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The Impact of the Climbers on Everest

How will Mt. Everest be impacted by the climbing that many ambitious people strive for?

The answer to that would be negatively. Climbing expeditions on Everest will lead to detrimental

aspects toward the mountain as more and more people accumulate there. To climb, masses of

people go on expeditions to escape from the confines of their homes and travel to see the natural

world. Aided with advances in skills and technology, climbers are able to reach the worldfamous

Everest. However, the excessive climbing of the mountain has led to the decline of

certain resources and pollution in the environments near this mountain. Climbing Mt. Everest

may have a greater impact on the mountain than most people may think. Consequently, Everest

expeditions harm the mountain by making it a dump for waste materials, leading to changes in

the ecosystems that surround the mountain, and simply destroying the magnificent image of

Everest.

As climbers make their way up the mountain, they bring many supplies and equipment

that is needed to survive the harsh conditions. However, after the struggle of lugging these

supplies up the mountain, climbers leave even more waste than anything else. To begin with,

Everest is visited by tourists who pack more supplies than taking out trash. From a passage of a

past article, the description of the state of one camp was that the camp at “26,000 feet ‘has

become known as the highest junkyard in the world.” (Tenenbaum 2000) In addition, that camp

was also “… littered with empty oxygen and cooking gas cylinders, tins, tents, sleeping bags,

food, ropes…and the frozen corpses of climbers who have died on the mountain.’” (Tenenbaum

2000) Aside from tourists, even the famous Hunt expedition where Edmund Hillary had taken a

part had left behind a massive load of trash on the mountain. Hillary was famous for being one of

the first people to reach the summit of Mt. Everest alongside Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. In order to

successfully climb to the top, Hillary had to have the characteristics of great leadership, bravery,

and physical strength. On his way to the top, Hillary was also guilty of lugging many supplies on

the mountain. As they were on Mt. Everest, “The 400-strong Hunt expedition of 1953, of which

Edmund Hillary was a part, included 20 Sherpa guides and 362 porters carrying 4,500kg of

baggage.” (Rees 2009) Even after this expedition, “…as much as 50 tonnes of rubbish has been

left behind on the slopes…” (Rees 2009)

Climbing on Mt. Everest also leads to the decline of resources or the disturbances of the

environment and ecosystems that surround it. Although tourism and expeditions may bring in

money and good business for the communities that surround Everest, the nature that surrounds

the mountain is affected greatly in its environment. For example, the wide range of climbers

contributes a good part of the income that surrounding communities depend on. But at the same

rate of its success, Everest is also impacted by the pollution that the climbers neglect on the

mountain. According to Rees, “Everest has become a victim of its own success…” (Rees 2009)

Aside from pollution on Everest, there is different wildlife in other world famous landmarks that

are also affected by the same characteristics of any foreign traveler. Tourists change the behavior

of the wildlife and the natural environment of the landmark as the climbers on Mt. Everest

caused pollution and changes in the mountain’s environment as well. As an example of what

other environments are facing, “It’s not just geography that can be threatened by tourists.

Animals may be affected by the presence of tourists as well. A 1990 survey by J.S. Akama

published in *Progress in Tourism and Hospitality Research* found that 80% of tourists in Kenya

were disturbed by animal harassment, off-road driving, and vehicle congestion” (Tenenbaum

2000) Another instance of a change in the environment would be the over usage of the resources

from the mountain and complying with the needs of the climbers by the native people who live

near the mountain. To keep warm, many of the climbers drink tea or other hot drinks to maintain

their regular body temperatures. The most common drink, which would be tea, requires the use

of the vegetation around the mountain. As a result, “Many teahouses burn juniper, the main

vegetation above that area from 14,000 feet, for heat and cooking. Overharvesting ‘is turning that

area from 14,000 to 18,000 feet into a high-altitude desert,’… ‘It takes 150 years for one of those

things to get an inch and a half in diameter.’” (Hancock 2003) Due to the increased cultural and

environmental changes of Everest, the native people who lived around the mountain in

surrounding communities also have had to adapt to the business associated with mountain

climbing. As an effect of the increasing demand for mountain climbing, “’the most affected are

local residents…allowed the possibility of attaining stable economic growth to slip through their

fingers if only they would have paid more attention to planning.” (Castilho and others 1994)

The result of all of this pollution is the ruining of the grand appearance of the mountain

and its natural beauty. Jon Krakauer had his experience on the mountain which included the

witnessing of the waste on the mountain and disorder within the several other expeditions that

were climbing on Everest. As he was reaching for the summit, Krakauer saw a situation where

the pollution left behind from previous expeditions lay in the snow undisturbed. From

Krakauer’s book *Into Thin Air*, he states that “Just back from the lip of this chasm, at the Col’s

westernmost edge, the tents of Camp Four squatted on a patch of barren ground surrounded by

more than a thousand discarded oxygen canisters.” (Krakauer 169) In a message from an

orphaned Sherpa, the orphan predicts that the disasters happened in Krakauer’s expedition

because “Sagarmanji,” “mother goddess of the earth”, supposedly punished them for infiltrating

the nature of the mountain. In an excerpt from Krakauer’s book, the orphan says that, “They

helped outsiders find their way into the sanctuary and violate every limb of her body by standing

on top of her, crowning in victory, and dirtying and pollution her bosom.” (Krakauer 299) Before

ruining the nature, expeditions to Everest were held for exploration and discoveries, but now,

there are many manufacturing expeditions that go for business reasons. Alton Byers, research

director for the U.S.-based Mountain Institute says, “’I start having problems when you start

manufacturing explorers or start having things like reality TV shows.’ ‘It all started with the

spirit of exploration--searching for knowledge. Then it became nationalistic. Then it became

commercialized and privatized.’” (Hancock 2003) In another person’s experience, Pete Athans, a

seven-time summiteers from Colorado, says, “’There’s been a dissolution of the spirit that’s

there, there being a much more competitive spirit and a much more selfish spirit on the part of

the people who are there who are interested in getting themselves to the top at all cost.’”

(Hancock 2003)

However, an opposing argument would say that eco-tourism on Everest is beneficial to

the mountain because it can provide a good source of income to the neighboring communities

that surround the mountain. From this suggestion, there is Eco-tourism. Eco-tourism is tourism in

exotic, often threatened, natural environments, used especially to support conservation efforts

and to observe wildlife. In some cases, “…eco-tourism has come to symbolize the fastest

growing business in the world” (Castilho and others 1994). Eco-tourism in other countries like

Costa Rica “…is being forced to choose between mass and low-impact tourism.” (Castilho and

others 1994) Eco-tourism can also be beneficial in opening up new jobs and businesses. Again,

in the country of Costa Rica, “The Minister of Tourism, Luis Manuel Chacon, also believes the

country’s future lies with tourism, but form a different angle; he defends the creation of

thousands of new jobs through mass tourism.” (Castilho and others 1994) In another person’s

opinions, “’Eco-tourism is our first experience of a total symbiosis between business and the

environment in modern times. Without either component, the activity would disappear. It is the

first case where executives and investors have no alternative but to consider ecologists as

partners instead of enemies.’” (Castilho and others 1994)

The opposing sides may say that eco-tourism and climbing expeditions may be beneficial

to the mountain, but on the contrary, mountain climbing expeditions bring detriment to Everest

from the pollution that it brings along. Not only is the pollution a major problem, the ecosystems,

environment, and the overall beauty of the mountain become affected as well.

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