

Our Mountain

For British climbers of the 1920s and 1930s, Everest was, quite simply, ‘our mountain’. It didn’t matter that it was over 4500 miles away on the border of two of the most remote countries in the world, countries that weren’t even part of the British Empire. To paraphrase the poet Rupert Brooke, it was a foreign field that would be forever England. The British had measured it, named it, photographed it, flown over it and died on it. And so they assumed that one day a British mountaineer would be first to its summit.

Everest was measured in the mid-nineteenth century. It stands in the middle of the Himalayas, on the border of Nepal and Tibet and like many mountains, marks both a physical and political boundary. Even though none of the surveyors ever set foot on its slopes, the Great Trigonometric Survey of British India was able to measure its height with astonishing accuracy from observation points over one hundred miles away. They estimated it to be 29,002ft, 27ft shorter than the current official height. Breaking with convention, instead of retaining its local name, Chomolungma, they christened it Mount Everest, in honour of George Everest, a former chief surveyor.

At about the same time, the sport of mountaineering was growing in the European Alps. British climbers were very competitive , making first ascents of many peaks in Switzerland and France and, in 1857, establishing the world’s first mountaineering society, the Alpine Club. Within a few years most of the high mountains of the Alps had been climbed and the more enthusiastic mountaineers had begun to look further afield for new challenges.

VIPER Questions ( session 4)

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

**never, eternally, frequently**

2) How high did the Great Trigonometric Survey of British India estimate Everest was?

3) How far away is Everest from Britain?

4) How do you think local people would feel about the British naming the mountain Everest rather than using the local name of Chomolungma?

5) What does 'assumed' mean?

6) Can you write a fact about this text?