

# Papers

## Three adventurous journeys

SIR EDMUND HILLARY

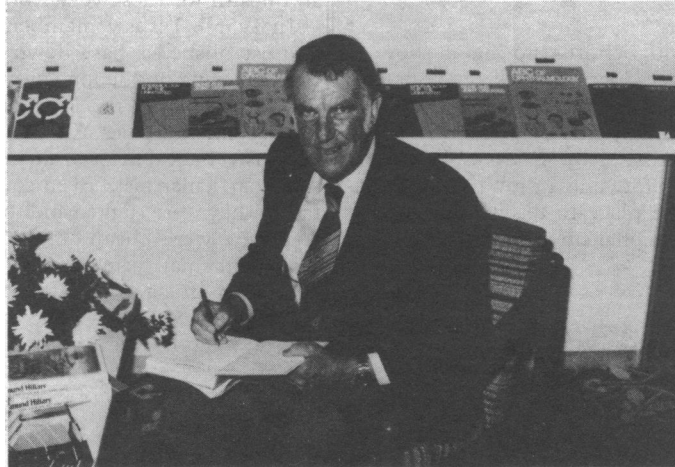
All adventures, whatever they may be, must follow certain basic guidelines if they are to be successful. There must be imagination and enthusiasm, good planning and equipment, fitness and endurance, and an acceptance of fear as a stimulating factor.

Three of my major adventurous journeys reflect most of these qualities. In many ways it all started with Nepal and Mount Everest. Even though Mount Everest was my fourth Himalayan expedition, it was certainly the one which made the greatest effect on my own life. And that expedition of 26 years ago did mean a great deal of travelling and certain medical problems, particularly dysentery, on the way in and was a very exciting and challenging occasion. Squeezed up between China to the north and India to the south, Nepal is a small country about the size of Great Britain and with a population of something over 10 million people. It's a very beautiful country, and Kathmandu, the capital, has an atmosphere of peacefulness, of mystery perhaps, which still fascinates all visitors.

We passed through the whole country of Nepal, with typical villages containing very solid substantial homes, very attractive in that they seem to fit so well into the local topography. And as we climbed up, we started getting great views of the Himalayan peaks—Mount Gaurishankar, for instance, climbed only this year for the first time. At that time of the year, the flowers were everywhere: rhododendrons clinging to every steep slope and giant magnolia trees in full blossom. Finally, we reached an altitude of about 12 000 feet and then saw ahead of us the great summit of Mount Everest still plastered in snow and with that plume of snow streaming from its summit which is such a common feature of this mountain.

In 1953 we established our base camp at about 17 000 feet. It was an uncomfortable base camp, with tents just pitched on rocky moraine spread over the ice (in recent years a more satisfactory base camp has been established a little further up the valley) and from here we had to overcome the first major

hazard—the ice fall, which has probably claimed more lives on Everest than any other part of the mountain. Here one climbs up and down through crevasses; today many of them are crossed by aluminium ladders but in our time most of them were traversed by the use of logs and wood carried up from the lower valleys. Then you have to climb up ice cliffs; many of them are extremely unstable, but we slung rope ladders down them and our porters carried cumbersome loads up to the next step. To get a rope ladder down a sheer cliff you first have to climb up it, so there is a certain amount of technically demanding work in establishing our route through the ice fall.



Sir Edmund Hillary signing copies of *From the Ocean to the Sky* at the BMJ stand at the BMA Congress, Hong Kong.

### Big push forward

Finally, we established camps on the upper parts of the mountain, and the moment came when the big push forward was finally under way. Even at 21 000 feet in the Western Cwm we had bare arms because when there was no wind blowing it got decidedly hot with the reflection of the sun off the snow, but as soon as the wind came up then we got very cold and on went our down jackets for insulation. We established camp on the Lhotse face and the following day one on the South Col, at 26 000 feet, which is unquestionably the most uncomfortable camp site that I've ever spent three days in. Most of the time the wind blows furiously across the col. One feels rather remote up there and in general it's not the sort of place that you'd want to spend a Bank Holiday. Nevertheless, after one delay caused by bad weather, from this camp Tenzing and I and a few companions set off up the mountain to establish our high base camp, which we finally did on the slopes of a rounded bump at 27 900 feet. This camp site looked like heaven itself because it was so much better than anything else we had come across. We dug out a couple of little terraces, pitched our tent across them in an uncomfortable fashion, and tied them down as well as we could. Having discussed who should sleep where, in the end Tenzing slept on the bottom ledge and I slept on the top ledge with my feet across him just resting on the other side. For the course of the night during this period I worked out that we had just sufficient oxygen for four hours of using it at one litre a minute. Of course, that is a very small quantity of oxygen if you are working hard, but this had a miraculous effect on us. For the four hours we were breathing oxygen we slept peacefully, but as soon as the first cylinder ran out we woke up feeling cold and miserable; once

### Auckland, New Zealand

HILLARY, Sir EDMUND, KBE, LLD, author, lecturer, and mountaineer.

This article is an abbreviated and edited manuscript of a tape recording made of Sir Edmund's opening address in the session on the medical problems of extensive travel, at the BMA Congress in Hong Kong. Sir Edmund gave the *BMJ* permission to prepare a suitable article.

we started breathing oxygen again we slept for another two peaceful hours.

Fortunately the morning was fine. We took quite a while to make our preparations but set off up the upper slopes of the mountain with the aim of reaching the summit. Climbing up the steep slopes to the south summit was arduous: remember that this was before the days when everybody more or less makes tourist trips to the summit of Everest and much of the ground ahead was unknown. Perhaps even more important was that the physiologists had assured us that if by any chance anything went wrong with our oxygen supply we would immediately drop dead. (Nowadays, of course, the physiologists would have to drop dead because we have discovered that the human body has a remarkable ability to achieve great heights without oxygen and Everest has been climbed without oxygen now on four occasions.)

The final summit ridge was quite impressive. Looking along it it reminded me more of the sort of alpine type of ridge that one would see in the European Alps, or even in the New Zealand Alps, except there was cornice overhanging on the right, which demanded considerable care and the need to keep down on the left-hand side of the ridge and I actually chipped steps all the way along. We came to what is known as the step in the ridge and wriggled our way up a crack between the ice on the right and the rock on the left on to the final part of the ridge, making our way along the summit section ultimately to reach the top.

### On the summit

This was the culmination of our effort and fig 2 shows Tenzing standing on the summit of Everest. I've often been asked why there isn't a picture of me on the summit of Everest and my answer has always been that, firstly, I never really thought about it much and, secondly, that, so far as I knew, Tenzing had never used a camera before and I didn't really feel that the summit of Everest was the place to teach him. After Everest had been climbed a little nationalism crept into various



FIG 2—Tenzing on the summit of Everest, 1953. (Copyright of the Royal Geographical Society.)

reactions, particularly in Asia, and one Indian newspaper complained bitterly that when I took this photograph I had waited carefully until the Union Jack was showing clearly before pressing the trigger because obviously the photograph would

show that this had been a British expedition. At the time, of course, such matters were certainly very far from my thoughts. I wasn't all that enthusiastic about taking any flags to the top of Everest, and in actual fact turned down the offer when John Hunt suggested it, but Tenzing was happy to do so.

### My Sherpa friends

The ascent of Everest made a tremendous difference to my own life and the life of all those who had been on this long walk. Over the years, moreover, I've become very closely linked with the people of Everest probably because of my expeditions there over the years. These projects have included not only climbing and exploration, but establishing schools and a couple of small hospitals in co-operation with the Sherpa people. The volunteer doctors there normally serve for two years and they make quite a contribution to the health of the local people. In the early days goitre was a major problem in this area, with many of the children born as cretins. As a consequence of injecting iodised oil goitre has virtually been eradicated from this area and the children are now as bright and sharp as they are anywhere. There are also problems of severe burns in children which occur when they roll into the open fire found in the Sherpa houses. I find all these activities very satisfying because these people are my friends. I feel no sense of being very noble about it, but we get a great deal of pleasure out of being able to provide education and health for these very worthy people.

In 1956-8 I was a member of the Transantarctic Expedition and established a base down in McMurdo Sound in the Ross Sea for laying out depots towards the South Pole. I also planned to take tractors to the Pole and had arranged to have sufficient fuel for this purpose. We had a number of dog teams as well as various vehicles, most of them farm tractors entirely unsuited to their particular task. Even so, the tractors did have two advantages: they were rugged and tough, as any farm tractor has to be; and they were cheap (in fact, they didn't cost us anything). Using our small farm tractors with endless belts running over the wheels we dragged ton after ton of supplies to Pram Point and there we assembled a large number of buildings together, and before long everything was closed in and safely protected against the weather.

Before the onset of winter we made a number of sledge journeys about the area, but finally the sun disappeared to the north, darkness set in, and for several months we saw the sun no more. But it was a time of extreme activity, making preparations for our journey south, while the five or six scientists carried out extensive research studies, as part of the International Geophysical Year Programme. When the sun returned it was a tremendous moment after the darkness of winter, and feverish activity started: trips were made, preparations finalised; scientific work hurried up; and finally with our full vehicles we headed south over the Ross Ice shelf towards the South Pole.

To get to the polar plateau we had to climb up the Skelton Glacier, to which we had sent dog teams the previous year, though no vehicles had ever been before. Immediately we encountered the trying problem of travel in the Antarctic: crevasses. Mostly these are concealed and our only method of knowing where there was one was to drive over it; then the tractors' big heavy back wheels would punch a hole in the crevasse and if we were lucky we would lurch our way to the other side heaving a sigh of relief and waiting for the next crevasse to come along. For week after week we travelled through a crevasse area and the constant strain of not knowing whether you would break through into a crevasse started to wear down the lot of us as we travelled our way slowly southwards. (Our top speed was about three miles an hour and the biggest day's journey was 60 miles when we drove continuously for 20 hours.) On the plateau at 9000 feet in places the going was very firm and the tough hardy tractors rattled their way along. But then there were occasions in which the snow was extremely soft and more often than not we would break through into crevasses. We

had only three vehicles left now, all roped together with very strong ropes so that the lead tractor, which was the one that usually broke through, wouldn't go too far and it would be possible to check its fall and then tow it out. This happened on many occasions (fig 3) but it left almost a psychological mark on each one of us because we never knew when the next crevasse might appear.



FIG 3—Rescuing a tractor from a crevasse. (From *The Crossing of Antarctica*, by Sir Vivian Fuchs and Sir Edmund Hillary.)

Over the final 100 miles to the Pole we just drove on and on. We knew that we just had to keep going: we were running out of fuel and enthusiasm and it was a very good moment when we finally arrived at the South Pole, where the Americans had established a base by transferring everything by airlift. So we had, at least, been the first to take vehicles to the South Pole.

### Ocean to sky

More recently I've been concerned in a different type of travel. Inevitably, as one gets older, what one does tends to be adjusted to one's physical capabilities. I've found that it's surprisingly easy to adjust to expeditions in which you have vigorous young members of the party who can accept and overcome the difficult challenges while you do the organising, the planning, and the leading of the trips. In this way you get just as much satisfaction out of it as if you are meeting the major challenges yourself.

Our objective three years ago was to go up the Ganges River against the current from the ocean to its sources in the mountains. From the ocean to the sky they called it, and we had three jet boats, rather simple runabouts which, instead of having a propeller and a rudder, use an advanced pump system to suck water through underneath the hull and eject it out the back. They are very fast, extremely mobile, and very exciting in fast-flowing white-water rivers. We started right down near the coast in the Bay of Bengal from an island called Gangesagar, which is regarded as the mouth of the Ganges, where, like all the people who go up the Ganges, we thought it desirable to have the blessings of the local priest or punjaree.

After the ceremony we headed up the Hooghly River, which is one of the main outlets of the Ganges, and up to Calcutta, where there were vast numbers of people lining the banks—as there were as far as 40 or 50 miles up from Calcutta, where the banks were lined with people 40 or 50 deep. In fact, one of the Indian members of the expedition who has travelled a great deal said that we probably passed a total number of people equivalent to the population of New Zealand. And certainly the enthusiasm

and the warmth that radiated from these people showed that our journey was not only to them an adventure but was also a tremendous spiritual journey up to the source of Mother Ganga. Even we had this feeling over the journey and for a while at least became Hindu in our outlook, accepting the sort of beliefs and the spiritual feeling of this whole journey.

The river is enormous in its lower reaches, especially as we travelled at the tail end of the monsoon, and as we camped on the banks we had the opportunity to meet many of the rural people of India, finding them astonishingly courageous and having great dignity. Though the river was wide, it wasn't always easy to find suitable channels and in places we would run aground on sandy banks and come to a violent halt. On occasions the crew was thrown through the front and into the water as the boats came to a dead halt, and this became a daily occurrence as we were passing through an area where there were many sandbanks. We spent three wonderful days in the famous old town of Varanasi or Benares, and, though we had been concerned that the local people and the many thousands of pilgrims might be offended by our noisy boats, this was far from the case: they welcomed us as people who were making the great pilgrimage.

### Difficult water

After travelling for 1300 miles we reached the foothills of the Himalayas and the really exciting part began so far as the difficult water was concerned. We struck rapid after rapid and we would camp at night and carry on next day with a series of rapids ahead of us. Often, faced with very difficult rapids, we would unload most of the supplies in the boat and the actual run would be done by the chief driver alone travelling as light as possible. We reached the little mountain town of Delpreeag and subsequently there was an even more devastating rapid at Andapriag, where we had considerable difficulty in making our way to the calmer water above.

A little further up was a very narrow gorge, where we knew that there was a difficult rapid which we had called the shute.

### All the lonely people

"Distinguished renal physician (widower), acknowledged to be of an 'even tempered and cheerful disposition and never heard to utter a sentiment not fit to be heard by the meanest child or most refined female' wishes to meet such a female with a view to a second happy marriage."—BRIGHT

"Impotent sexologist, contemplating extensive literary work, wishes to meet lady with lesbian tendencies."—HAVELOCK ELLIS

"Scottish bone surgeon, expert amputator, wishes to meet a genteel lady. Determined to remain in Edinburgh, as recent appointment in London most unsatisfactory, and advertiser was forced to return."—SYMES

"Well known London physician, with appointment to Her Majesty the Queen, obsessive traveller and fluent writer, would like to meet a young lady with a view to marriage. Daughter of wit or clergyman, preferably both, would be most compatible."—HENRY HOLLAND

"Gloucestershire physician interested in dairymaids and practical research would welcome introduction to a delicate lady of good family."—JENNER

"London surgeon with extensive clinical and educational commitments seeks marriageable lady. No time for courtship and proposal, if a suitable candidate presents herself, will be by letter, with a two week period for consideration allowed."—ABERNETHY

ANN SAVAGE

Getting up this chute was certainly one of the challenges of our journey (fig 4). We had been going for day after day and already we were feeling the pressure of this constant travel, not knowing what we would see around the next corner or what difficult rapid would next have to be overcome. There was always this sense of danger, of fear, and, even though all of us could swim perfectly adequately and had life jackets on, there was always the risk of drowning if one was thrown out into these rapids.

Finally, we came to the end of the line, a waterfall 10 or 12 feet high that even our jet boats couldn't surmount, and we were still about 100 miles from our final destination—the snowfields of the Himalayas from which the river originally

comes. So we carried on on foot and travelled up the narrow winding roads to a base camp at 15 000 feet, from which we planned to climb to the snowfields and then to surmount a smaller mountain, in Himalayan terms, of about 19 200 feet.

I reached our final camp at 18 000 feet feeling extremely exhausted, though I'd carried only about 50 lb, compared with the 80-lb load that some of the others had shouldered. In this beautiful spot I duly passed out from pulmonary oedema. I'd managed to survive about 30 years of Himalayan climbing without having pulmonary oedema and to my disgust I finally succumbed to it on this occasion and had to be lowered down the mountain and finally evacuated. But the other members of the party, including my son Peter, carried on to reach the summit of the beautiful mountain and there to fly the temple flag given to us at Badrinath.

In many ways we felt that this was the culmination of our journey from the ocean to the sky. We had started where the Ganges meets the sea: had travelled all the way up the river and seen perhaps millions of people and had had a tremendous warmth of welcome: had battled against a series of difficult rapids; and then finally members had stood on the summit of the world from which the Ganges draws its water. And for us it was a tremendous experience—for me perhaps the most interesting experience that I've ever undertaken. Not only had there been adventure but there had been this close relationship with the people of that great country, India.

These three journeys are perhaps a little different from what most people take. In each of them, however, there were the same factors: determination; good planning; and enthusiasm. On many occasions we suffered from physical discomfort or maladies such as dysentery but these did not detract from the fact that we were meeting interesting challenges, that we were overcoming them, and that we confidently hoped that we would meet with success at our destination.



FIG 4—Facing the rapids on the Ganges. (Photographed by Peter Hillary and reproduced by permission of Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.)

## Harvard Requiem

Who killed Harvard Robin?  
I said Vancouver  
With my fell manoeuvre  
I killed Harvard Robin.

Who saw him die?  
Well, of course, said the author,  
With my little eye  
I saw him die. In fact, I said  
To the chap sitting next to me  
In the library, *he's* not going  
To last the night. Look at  
Those contractions, that wasting away of the words.  
Rigor Verbis has set in. Yes,  
With my little eye  
I saw him die.

Who sutured the shroud?  
I said the librarian, out of a duster,  
One semi-colon, and two info. clusters.  
I sutured the shroud.

Who dug his grave?  
I said King Computer  
With my nitpicking ways.  
Didn't Freud describe  
The cut of my spade?  
I dug his gr.

Who was the parson?  
Said *Index Medicus*, look,  
With my little book  
(Hallelujah)  
I was the parson.

Who was chief mourner?  
I said a reader  
It was I shed a tear  
For the names who're not here,  
And hated the numbers  
That pointed ahead  
But gave nothing at all  
On the page as it read,  
And sighed for the date  
That told an idea was  
Early or late.

It was growth that I missed,  
Time passing I kissed.  
I was the dove  
Who mourned for my love.  
I was chief mourner.

Who carried the coffin?  
We said the journals,  
With our subbing maternal  
We carried the coffin.

Who tolled the bell?  
We said the mourners,  
Though we've no pull,  
We tolled the bell.

All the birds of the air  
Fell a-sighing and a-sobbing  
When they heard the bell toll  
for Harvard Robin.

Toll (1979)  
The bell was tolled.<sup>1-8</sup>  
Requiescat

—GRACE WILLIAMS (London).

(Like 100 other journals, the *BMJ* will use the Vancouver style from 5 January 1980.)