



Mount Everest has always posed a challenge for mountaineers – and many have attempted and failed to climb it. The history books show that the first definitely successful climb was in 1953, by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay.

Edmund Hillary did the whole climb alongside a Sherpa mountaineer called Tenzing Norgay. Sherpa people are native to the Himalayas in Nepal and were a vital component of any successful ascent up the mountains. They were experienced local climbers who were paid to prepare the route, fix ropes and carry essential kit. Norgay was to become more than just a guide, but also a lifesaver, a history-maker and a friend for life.

Hillary and Norgay's expedition team of 13 Europeans and their guides climbed together to camp 7,890 metres up the mountain – around 1,000 metres from the top. On 26 May, Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans attempted the climb, but turned back when Evans's oxygen system failed. The pair had come within 91 vertical metres of the summit. The expedition leader Colonel Hunt then directed Norgay and Hillary to try to reach it.

Their ascent was far from easy. Early in the climb, Hillary fell. Norgay reacted quickly, using his ice axe to prevent Hillary from slipping into a crevasse to his death, and enabling him to climb out of the sheer-walled ice chasm. When Hillary was asked about Norgay's heroic actions he answered, 'Tenzing and I were a team. I expected Tenzing to carry out the right procedures in an emergency, just as I would.' From then on, Hillary insisted that he would climb alongside only Norgay.

Finally, on 29 May, Hillary and Norgay made their final push. After having to cut steps up the last frozen rock face, they clambered up – and reached Everest's summit.



When he was asked about Norgay's reaction, Hillary said:

'Well, Chet Tensing was, I think, on reaching the summit, certainly in many ways more demonstrative than I was. I shook hands with him, rather in British fashion, but this wasn't enough for Tensing. He threw his arms around my shoulders – we were in oxygen masks and all – and he thumped me on the back and I thumped him on the back, and really it was quite a demonstrative moment. And he certainly was very, very thrilled when we reached the summit of Everest.'

After only 15 minutes at the frozen top of the peak, the highest point on Earth, the mountaineers descended to their delighted expedition team. Only days later, back in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu, Hillary learned that he had been knighted for his achievement. Despite this honour, Hillary was always eager to explain that his was not an achievement that set him apart from his team. He said:

'On this expedition, we had altogether 13 western members of the expedition, and then we had, I think, about 30 permanent high-altitude sherpas. [...] It is a team expedition, and it's very much in the form of a pyramid effort. [...] The two men who reach the summit are completely dependent on the combined effort of all those involved lower down.'

Hillary's greatest praise, though, was always for Norgay. Colonel Hunt agreed; from the moment he was asked who reached the summit first, he'd give the same answer: 'They reached it together. As a team.'

Despite Norgay's part in the achievement, it is often only Hillary who is remembered in the UK. It is clear, however, that Tenzing and Hillary reached Everest's summit together.