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MOUNTAIN MASTERS, SUMMIT SURVIVORS

Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay are the first to reach Everest's summit.

On the 29th of May at 11:30am, Edmund Hillary (of New Zealand) and Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa of Nepal, made world history, becoming the first explorers to reach the summit of Mount Everest after a gruelling climb up the southern face. The well-known mountain, which sits at 29,035 feet above sea level, is the highest point on Earth.



Photograph of Sherpa, Tenzing, waving flags representing Britain, Nepal, the United Nations and India.

Today is a day for celebrations. With Queen Elizabeth II's coronation and the news that two determined men have conquered the highest mountain in the world, it's surely a day that will go down in history. The people of Britain have hailed the relentless pair for their bravery after hearing that they had to endure a fitful, restless night at 27,900 feet the evening before their inspiring triumph.

When they reached the top, the two men embraced each other with relief and joy. Surprisingly, Hillary and Norgay only spent a short fifteen minutes at the summit since they did not have sufficient oxygen available. Hillary – a mountaineer, explorer and philanthropist – took numerous photos of the scenery. Norgay did not miss the opportunity to have a photo waving his flag proudly for Britain, Nepal, the United Nations and India. As a Buddhist offering to the gods, Tenzing also managed to find time to bury some sweets and biscuits in the snow before his oxygen ran out.

Within those fifteen minutes, the daring duo looked for signs of George Mallory and Andrew “Sandy” Irvine, who had previously disappeared during a similar attempt in 1924.

Unfortunately, they found nothing. The fact that they were in life-threatening conditions, low on oxygen and still trying to find traces of lost loved ones only goes to show a fraction of their perseverance and benevolence.

After a life-changing fifteen minutes at the top, the tenacious two began their slow and torturous descent to rejoin their team leader, Colonel John Hunt. John, who awaited their arrival further down the mountain at Camp VI, said, “I assumed the men had failed their expedition when I saw how exhausted they looked! I had already started planning another attempt in my head.” To his surprise, the two climbers then pointed to the top of the mountain to signal their proud achievement. “The honour on their faces and in the point of their fingers is something I will never forget! I couldn’t believe we had finally done it. They made the impossible... possible!” Mr Hunt beamed. A question left unanswered is that of ‘who got there first?’ While Tenzing insists it was Hillary who took the first step, Norgay is the only one of the two to have a photo at the top. It has been said that Hillary did not ask for one.

Before now, many unsuccessful attempts have been recorded but this did not deter this new team of individuals. Hillary and Tenzing’s leader stated that the planning for this expedition was built upon advice from other voyagers and their failed attempts. The first recorded attempt to climb Everest was made in 1921 and it was aborted due to harsh weather conditions and extreme temperatures that made the tiresome trek difficult. However, during this attempt, Mallory saw an achievable route to the peak. When questioned by a journalist as to why he wanted to climb the dangerously high mountain, he simply stated, “Because it is there.” More recently, Mr Hillary described the peak as ‘a symmetrical, beautiful snow cone summit’. When the triumphant team were asked about why this attempt was more successful than others in the past, they stated it was due to careful planning, excellent open-circuit oxygen equipment and good weather. He suggested their success had come from other’s failures.

Hillary is already considering his next expedition and hinted at something around the Antarctic region. As for Norgay, he claimed, “My heart is a mountain and I’ll never be far away from one!” Other explorers from around the world now plan to attempt the trudge to the top of Everest, enthused by the pair’s passion.

