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Mount Everest

from *The New Book of Knowledge*©

Source: Scholastic News Online

The summit (top) of Mount Everest is the highest spot in all the world. On a sunny day it can be seen from some points at least 160 kilometers (100 miles) away. When viewed from afar, the summit looks calm and beautiful. But it is a desolate wasteland of wind-blasted snow and rock. If the wind is blowing (and it usually is), a great plume of snow and ice particles stretches out downwind for a vast distance. For the top of Everest is so high that it reaches into the jet stream, where winds over 300 kilometers (200 miles) an hour are not uncommon.

The official height for Mount Everest is 8,850 meters (29,035 feet). The huge peak is located on the border between Nepal and Tibet, just north of India. It is part of the giant Himalayan mountain range. Seen from the Ganges Plain of India, Mount Everest lies far back among the other mountain peaks. Many of these peaks look higher because they are closer in view. But seen from Tibet, Mount Everest towers above all the others.

Mount Everest was first calculated to be the highest mountain in the world in 1852 during the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India. It was named for George Everest, the former surveyor-general of the survey. But it has another name, given long before by the people of Tibet. To these reverent and poetic people it was Chomolungma—Goddess Mother of the World.

In the last 100 years, mountains have increasingly challenged our spirit of adventure. The higher or more difficult the mountain peak, the greater is the desire to climb it. Everest, being the highest of all, naturally stood as one of the supreme challenges for all mountaineers. But it was not until December 9, 1920, that permission was granted to approach the mountain on its north side, through Tibet.

Then nine attempts were made on that side without success. Climbers did reach over 8,500 meters (28,000 feet) without oxygen, and they learned that they could sleep, live, and work at almost that height, at least for a while. They also learned from hard experience quite a bit about the best food, fuel, clothing, and equipment to take. At these altitudes everything must be as light as possible, as efficient as possible, and as reliable as possible. People are living in a semi-vacuum with only a fraction of the oxygen they need. So they have no extra energy to deal with bulky or inefficient equipment.

Everest continued to resist all attacks. Climbers began to despair and to say that the task was beyond human endurance. But others refused to give up. Tibet was taken over by the Chinese in 1950, and the route on the North Face was closed. But a new route was pioneered on the southwest side through Nepal. The Swiss almost succeeded in 1952. Then in 1953 the British made an all-out attack. Under the leadership of Colonel John Hunt, ten climbers were selected. They and the tons of necessary equipment were transported to the mountain. Every detail was carefully planned. As far as possible, every problem was foreseen, for the British realized that this might be their last chance to be first to the top. They hoped to accomplish it in time for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Supplies and equipment were relayed up the mountain. Camps were set up about every 300 to 600 meters (1,000 to 2,000 feet). Then finally, on the morning of May 29, 1953, two climbers set out for the summit from their high camp at 8,500 meters (27,900 feet). They were Edmund P. Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. The latter was a Sherpa—a member of one of the hill tribes that live in the high valleys around Everest. On that historic morning the two climbers accomplished one of the great mountaineering feats of all time. They had climbed Everest.

As the news was flashed throughout the world, it was deemed appropriate that one



person from the East and one from the West should have shared in the victory. The victory was also shared with all other members of their party and with all those who had gone before on Everest, without whom the final success could never have been achieved.

But Everest remained a gripping challenge. In 1956, following the same route as the British, the Swiss put four men on top. In 1960 and 1962 India tried but failed. On the old northern route in Tibet, the Chinese tried in 1960 and failed. In 1962 a four-member American expedition under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson Sayre also tried the north route. They used no oxygen, no porters, and no fixed camps, carrying everything they needed for 42 days on their own backs. The expedition carried to about 7,750 meters (25,400 feet) and then was forced to give up.

In 1963 another American expedition, under Norman G. Dyhrenfurth, succeeded in putting six men on the summit. Four climbed by the now traditional Nepalese route up the southwest ridge of the mountain. But William F. Unsoeld and Thomas F. Hornbein climbed an entirely new route, which they had pioneered, on the west ridge of Everest. They made the first traverse of a major Himalayan peak when they descended by the route that the others had come up the same day. In 1965 a second Indian expedition, led by Lieutenant Commander M. S. Kohli, succeeded in reaching the summit. Their Sherpa guide, Nawang Gombu, had been on the 1963 Dyhrenfurth expedition. He thus became the first person to climb Mount Everest twice.

In 1975, Junko Tabei of Japan, part of an all-woman team, became the first woman to climb to the summit of Mount Everest. In 1988, two teams of climbers reached the top from opposite sides of the mountain, the first time two groups climbed at the same time.

The 50th anniversary of the first ascent was celebrated in 2003. Edmund Hillary was made an honorary citizen of Nepal, and special medals were awarded to others who had also reached the top of Mount Everest.

The record of ascents by one person is currently held by Apa Sherpa of Nepal. As of 2009, he had climbed to the summit of the mountain 19 times.

For years Everest has fired the imagination of people of spirit and courage. Although it has now been conquered, the mountain still stands as a symbol of challenge, of beauty, and of human aspiration.

—Woodrow Wilson Sayre
Author, *Four Against Everest*

Thirteen-year-old Jordan Romero of Big Bear Lake, California, became the youngest person ever to climb to the top of Mount Everest on May 22, 2010. [Read about his adventures in this article from Scholastic News Online!](#)