

What's Happening

IN THE WORLD ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 11, NO 9 MAY 2011

Mount Everest is the highest point on Earth, and stands on the border between Tibet and Nepal. Ever since the first men reached its summit in 1953, more and more climbers have been trying to reach it. On their expeditions they have left tons of litter on the mountain. In April another expedition set off to clean up trash from what has become the world's highest garbage dump.

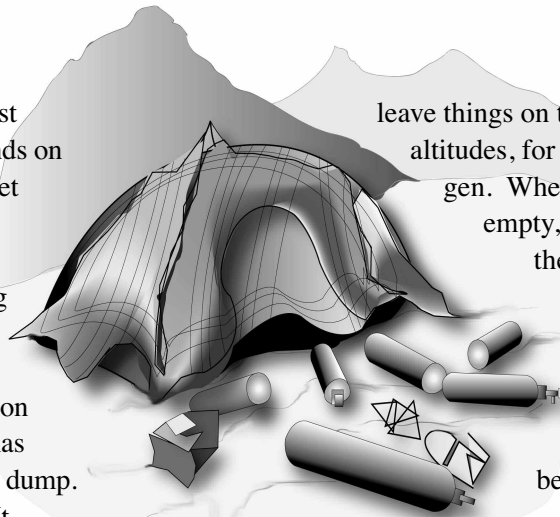
Expeditions to the top of Mt. Everest began in the first half of the 20th century. In 1920 Tibet opened to foreigners, and in 1921 a British expedition went there. One of the climbers was George Mallory. People today still remember his reply when a reporter asked him why he wanted to climb Mt. Everest. He said simply, "Because it is there." In the following decades seven major expeditions attempted to reach the summit, but none succeeded. A number of people died in the attempt, including Mr. Mallory in 1924.

The first expedition to climb all 29,035 feet above sea level did it in 1953. Two men from the expedition, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, made it to the summit. Their success gave others hope of reaching it too. Now more than 2,700 individuals have reached the summit, many of them more than once. In addition, now tens of thousands of people trek to the lower elevations every year to look up at Mt. Everest and the spectacular scenery around it.

Not surprisingly, humans who have gone to Mt. Everest have left many things behind. The trails always used to be covered with ice and snow, so much of what the climbers left there got covered up quickly. However, global warming has melted a lot of ice and snow, which has exposed the trash that lay buried underneath.

It did not take long for humans to make a mess on Mt. Everest. Only ten years after Mr. Hillary and Mr. Norgay reached the top, a climber wrote about the trash in *National Geographic* magazine. Some of the trash there today dates back to those early expeditions. In the freezing temperatures at high altitude, most trash never degrades.

There are some good reasons for climbers to



leave things on the mountain. At the highest altitudes, for example, climbers use oxygen. When the large metal canisters are empty, climbing is easier without their weight and size. It is also easier without carrying around empty food containers and broken equipment. Sometimes the extra weight can even mean the difference between life and death.

Litter Mars the Mountain

The government of Nepal has taken steps to fight the litter problem. It has imposed regulations on climbers. When they receive permission to climb the mountain, the government takes inventory of everything that they are carrying. Then they must pay a large deposit that they get back only when they return and prove that they have brought everything back down with them. The government also has been a partner in recent expeditions to clean up litter on Mt. Everest.

The Eco Everest Expedition has been cleaning up the mountain every year since 2008. In three years it has brought down more than 25,000 pounds of garbage, including empty oxygen canisters, ropes, torn tents and food containers. It also has transported more than 650 pounds of human waste. In 2010 the team even cleaned up above 26,000 ft., which is called the "death zone." From there it transported four bodies down the mountain.

On April 6, 2011 an international team of more than 60 people left Nepal's capital, Katmandu. Among them are 40 Sherpas, local people who often act as guides for other expeditions. The others come from Brazil, India, Japan, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland and the U.S. The climbers will make several trips up and down the Southern Ridge, the most popular route. Only a few of the climbers will attempt to reach the summit.

April and May are the best times to climb Mt. Everest. Again this year dozens of expeditions will carry tons of equipment as they attempt to reach the summit. Those who love the mountain hope that government regulations and annual cleanups will someday return Mt. Everest to its incredible natural beauty.

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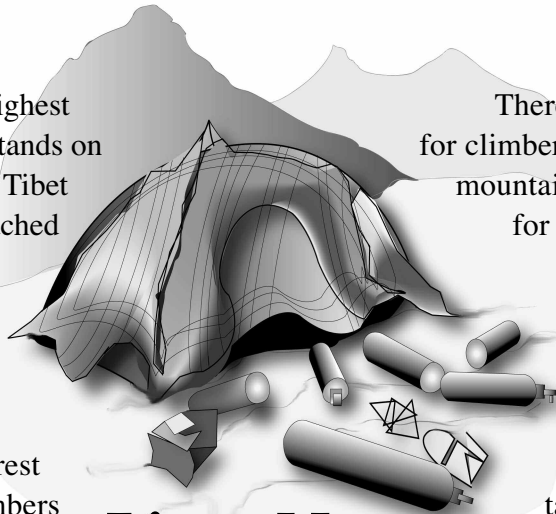
Mount Everest is the highest point on Earth. It stands on the border between Tibet and Nepal, and the first men reached its summit in 1953. Since then many climbers have tried to climb it, and they have left tons of litter. In April an expedition went to clean up their trash.

Expeditions to Mt. Everest began in 1921. One of the climbers was George Mallory. People today still remember his reply when a reporter asked him why he wanted to climb Everest. He said simply, "Because it is there." In the following years seven major expeditions failed to reach the summit. A number of people died in the attempt, including Mr. Mallory in 1924.

The first expedition to climb all 29,035 feet above sea level did it in 1953. Two men from the expedition, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, made it to the summit. Their success gave others hope of reaching the top too. Now more than 2,700 individuals have reached the summit. In addition, tens of thousands of people go to the lower elevations every year to look up at the beautiful mountain.

Climbers have left many things behind. The trails there always used to be covered with ice and snow, so the trash got covered up quickly. However, now global warming has melted some ice and snow and exposed the trash.

It did not take long for humans to make a mess on Mt. Everest. Only ten years after Mr. Hillary and Mr. Norgay reached the top, a climber wrote about the trash in *National Geographic* magazine. Some of the trash there today dates back to those early expeditions. In the freezing temperatures at high altitude, most trash never degrades.



Litter Mars the Mountain

There are some good reasons for climbers to leave things on the mountain. At the highest altitudes, for example, climbers use oxygen. When the large metal canisters are empty, climbing is easier without them. It is also easier without carrying empty food containers and broken equipment. Sometimes the extra weight can even mean the difference between life and death.

Nepal has taken steps to fight the litter problem. When climbers leave to climb the mountain, the government lists everything that they are carrying. Then they must pay a large deposit. They get it back only when they prove that they have brought everything back down with them. The government also has helped with expeditions to clean up litter.

An expedition has cleaned up trash every year since 2008. In three years it has brought down more than 25,000 pounds of garbage, including empty oxygen bottles, ropes and torn tents. It also has transported more than 650 pounds of human waste. In 2010 the team even went to the "death zone" above 26,000 ft. There it removed four bodies.

On April 6 an international team of more than 60 people left Nepal's capital, Katmandu. The climbers will make several trips up and down the Southern Ridge, the most popular route. Only a few of the climbers will try for the summit.

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Background Information

Mt. Everest stands in Sagarmatha National Park, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. UNESCO describes the park as an exceptional area with dramatic mountains, glaciers and deep valleys. The park is also home to rare species like the snow leopard and the lesser panda.

Authorities in Nepal say that the number of visitors to Sagarmatha National Park tripled in the last 20 years to more than 30,000 per year.

An Indian survey in 1955 first set Mt. Everest's elevation at 29,029 ft. It measured the snow cap, not the rock head. In May 1999 an American expedition used a GPS unit to measure the rock's elevation at 29,035 ft.

In 2011 the team will get help carrying the garbage. Guides and members of other expeditions will get 100 rupees (\$1.40) for every kilo of trash they carry down. The team hopes to clear 4,000 kilos of garbage from the lower part of the mountain, and another 1,000 kilos from the death zone.

George Mallory initially described the use of oxygen as unsportsmanlike. He concluded later that it would be impossible for him to reach the summit without it. Hillary and Tenzing used it in 1953. In 1978 two men made the first ascent without supplemental oxygen.

George Mallory's body was discovered in 1999.

Since 1953 there have been 250 deaths reported from the mountain. Some drop off ledges, so their bodies are lost forever. En route to the summit most climbers will see at least 10 corpses. Climbers report that it is nearly impossible to tell whether the person sitting on a rock needs help, is dying, or has been dead for years.

The leader of the 2011 clean-up expedition is a Sherpa guide, Apa. He has participated in the last three, and has climbed Everest a record 20 times.

The cleaning of the death zone in 2010 was the first one there ever. It is called the death zone because the lack of oxygen plays an important role in the deaths of many climbers. Air at that altitude holds only one-third the oxygen as at sea level. Climbers say that the flow of oxygen to the brain decreases quickly. They get out of breath, which makes simple tasks like taking a step tiring. Using oxygen helps climbers think clearly and plan their moves.

Mt. Everest is known as Chomolungma in Tibet and Sagarmatha in Nepal. Its English name comes from Sir George Everest, the Surveyor General of India who recorded the mountain's location in 1841.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- List some things that mountain climbers carry on their expeditions.

Comprehension:

- Explain how the litter problem has gotten worse over the years.

Beyond the Text:

- Do you understand the motivation of people who want to climb Mt. Everest?
- Name some other sports or sporting activities that could result in death if things went wrong.
- Describe how human activity has damaged some other natural settings.

Vocabulary (*advanced article only)

Article-specific: to mar; litter; summit; expedition;

to trek*; to melt; altitude; canister; inventory*; ridge

High-use: decade*; major; elevation; global warming;

to expose; to degrade; oxygen; equipment;

to impose*; regulation; to transport; annual

Sources

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The Hindu April 6, 2011

KVAL.com April 5, 2011

www.allheadlinenews.com April 3, 2011

The Guardian (London) April 19, 2010

New York Times September 5, 2007

McClatchy Newspapers June 07, 2007

www.everesthistory.com

CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

English-Language Arts

Reading 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

Writing 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking