

# Mount Everest

## What A Mess!

Rebecca E. Hirsch

**O**n May 29, 1953, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa guide Tenzing Norgay became the first people to climb to the top of the world's tallest mountain. The following day, as the weary expedition celebrated and prepared for the descent, leader John Hunt ordered his men to dump their extra equipment. The downward climb would be grueling. Carry only what you need, he told them. The men could not have known that Mount Everest's trash problem had begun.

### Trash on Mount Everest?

Yes! A lot of it. About 50 tons of garbage litters the slopes. Since 1953, thousands of people have climbed the world's tallest mountain. Many dump their trash to lighten the load. The garbage includes empty oxygen tanks, torn tents, ropes, discarded food and water containers, and human excrement. None of it decomposes in the icy conditions.

### A Trail of Corpses

At least 250 people have died climbing Mount Everest, many of them in the "death zone," the area above 26,000 feet. Avalanches, blizzards, falls, freezing temperatures, low oxygen, exhaustion, lack of experience—all can prove fatal. Most bodies remain on the mountain, too cumbersome for other climbers to bring down. Frozen solid and still in their climbing clothes, the bodies serve as gruesome trail markers. More deaths keep coming. Mount Everest's deadliest day to date happened in April 2014, when 16 Nepali Sherpa guides died in an avalanche of ice and snow.

### Garbage Crackdown

The government of Nepal now requires each expedition to pay a deposit of \$4,000 before heading up the mountain. If climbers want their money back, they have to prove they brought down all of their own garbage, including their own bodily waste. That's right—climbers have to carry their own poop.

This year the government added another rule: In addition to their own trash, climbers must return with an extra 18 pounds of garbage.

## Trash to Treasure

Artists in Nepal are turning Everest's trash into art. Fifteen artists created sculptures from a wide range of Mount Everest trash, including discarded cooking stoves, oxygen tanks, beer cans, and the remains of a crashed helicopter. By using the trash creatively, the artists hope to raise funds as well as awareness of the problem. Profits from art sold go back to Everest Summiters Association, an organization that has collected over 10 tons of garbage from the mountain.

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