

Edmund Hillary Graduate Award Information



Hillary in 2006

<https://youtu.be/BOLj3cedNM>

Born: He was born in Auckland, New Zealand in 1919.

Died: Edmund Hillary died in 2008, in Auckland.

Family: Edmund's father was Percival Augustus and his mother was Gertrude Hillary. In 1920, his family migrated to Tuakau (south of Auckland), as his father was allotted a land there. His grandparents had emigrated from Yorkshire, England to Wairoa (Northern Auckland) in the mid-19th century. He got married and had three children, but tragically his wife and one of his daughters were killed in a plane crash in Nepal. He later married again, and his son Peter climbed Mount Everest too, in 1990, following in his father's famous footsteps.

Early Life: He received his education at the Tuakau Primary School and then the Auckland Grammar School. Edmund Hillary was an intelligent child, and he finished primary school two years earlier than the usual period. However, he was an average student in the high school. He was a petite and shy boy who would often be lost in his books and kept dreaming of adventures, which perhaps motivated him to attain feats in his life. He loved reading and his favourite books were adventure stories. He had a long train journey to school each day so he spent the time reading and day-dreaming about his own adventures. In the Auckland University College, he studied science and mathematics.

When he was 16 years old, he became interested in climbing. By then, he had grown very tall and strong, and although he wasn't very skilful, he did have lots of stamina. He climbed his first real mountain while he was at University in 1939. It was Mt Ollivier in New Zealand.

Then World War Two broke out. Edmund Hillary was a pacifist and did not want to fight in the war, but by 1943 there was such a threat to his country's safety that it was made compulsory for young men to join the military. He joined the New Zealand Royal Air Force. He was sent to Fiji and the Solomon Islands, but he was badly burned in an accident so was sent back home.

Achievements: After the war was over, he climbed the highest mountain in New Zealand, Mount Cook. It is 3,724 metres high. There's a ridge on this mountain which has been named Hillary Ridge in honour of him.

In 1953 he joined a British expedition to climb Mount Everest in Nepal. This is the highest mountain in the world. There were over 400 people in the expedition team. There were other climbers, as well as 362 porters who carried over 4500 kilograms of equipment and luggage. The porters were Sherpas – the people who live in the remote region of Mount Everest. Because they live so high up in the Himalaya Mountains, they are famous for being expert mountaineers and guides. They are used to the thinner air of the high mountains and are often incredibly fit and strong. They know and love the mountains of their

region, including Mount Everest, which is called Chomolungma (meaning Goddess Mother of Mountains). The most famous Sherpa to have climbed Mount Everest was Tenzing Norgay, who was on the same expedition as Edmund Hillary in 1953. Their team made a base camp in March, and by May they made a final camp high up on the mountain. Two climbers – Hillary and Tenzing – were chosen to go even further and get to the top. The next morning Hillary's boots were completely frozen. He warmed them up, and they set off. At 11.30 in the morning on May 29th 1953, he was standing at the highest point on our planet. What an amazing feeling!



Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953

Hillary said that his first sensation when he reached the summit was “one of relief”. The two men did not stay long on the 'top of the world' because it was freezing and the air was so thin that they needed oxygen tanks to help them breathe. It was not a place to hang around. However, Tenzing had time to make a little hole in the snow to place some small offerings of food as a gift to the gods of Chomolungma, and Hillary put a cross next to the food offering. Then there was just time for Hillary to take a quick photo of Tenzing, but he wasn't sure if Tenzing had ever used a camera before, and didn't think that the summit of Mt Everest was a good place for a lesson – so there is no photo of Hillary himself at the summit. It was a long time before the invention of the 'selfie'! There were no satellite phones either, no mobile networks and no internet. So the news of their triumph did not reach the outside world until four days later. This was the day that the Queen was being crowned in England. All the newspapers said that the British team's success was a 'gift' for the new Queen. In return the successful climbers were given a special medal from the Queen.

After reaching the top of Mount Everest, Hillary went home to New Zealand. However, his adventures did not end with his Mount Everest climb. He climbed many other mountains, including ten other peaks in the Himalayas. He travelled the whole length of the River Ganges in India. He went to Antarctica several times. He visited both the South and the North Pole.

Edmund Hillary always loved Nepal, where he had so many adventures in the mighty Himalaya Mountains, and he came to especially admire and respect the Sherpa people. He set up an international charity to help the Sherpas in Nepal by building schools and medical clinics in remote areas. He always said that these were the most worthwhile things he had done – more than his climbing and expeditions. However, he never forgot his home. He said that it was always good to be going home to New Zealand, no matter what adventures he'd had, and that he wanted to end his days in Auckland.

In 1992, Edmund Hillary appeared on the New Zealand \$5 bill, which made him the only New Zealander to appear on a banknote during his or her lifetime, as opposed to the contrary, where famous deceased personalities would be displayed on the currency bill.

On January 11, 2008, at the age of 88 years, Sir Edmund Hillary died of heart failure at the Auckland City Hospital at 9 A.M. In his honor, a big state funeral was held at the Holy Trinity Cathedral; where thousands of citizens, aristocrats, and bureaucrats from countries around the globe and the Gurkha soldiers from Nepal paid their respects. The flags were lowered to half-mast on all Government and public buildings and at the Scott Base in Antarctica.

Quotes: “It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.”

“I am a lucky man. I have had a dream and it has come true, and that is not a thing that happens often to men.”