

LIFESTYLE

The Lure of Everest

KATMANDU, Nepal (AP) - The hundreds of people who attempt to climb Mount Everest every year know one important thing that Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay didn't before 11.30 a.m. on May 29, 1953.

It's possible to climb the world's tallest peak and survive.

Fifty years after Hillary and Norgay became the first humans to stand on the world's highest peak, at a height of 29,035 feet, some 1,200 people have equalled their feat.

"People ask, 'What was all the fuss about?'" Hillary, 83, said to Indian mountaineers recently as he made his way to Katmandu for the golden jubilee celebration of the conquest of Everest.

He is being joined by Junko Tabei of Japan, the first woman to climb Everest; Reinhold Messner of Italy, who climbed first without bottled oxygen; Tamba Tsheri, a Sherpa who is the youngest to reach the summit.

A blind man has climbed Everest. A Sherpa named Appa has made it up a record 12 times, and is on the mountain trying for No. 13. A climber without hands is making the attempt this year.

And Nepali sherpa Pemba Dorje Sherpa set a record for the fastest ascent of Mount Everest on Friday by reaching the top of the world's highest mountain in 12 hours and 45 minutes, the



The top: A glow envelopes as the sun sets on the world's highest mountain, centre, seen from Kala pathar, on the trail to Everest, Nepal. Hundreds and thousands of mountaineers and mountain lovers have gathered in Katmandu to take part in various celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay on May 29, 1953.

Tourism Ministry said.

And a South African game ranger became the first black African to reach the top of Mount Everest on Monday, almost 50 years after the world's highest peak was first conquered, local

SABC radio reported. Pemba Dorje, a 25-year-old guide, started from base camp at 17,550 feet at 5 p.m. (1115 GMT) on Thursday and reached the summit on Friday morning, the Tourism Ministry said in a statement, beating the previous record by four hours.

After Sibusiso Vilane, 32, reached the summit early yesterday, the game ranger wept tears of joy after he made it to the top, the South African Broadcasting Corp (SABC) said, quoting a journalist who had spoken to Vilane by phone. So what was all the fuss about 50 years ago, when Hillary and Norgay came down the mountain to find they had become world heroes? "The major thing that Tenzing and I did was showing that it was indeed possible to reach the

summit of that great mountain and survive," Hillary said.

"This question was hanging over our heads. We didn't know whether we would reach the top and just collapse," said Hillary, who will head a horse-carriage procession through Katmandu today, then attend a string of seminars, dinners and exhibitions celebrating the achievement.

Neither man ever went back, but it was enough. "The only footsteps in the snow were our own," Hillary said.

The conquest of Everest altered the face of Nepal. Today, up to 50,000 trekkers hike into the mountains each year, part of an annual wave of a half million visitors.

Tourism is the country's top foreign currency earner, bringing in \$160 million a year and employing 200,000 people.

Still, 40 percent of Nepal's 23 million people live in poverty, according to the World Bank, while the royal family and upper class in the Hindu kingdom live in splendour. That gulf incited a Maoist



Cleanup: Nepalese Bahadur Shresh rests, from the Everest Base Camp to Namche Nepal. Supported by the Sagarmatha Polee, garbage is removed up to the base camp frequently by mountaineers from a

guerrilla rebellion that has killed more than 7,000 people since 1996, though no foreigners have been harmed and peace talks are under way.

Many Nepalis - particularly mountain folk - want the government to spend the \$70,000 it collects from each Everest expedition, and lesser amounts for other peaks, to build schools, bridges and medical clinics in rural areas.

Mountaineering changed the face of Nepal's mountains, too. "Commercial climbing has developed, with many inexperienced enthusiasts, dozens of aluminium ladders, thousands of metres of fixed rope," Hillary said. "It is hardly mountaineering; more like a conducted tour." The paths hacked out of the



Hero: Tibet born Sherpa Tenzing Norgay stands on the summit of Mount Everest after he and climbing partner Edmund Hillary became the first people to reach it, in this May 29, 1953 file photo. He removed his oxygen gear to take photographs, and after about ten minutes realized his movements were becoming clumsy from a lack of oxygen and put on his tanks and mask again. Hillary explained that Norgay was unfamiliar with the use of a camera and there are no photographs of Hillary at the summit. "But you can take my word for it: I was there," he said.



South African Deshun Deyssel who could not climb Everest this spring waits for a helicopter to leave Everest Base camp, Nepal. Deyssel would have been the first black woman atop Everest, but had to return because of bad weather after climbing nearly 8,300 metres of the 8,500 metre peak.



Participants in the Everest Marathon start off from Everest base camp, Nepal, in this May 19, 2003 file photo. A total of 34 participants from the U.S., Nepal, India and Canada ran in what is claimed to be the world's highest marathon.

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Sir Edmund Hillary still going strong at 80