

THE ALPINE JOURNAL 1993

The *Alpine Journal* is the world's principal mountaineering year-book and essential reading for all who love the mountains. It has been published regularly every year since 1863.

The 1993 *Alpine Journal* celebrates the 40th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest, and all the surviving participants in that great endeavour have made a personal contribution. Some allow us to read the letters they wrote at the time, or share with us their cherished memories; others throw fresh light on this unique achievement, its forerunners and aftermath; yet others have sent pages from a sketch-book or treasured contemporary photographs.

Outstanding mountaineering successes (and failures) of the past year are also covered, with contributions from leading Himalayan climbers such as Chris Bonington, Kurt Diemberger, Lindsay Griffin, Doug Scott – and Stephen Venables who describes in graphic detail how he survived an abseiling accident on Panch Chuli V.

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Everest 1953: the triumphant return

From left:

George Lowe, Goerge Band, Alfred Gregory, Edmund Hillary, Griffith Pugh (hidden), John Hunt, Tenzing Norgay, Michael Ward, Charles Wylie, Wilfrid Noyce, Tom Stobart (hidden), Michael Westmacott, James Morris. Photograph © by Times Newspapers Ltd

If you are climbing regularly in the Alps or the greater ranges, why not join the Alpine Club: Benefits of membership include:

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Jacket photographs: *front*, Everest 1953: Charles Wylie leads Sherpas up the Lhotse Face (Alfred Gregory); *back*, the Summit Ridge of Everest from the South Summit (Edmund Hillary)

ISBN 0 948153 27 X

EDMUND HILLARY

A Letter to Jim Rose

(Plates 10-12, 24 and back cover)

This letter was written by Sir Edmund Hillary on 2 June 1953 at Everest Base Camp to his future father-in-law Jim Rose, President of the New Zealand Alpine Club. The letter is unedited.

Base Camp
June 2nd 1953

Dear Jim,

Well all the flurry & bustle is over, all the hard work is finished & at long last we've climbed the jolly mountain. Now Himalayan climbing can settle down into a more normal routine & the 'Everest' sense of values can be put aside. However I must admit that the whole of this expedition has been jolly good fun despite the very real dangers of the icefall & we've had a party that welded into a particularly useful & pleasant team. I think the great feature of the party is how practically every man went high & certainly all did a very useful job. It was far from the case as in previous expeditions, including the Swiss, where a couple of men did all the work.

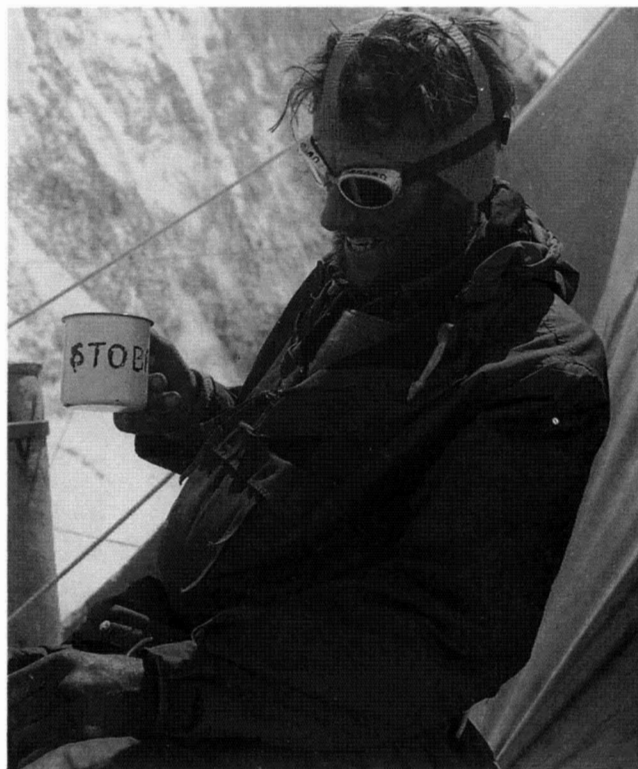
I must admit that I haven't quite got used to the idea of climbing Everest although I had a couple of wonderful days high on the mountain. After all it is only a couple of years ago that four very ignorant New Zealanders went to Gawhal. We're all back at Base Camp now after some hairraising incidents in our final descent of the icefall & we're very thin & lacking in energy at present as we organise things to start off on our long trek to Katmandu tomorrow. We expect to arrive at the British Embassy by June 20th. John Hunt wants me & Tenzing to fly to England with him & meet our patron the Duke of Edinburgh & attend all the official functions. As they will be paying my fare I was only too willing to agree. I expect to be back in Auckland by the middle of September.

Regarding the climb I'll give you a brief account of the incidents leading up to it & the climb itself.

By May 19th George Lowe, Mike Ward & Da Tenzing were in Camp VII at 24,000' but the Lhotse face attack seemed to have lost its punch & little or no progress was being made towards the traverse to the South Col. However on 20th the first lift of nine Sherpas under Wilf Noyce laden for the South Col went from Camp V to Camp VII & George & his party came down without having made much progress. On the 21st we watched eagerly but only two figures (Wilf Noyce & a Sherpa) left Camp VII & made their way upwards to the South Col. At the same time Charles Wylie & another bunch of Sherpas went from V to VII. This meant that fourteen Sherpas were at Camp VII &

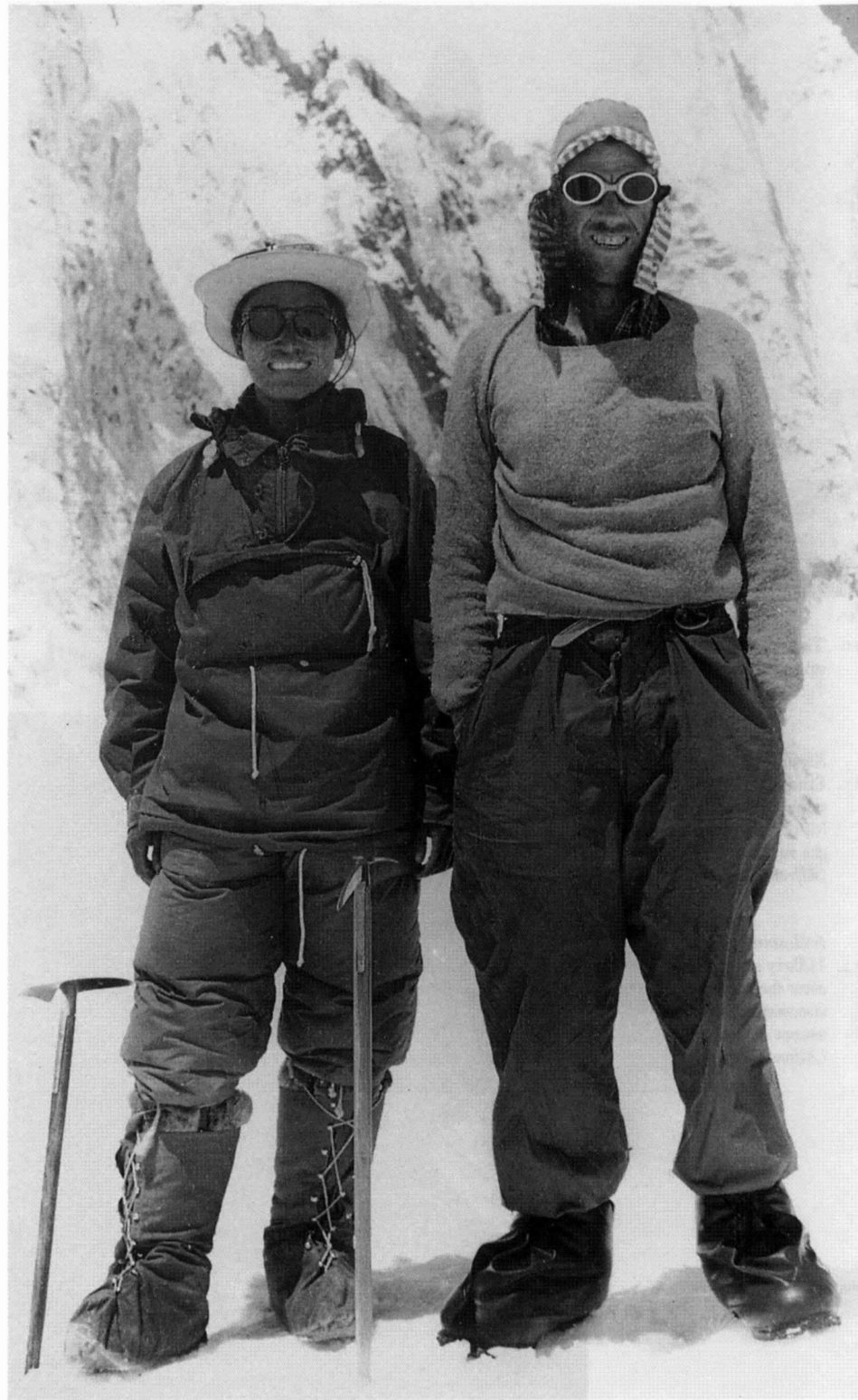


10. The summit assault. Hillary and Tenzing on the way up to the highest camp at 27,900ft. (Alfred Gregory)



Right
11. Edmund Hillary relaxing after his return from the summit. (Alfred Gregory)

Following page
12. Hillary and Tenzing after their successful first ascent of Everest. (Alfred Gregory)



even though Wilf had made a route to the South Col it was absolutely essential that on the 22nd the whole bunch of Sherpas should go from VII to the South Col or food would run out & the whole attack break down. John decided therefore to reluctantly send Tenzing & me up to ensure that the lift went through according to schedule. Tenzing & I went from IV to VII in $4\frac{1}{4}$ hours on the 21st & on the next day the 22nd we had our great triumph – we set off with 15 Sherpas & three sahibs & got 14 Sherpas & all the loads to the South Col. Tenzing & I had a strenuous day having to kick & cut a good route the whole way up. Tenzing & I then returned right back to IV. This day was the turning point in the expedition. We now had the South Col stocked.

On May 24th Tom Bourdillon & Charles Evans – the closed circuit team with their support party John Hunt, Da Namgyl & Balu went from Camp VII to the South col in very slow time in bad conditions. The following day they had to rest on the Col while Tenzing & I the open circuit team with our support party George Lowe, Alf Gregory & Pember, AngNima & Angtember went up to Camp VII. We also had five other Sherpas who were carrying loads to the South Col & then descending.

On the 26th we all left Camp VII & set out for the South Col. We soon saw figures on the ridge to the South summit & had a great thrill watching their progress. Tenzing & I were in good form & went on ahead to reach the South Col in $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours from Camp VII. We were in time to receive an exhausted John Hunt & Da Namgyl who had packed a tent, oxygen, food & fuel to about 27,350ft. Meanwhile Tom & Charles went on & finally reached the South summit at 1 p.m. This was a great triumph. We doctored John Hunt & watched eagerly for the others who finally arrived back at 3.30 completely exhausted. They both had terrible tales of the ridge from the South Summit to the top & even expressed the opinion that it wasn't climbable. This night was a terrible one with very strong wind & great cold. On the 27th there was no hope of us moving upwards & the best we could do was escort a very weak & exhausted party over the Col & down to the long traverse. Both Balu & Angtember had become sick & also went down. Another ghastly windy night followed but the 28th was rather improved. However we had another blow – Pember was sick leaving us only one Sherpa AngNima for the carry up the ridge. We had no alternative but to carry the stuff ourselves. George Lowe, Greg & AngNima left at 8.45 a.m. carrying about 40lbs apiece & working on oxygen at 4 litres. Tenzing & I carrying nearly 50lbs left at 10 a.m. & followed in their tracks. George was going very well indeed & led nearly all the way up to the main ridge & the old Swiss Camp at 27,200. This involved a good deal of stepcutting in firm very steep snow. We caught up to the others on the ridge & we continued up another 150 feet to 27,350 where John had dumped his gear. We still considered this too low for a camp so decided to increase our loads & push on. I added a tent to make my load well over 60 & the others had mostly about 50 lbs. The ridge was steep but the upward sloping rock strata made the climbing reasonably easy. We pushed on & on & couldn't find a spot even the slightest bit flat. After a long pull we followed Tenzing's advice & did a traverse out onto the steep face on the left & finally found a possible spot under a rock bluff. We estimated it was about 27,900 ft



24. Edmund Hillary in 1971 at Manedingma where he had just built a school; with his two remaining children Sarah and Peter (L), and Passang Sherpa (R), the village headman, who now runs the Manedingma medical clinic.



25. Everest reunion at Pen-y-Gwryd, N Wales, 1978. From L: Michael Ward, George Lowe, George Band, Michael Westmacott, Anthony Rawlinson, John Hunt, Griffith Pugh, Alfred Gregory, John Jackson, Edmund Hillary, Charles Wylie, Emlyn Jones, Tom Stobart, Hamish Nicol, Jan Morris.

& decided to camp so the others dumped their loads & returned to the South Col. Tenzing and I spent from 2.30 to 5.30 making a camp site large enough to pitch the tent & even then it was on two levels. – I spent the whole night sitting up. Our oxygen due to the reduced lift was very short & I worked out that if we worked on the reduced flow rate of 3 litres per minute we'd have sufficient endurance for an attempt but it would be pretty fine. We also had enough oxygen for four hours sleeping at 1 litre per minute.

At 6.30 a.m. on the 29th we left our tent & set off up the ridge. We were going well but slowly. It was a magnificent morning with astounding views everywhere. Taking turns we plugged up the ridge & then reached the enormous 300 ft slope leading to the South summit. This was very steep deep snow with a light crust on top & made us both very unhappy. However we persisted & finally reached the South summit at 9 a.m. We were eager for our first view of the ghastly summit ridge & I was very relieved to see that although it looked impressive it didn't look by any means impossible. On the right overhanging the Kangshung great fingers of cornices & then a steep snow slope running down to the 8,000 ft rock bluffs dropping to the Western Cwm. I was worried about oxygen endurance so got to work. I cut a trail of steps just above the rocks & made good progress often dodging larger cornices by getting onto the rocks themselves. A vertical rock pitch I got up by jamming between the rock & some vertical snow on the right. A forty foot struggle & I was on top of it & I was astonished at the energy I had. I hauled Tenzing up – he wasn't going quite as well but was a good safe & sound companion. I felt now that it would take a lot to stop me & cut steadily along until a final bump loomed up & I moved up on a tight rope & was standing on top of the world. It was quite a moment. Tenzing so far forgot himself as to embrace me & I banged off a number of photographs. I collected a few stones one of which I'm keeping for you if you want it.

I was very worried by our oxygen shortage so we wasted no time in hastening back to the South Summit, down to Camp IX & finally very tired indeed down to the South Col after a tremendous day. The next day we descended to the Cwm & so to Base.

Well, this is the bare story, Jim. I must apologise for the dry nature of the tale but we're all rather anoxic & find it hard to concentrate. We'll have plenty of opportunity for discussing it in the future around your hospitable fire.

We've just heard by radio that the Queen & Winston Churchill have sent messages of congratulations to us at Katmandu so we are understandably excited. Also old Sid Holland [the Prime Minister of New Zealand] has said some kind words. What a business!

Well, Jim, I must close & send this letter off tonight with the runner. I would greatly appreciate it if you could give some of these details to my Mother & to Rex if it's not asking too much. I've written short notes to them but no climbing details. Our main interest now is to reach Katmandu & hear what's occurring.

Regards to Mrs. Rose & yourself.

A somewhat confused

Ed.