**A Short Biography of Edmund Hillary**

Edmund Hillary was born in Auckland, [New Zealand](https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/new-zealand), in 1919 to Percival Hillary, a journalist and part-time beekeeper, and his wife Gertrude. Edmund’s paternal grandparents had moved to New Zealand from Yorkshire, England, in the 1800s.

The family lived in a small village called Tuakau, where Edmund and his older sister and younger brother went to the local primary school. For secondary school, they commuted over three hours a day (by bike and train) to and from Auckland Grammar School, until the family relocated to an Auckland suburb.

Edmund loved to read and **dreamed of an adventurous life**. He got his first taste for climbing at 16, on a school trip to Mount Ruapehu where he saw snow for the first time. By 20, he had **climbed his first major mountain**, Mount Ollivier. Edmund studied maths and science at the University of Auckland, but left after two years because he wanted to see the world. He worked during the summer as a beekeeper with his father and brother, and continued to climb in winter.

During World War II, Edmund joined the Royal New Zealand Air Force as a navigator. He was badly burnt in a boat accident in Fiji in 1945 and was sent home to recover.

In 1953, Edmund was asked to join a **British climbing expedition**, attempting to scale **Mount Everest**. Over 400 people took part, including 362 porters and 20 Sherpa guides. They climbed in stages to get used to the altitude, and at each camp, some remained while others climbed on. At the last stage, two teams were chosen for the final ascent. Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans were picked to go first, and got within 300 feet of the 29,028 ft (8,848 m) summit, but turned back when Evans’ oxygen system failed. Then Edmund and Tenzing Norgay had a chance.

Despite the difficulties of the climb, including a 40 ft (12 m) rock face (now called ‘Hillary’s Step’), they **made it to the top on 29th May 1953**. They didn’t stay long because the air was so thin, but Tenzing left an offering of chocolates in the snow and Edmund left a cross that John Hunt, the expedition leader, had given him. It was difficult to retrace their steps because drifting snow had covered their tracks, but a member of the support team soon met them with hot soup! News of the expedition’s success reached Britain on 2nd June, the day of Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation. The Queen immediately knighted both Edmund and John Hunt.

Edmund continued to climb in the years that followed, **conquering ten other peaks in the Himalayas**. In 1958, he also took an **expedition to the South Pole**. The group were the third to reach the South Pole over land, and the first to do so using motor vehicles.

In 1960, Edmund founded **the Himalayan Trust**, which built many schools and hospitals for the people of Nepal. He was also patron of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre in New Zealand, introducing young people to the outdoors, just as he had been on a school trip as a 16-year-old boy.

Edmund led one last expedition in 1977 before retiring to his bee farm near Auckland. He **wrote several books** about his adventures and had a busy schedule of touring, lecturing and fundraising. Edmund also campaigned for mountain conservation work, to clean up climbing debris such as oxygen bottles and other equipment and litter. In 1989, he married June Mulgrew, the widow of his close friend Peter.

When Edmund died in 2008 at the age of 88, flags flew at half-mast on government and public buildings in New Zealand and he was given a state funeral. For the people of Nepal, his legacy lives on in the many schools and hospitals he helped to fund, and in climbers’ attempts to scale Mount Everest to this day, in reflection of Edmund’s enthusiasm for life and adventure.

VIPER QUESTIONS ( for session 4)

1) Which word is closest in meaning to **debris?**

**treasures, waste, equipment**

2) In which year did Hillary lead his last expedition?

3) What was the purpose of the Himalayan trust?

4) I have inferred from this text that Edmund Hillary was considered to be very special in his home country of New Zealand. What information in the text makes me think that?

5) What does 'patron' mean?

6) Can you write a fact about this text?