ALEXANDRA STEWART JOE TODD-STANTON

EVEREST



THE REMARKABLE STORY OF EDMUND HILLARY AND TENZING NORGAY

FOREWORD BY RANULPH FIENNES

BLOOMSBURY



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EDMUND HILLARY AND
TENZING NORGAY



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ILLUSTRATED BY
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For my parents, Christopher and Donna Stephens – A. S.

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FOREWORD

Mount Everest – the closest you can get to the Moon by walking . . .

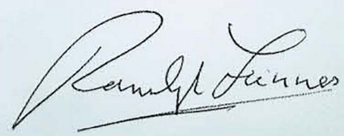
I was just nine years old when I received the news. They'd done it. Mr Hillary and his friend Tenzing had reached the top of Everest. And so I decided: I too would become a climber of mountains . . .

Climbing Everest is no easy feat. Dangling on a never-ending knife's edge, the possibility of plummeting to one's death awaits you at every crevice, crack, avalanche and icefall. More than 50 years later and even with mobile phones and modern science, oxygen regulators can fail you or nature can intervene; an unexpected icy staircase causing your fall. And so it seems only fitting that Hillary is remembered for his legendary tale of triumph on Everest, one half of the first two humans to have reached the top of the world's tallest mountain.

Born the son of a beekeeper, Edmund Hillary was a modest man. When he finally reached the roof of the world in a death-defying journey, that had killed 13 climbers before him, he wearily reached for his camera to take a snap of his fellow climber and friend Tenzing Norgay; it never occurred to him to ask for a photo of himself. Little is written about Hillary's enduring charity work, the results of which touch the heart of Nepal today, nor is Tenzing the household name that Hillary is – the ever-fearless Sherpa whose acts of bravery, determination and friendship side by side with Hillary would change their lives forever.

After two attempts and one successful summit, I know first-hand that the path to Everest is treacherous, with worse than nail-biting moments along the route. This wonderful story tells us not only of Hillary and Tenzing's remarkable journey, but also of the courageous team further down the mountain made up of hundreds of Sherpas, correspondents, surgeons and even students, who helped Hillary and Tenzing along their way. It recounts the important stories of the heroic explorers who went before them, their tragic legacies sending life-saving information about Everest storming back to the base below. And it is a tale that speaks of the endurance, creativity and tenacity of those on the ground from fundraisers and medics to scientists and shoe manufacturers – most of whom have never even set foot on this gigantic mountain.

You don't have to be a hero
to make your mark on the world.



RANULPH FIENNES

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 3● 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.

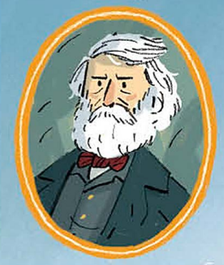


What we can say is that Everest is roughly equal in height to 20 Empire State Buildings piled on top of one another. Or, to put it another way, just lower than the cruising height of a jumbo jet.



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 *Euophrys 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'.

Bar-headed geese



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.

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.



Low oxygen levels and the draining effects of altitude on the human body mean that climbers must battle for every step they take.

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 13th 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 13th 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 . . .