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English pd. 2

The Damaging Environmental Effects of Mountain Climbing

After Sir Edmund Hillary’s first success at climbing Mt. Everest in 1953, many other expeditions have taken place such as George Mallory’s and Jon Krakauer’s expeditions, inspiring thousands of people to attempt to scale the once overpowering mountain. As more and more successful expeditions are being completed, the business of guiding expeditions through the Himalayas skyrockets. Now, the once isolated Himalayan villages have become crowded and industrialized as large businesses began to extract natural resources from the mountain to build lodges and roads in the region. The growth in the number of climbing expeditions has proven to be detrimental to both the Himalayan environment and the local communities. Although efforts are being made by Nepalese government organizations to protect the environment of the Himalayan mountain regions, the increase in the number of climbing expeditions on Mt. Everest has still effectively damaged the mountain and the surrounding villages through the increase in trash and air pollution, the deforestation of the Himalayas, and the overgrazing of local farm and grasslands.

The climbing expeditions of Mt. Everest have produced large amounts of litter and trash collections in the crevices of the mountain. The amount of trash littering the slopes of Everest, therefore, has accumulated as a direct result of the increase in the number of expeditions taking place on the mountain. In the Ecologist Magazine article regarding the environment of Mt. Everest, it is stated that, “Since Edmund Hillary’s Everest expedition in 1953, as much as 50 tonnes of rubbish has been left behind on the slopes: paper, plastic, cans, glass, clothes, tents, countless oxygen bottles and approximately 180 bodies.” (Rees 2009). The expeditions of Mt. Everest have introduced thousands of pounds of trash to the mountain, and because the trash is not being removed quickly enough, the mounds of garbage continue to pile up. The more expeditions to Mount Everest, the larger the collections of trash will become.

Also, in order to accommodate the large number of tourists who travel to the Himalayas to ascend Mt. Everest, large businesses have begun clearing the vegetation at the base of the mountain to clear land for new lodges and roads. To clear the vegetation quickly, the crops and trees in the lower mountains are being burned to a point where there is not even grass left in the areas. As a result of these fires, harmful toxins are being released, causing air pollution. In the Economist magazine article about pollution in the Himalayas, it is written that, “Where people are clearing vegetation by burning it, soot is expected,” but as Angela Marinoni of the Institute of Atmospheric Sciences and Climate in Bologna explained to an audience at the second Third Pole Environment Workshop in Kathmandu on October 27th, “The high Himalayas are under an onslaught from this sort of pollution.” (The Economist 2010). Because the expeditions of Mt. Everest have led to the introduction of clearing vegetation through the use of fire, toxins have been released that continuously deteriorate the quality of air surrounding the mountains and communities.

Climbing expeditions of Mt. Everest have been injurious to the environment of the mountain and the surrounding villages because it has led to the degradation of the Himalayas. Once Everest was introduced to industrialization as a result of tourism, companies took advantage of the vast forestland in the Himalayas by setting up logging trades. Deforestation of the Himalayas has produced an increase in the number of erosions that now occur on the mountains because once the trees are uprooted, there is nothing to slow down the rocks from breaking down. According to the International Wildlife Magazine, “Nepal has cut down nearly half its trees since the conquest of Everest in 1953…every year an estimated 264 million tons of topsoil erode out of the hills, impoverishing thousands of hill farmers.” (Hinrichsen 1996). As the number of erosions increase, the land at the base of the Himalayas becomes rocky and barren, forcing more and more local farmers off of the land.

This erosion and degradation of grass and farm lands have resulted in thousands of livestock being moved into smaller spaces, causing overgrazing of the land. Because of deforestation, farmers’ lands have become desolate to a point where they can no longer grow crops on the land or graze their cattle. In an effort to save their animals from starving on barren lands, farmers have moved their herds into smaller, lusher areas. However, the migration of thousands of livestock has caused overgrazing and has caused the foothills of Mt. Everest to become harsh and bleak. In an article published in the World Watch Institute magazine, it is stated by environmentalists currently located in Nepal that in the Himalayas, “The impacts of overgrazing are widely visible in decreases of palatable grasses, invasion by noxious weeds, and soil compaction. The end result can be barren landscapes.” (Denniston 1993). The overgrazing of cattle caused by industrialization has caused the Himalayas to become desolate and is damaging the livelihood of the local farmers who depend on the land and livestock.

Even though the increase in tourism and industrialization as a result of climbing Mt. Everest has been damaging to the environment of both the Himalayas and the surrounding communities, the deteriorating environmental health has encouraged the creation of multiple organizations aimed at restoring the natural beauty of the mountains. Since the 1990s, environmental groups have been organized to focus on reintroducing indigenous plants and animals to the region. Also, these groups have sponsored the creation of hundreds of national parks in the Himalayas, protecting thousands of acres of land from any industrialization. According to Dr. Hemantra Mishra, a biodiversity specialist with the World Bank in Washington, D.C., “There are at least 131 national parks and protected areas covering about 863,000 hectares in the Himalaya…the areas include pristine forests, alpine meadows and several species of endangered animals, birds, herbs and orchids.” (Castilho 1994). As a result of the efforts of the environmental organizations, the Himalayas have prospered and have become healthier and lusher with vegetation than they ever were before. In the International Wildlife Magazine, it is stated that, “After a decade of work, the erosion scars that used to mar hillsides have been healed. Groves of pine trees now march down once-barren slopes, anchoring and stabilizing soils.”(Hinrichsen 1996). The destruction of the Himalayan environment brought upon the area by the increase in climbing expeditions and business development has inspired organizations to protect hundreds of acres of land. Now that there is increased awareness of the deteriorating environment, more effort is being put in to restoring the land and protecting parts of the forests and mountains from deforestation and industrialization.

Although environmental organizations have begun to establish national parks to protect the Himalayan environment, the increase in the number of climbing expeditions have proven to be damaging to both the mountain region and surrounding villages because of trash and air pollution, the deforestation of the mountains, and the overgrazing of farmlands. In order to accommodate the increase in the amount of tourists who travel to the Nepal/Tibet region, large industries have flocked to the Himalayas. As a result of the upsurge in the climbing industry of Mt. Everest, the region will continue to become industrialized until it is no longer one of the natural wonders of the world.

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