



Khumbu, Nepal

Tourists or Trees?



Around the bottom of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is a beautiful region of Nepal called Khumbu. Fifty years ago, it had thick forests, and the mountains were covered with red and pink flowers. Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay started from Khumbu when they became the first people to climb Everest in 1953.

Since then, thousands of visitors have come to Khumbu to enjoy the spectacular mountain scenery and take an adventure vacation. Many tourists go trekking or hiking between villages. They sleep in very small family guesthouses.

Now everything has changed. Much of Khumbu has become a desert, in part because more than 25,000 **trekkers** pass through every year. Most sightseers arrive by small plane from Kathmandu, the capital. The planes land at the airport in Lukla. In the past, it was just a grassy field, but in 2000 a new terminal was built to allow planes and helicopters to bring in more visitors.

“We must reduce the number of tourists,” says one local man. “They destroy the **trails** when they all walk in the same place. The guesthouses are crowded. People drop their water bottles and soda cans everywhere.”

But the biggest problem of tourism is deforestation. Khumbu has lost most of its trees. They were cut down to build more tea houses, and to use for **firewood**. You can only see the big old trees in the wide floorboards in old houses.

“Tourists don’t think about the problems they cause,” says a scientist. “Especially about the wood that is used to cook their foreign food and heat water for their baths. One trekker uses as much wood in a day as five local families. They don’t have to use so much wood.” Now the forests have disappeared, and local people have to walk many miles to find firewood.

One possible solution is to cook and heat water with **kerosene**. But it’s too expensive for many local people. “The government has got to distribute kerosene to local people,” says the scientist. “It’s the only way to save the forest.”

People in Nepal are taking action. One group has started a program to sell cheap kerosene. The Himalayan Trust, an organization started by Edmund Hillary, has planted more than a million baby trees in Khumbu. This will save the land, and produce wood products that people can sell. In 30 years, Khumbu will have forests and flowers again.

