year. Meanwhile, violent storms can dump up to three metres of snow at a time.

Bar-headed geese



For a few weeks each year the weather conditions improve just enough for climbers to make an attempt on the summit. Yet, even during these 'weather windows', conditions remain hazardous.

The path to the top is strewn with death traps including avalanches, tumbling towers of ice, rockfalls and seemingly bottomless crevasses.

Back in the early 20th century, however, the major difficulty of climbing Everest lay in gaining access to it.

His Holiness the 15th Dalai Lama of Tibet



At first, neither the Tibetans nor the Nepalese would allow foreigners to travel to the area. It was only in 1921 that His Holiness the 15th Dalai Lama granted a British team of climbers and surveyors permission to visit it. Their aim was to discover if a route to the summit existed.

The race to climb Everest had begun . . .



What we can say is that Everest is roughly equal in height to 20 Empire State Buildings piled on top of one another. Or, to put it another way, just lower than the cruising height of a jumbo jet.

MARCHING TO EVEREST

The team and their army of 350 porters set off on their march to Everest.

Over the next 17 days, they carried 7.5 tonnes of baggage (equivalent to five cars) over 150 miles across ridges, valleys and foaming rivers to the foot of Everest.

During their journey, the climbers became fitter and their bodies gradually adapted to the higher altitude. This vital process is known as acclimatisation.

On 26th March the expedition arrived at Tengboche Monastery – perched at 12,000 feet (3,658 metres) on a high ridge. Here, they began a training period during which they got to know their surroundings, their equipment and, most importantly, each other.

Training complete, they moved off to start their mission – but not before receiving a blessing from the head lama for the success of their expedition. The team established their base camp at the foot of the Khumbu Icefall. It was from here that they would launch their attack.

The team carry their heavy equipment to Tengboche Monastery.

