

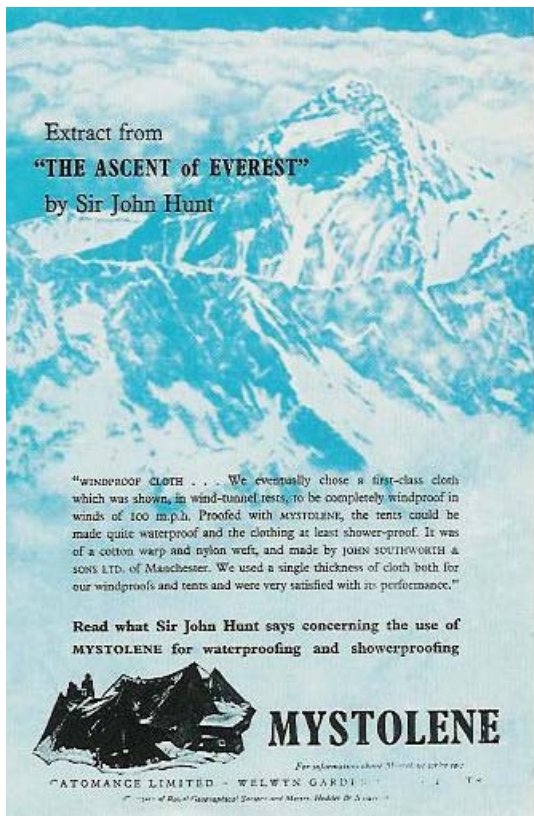


Mystolene on top of the World

The year 1953 was an exciting one for Catomance.

Fifty years ago on 29 May 1953, two men stood on the top of the World for the first time. On that day, the British expedition to conquer Mount Everest succeeded.

The 1953 expedition was led by John Hunt (later Sir John), a British Army officer seconded from duty in Germany. Hunt had been chosen for his organisational and leadership skills. All earlier attempts to conquer the mountain had failed and the British expedition of 1953 had to succeed or risk losing the race.



A Mystolene product from the Catomance range helped in achieving success in 1953. Later, in his account of the expedition, Sir John Hunt wrote:

For windproof cloth we eventually chose a first-class cloth which was shown, in wind-tunnel tests, to be completely windproof in winds of 100 mph. Proofed with Mystolene, the tents could be made quite waterproof and the clothing at least showerproof. It was of a cotton warp and nylon weft and made by John Southworth & Sons of Manchester. We used a single thickness of cloth both for our windproofs and tents and were very satisfied with its performance.

The two members of the British expedition to reach the summit for the first time on 29 May were Sir Edmund Hillary, a bee keeper from New Zealand, and Tenzing Norgay, a Nepalese Sherpa born in Tibet.

They were the first men to stand on the table top-sized pinnacle of the highest mountain in the World. It was an inhospitable place of wild winds, biting cold, little oxygen and blue-black skies.



The immensity of what Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay did on that bright day in 1953 is nearly impossible to imagine. There were no fixed ropes and aluminium ladders, no polar fleece, no GPS for navigational guidance. Just two men tied together, hacking steps in the ice to climb to the summit at more than 29,000 feet (almost five and a half miles) above sea level.

It was at 11:30 a.m. when they reached the highest point on Earth. Hillary and Tenzing spent only a total of fifteen minutes on the summit for their oxygen supply was running out and they still had the dangerous descent to make.

Hillary busied himself taking a couple of photographs of Tenzing, but there are no photographs of Edmund Hillary on the summit. Not knowing if the Sherpa could operate a camera, he did not ask Tenzing to take one of him – “the summit of Everest was hardly the place to show him how”, he later wrote.

Tenzing left some biscuits, a piece of chocolate and a few sweets as a gift to the Gods; Hillary placed a small cross beside them. Then, having admired the views all around, shared a bar of mint cake and picked up a few stones from the first visible patch of rock, they headed back down to base camp.



Much has changed in fifty years. When Hillary and Tenzing shook hands and embraced on that patch of snow five and a half miles in the sky, they had no witnesses. Since 1953, around 1,200 people have reached the top of Everest.