

## Facilitator Backgrounder 5.2

### Reaching the Summit of Mount Everest

The highest mountain in the world is Mount Everest. Located in Nepal, it rises 8,848 metres. It was first ascended in May 1953 by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. Hillary was a New Zealander, who was later knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. Norgay was a Nepali-Indian Sherpa mountaineer.

The Sherpa are Indigenous people whose ancestral territory surrounds Mount Everest. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and despite their apparent propensity for mountain climbing, Sherpas had not attempted to scale the region's mountains. For Sherpas the highest mountain peaks are the homes of the gods and should be revered from afar -- not conquered. The obsession with summiting was originally a European thing. The Tibetan name for Mount Everest is Chomolungma, meaning "Holy Mother".

Consider the worldviews (concerning land, in particular) on the day that Hillary and Norgay reached the summit of Mount Everest. What did they do at the summit? The two men embraced. Hillary took a number of photographs; several looking down each side of the mountain in every direction to prove that they had reached the summit. Norgay said a silent prayer of thanks to Chomolungma and buried offerings to the gods in the snow – including sweets given to him by his daughter. Hillary buried a small cross given to him by a fellow mountaineer. They spent 15 minutes on the summit.

As the two men made their way back down, the first climber they met was teammate George Lowe, also a New Zealander. Hillary's legendary greeting: "Well, George, we knocked the bastard off!"

Sixty-six years later, in 2019, Norbu Tenzing, Tenzing Norgay's son said in an interview, "Those experiences for Sherpas are pilgrimages to the top of Everest, or any mountain for that matter because mountains, valleys, are our sacred places. Mountains, valleys are places that our gods reside, and these sacred places really need to be preserved."

Sources:

<https://www.maoritelevision.com/news/regional/exclusive-shadow-mt-everest-tenzing-norgays-son-speaks>

<https://www.rgs.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?nodeguid=50e6a147-9024-4fbc-906b-4e7f9873bf1f&lang=en-GB>