


SIR EDMUND HILLARY, 82 **FATHER EVEREST**

The humble beekeeper-turned world's greatest living explorer—recalls sitting in his Auckland, New Zealand, study one quiet day in 1990 when the telephone rang. It was his son, Peter, calling. From the pinnacle of Mount Everest. No such amenities were available 49 years ago this month, when Hillary and his Sherpa climbing partner, Tenzing Norgay (who died in 1986), became the first men to set foot on, and return from, the top of the world. Of that moment, Hillary remembers being acutely aware that they had to turn around and head back down. "Well, George," he famously remarked during his descent, upon greeting his friend George Lowe, "we knocked the bastard off."

Photographed (with the ice ax from his 1953 Mount Everest climb) on Kare Kare Beach near his home in Auckland, New Zealand, on March 6, 2002.



As a youngster I was a great reader and dreamer. Every evening I walked for miles, planning exciting adventures but doing nothing about them. Then suddenly things changed. At 16 years of age I went with a school party to the mountains for skiing and climbing. I had never been in snow before, and it transformed my life. From then on I spent every moment I could in the mountains. I developed mountaineering skills on the great peaks of the New Zealand Southern Alps and became an accomplished snow and ice climber.

With three expert friends I joined a simple expedition to the Garwhal Himalaya. For us it was a great new challenge. Using primitive equipment, we climbed six new mountains, each more than 21,000 feet in height. We felt a sense of triumph and "nothing could stop us now." We returned to the Himalayas again and again.

In 1953 we were invited to join the British Mount Everest Expedition. By now I was tall and strong and very well acclimated. With my skill on ice I hacked my way up the Icefall and the Lhotse face and led a team of strong, load-carrying Sherpas to the South Col at 26,000 feet. We established our main supply depot with tents and food and oxygen.

Now the time had come to choose climbing partners for the great assault ahead. My companion was Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa—fit, strong, and very experienced. We were a formidable combination, I believe, strongly motivated and very determined. We battled our way up the southeast ridge and pitched our final, tiny tent at nearly 28,000 feet. After a cold and uncomfortable night we climbed up the steep slopes to reach the South Summit. Ahead of us was the long, narrow ridge leading to the final peak of the mountain. My swinging ice ax cut a narrow line of steps, and we moved up a rounded snow dome and emerged on the summit of the world. It was a great moment.

Year after year, I have been involved in exciting adventures. Among the most memorable was a 1956 expedition driving farm tractors up the crevassed Skelton Glacier in the Antarctic to reach the Polar Plateau at 8,000 feet. I can recall our team dropping tractor wheels into deep crevasses and towing them out again, and struggling desperately through deep, soft snow. Weeks and indeed months passed until ahead of us loomed the great rounded American South Pole station, which had been established by airlifting items to the site. With our small farm tractors we had been the first team to travel overland with vehicles to the South Pole.

There have been so many other adventures as well. Building 27 schools for the Himalayan people and two hospitals. Establishing three mountain airfields and helping rebuild traditional Sherpa monasteries. Driving three jet boats up the great Ganges from the Bay of Bengal to the river's source among the great Himalayan Mountains. And flying over the ice-clad Arctic Ocean to the North Pole with Neil Armstrong as a companion—what a delightful person he proved to be.

I suppose the major challenges of terrestrial exploration have been overcome, but there are still many exciting adventures to be attempted: sailing across the wild southern oceans, tackling the many unclimbed peaks in the Himalayas and the Antarctic, and penetrating deeply into the many great underground caverns.

Yes, there are still plenty of places left to explore!

—SIR EDMUND HILLARY