



OTHER EVERESTS
ONE MOUNTAIN – MANY WORLDS
by Paul Gilchrist, Peter Hansen and Jonathan Westway

Reviewed by Mal Creasey

For those who think they have a pretty good knowledge of Everest, its history, environs and indigenous populations, and haven't read this book (which is likely as it only recently been published,) I can safely say – you don't know nothing yet! Excuse the misquote from the song but this in-depth study of all things Everest, Chomolungma or Sagarmatha – call it what you will – only one mountain, but so many facets and so many lives affected, either directly or indirectly on and around this unique region and mountain over the years. It has always been an ever-changing picture from the early expeditions of the 1920s to the present day with literally hundreds of people undertaking a variety of roles during the 'Everest' season either on the mountain, in the surrounding villages or on the approach.

The book initially looks at the origin of the people, languages

and naming of the mountain and not just Everest but the region as a whole. The isolation from the outside world and limited knowledge of the local inhabitants, both from early visitors, and of course each other with little or no direct links between the Tibetan and Nepalese sides simply adding to the lack of knowledge until about 150 years ago. In the short space of time (relatively speaking) enormous social change has been inflicted on the local populations. The massive incursion of pedestrian traffic, accumulating garbage and global warming have all taken their toll on the landscape.

This book examines the detail behind the commonly known and accepted versions of events, particularly the roles played by the local population, those employed as porters, cooks and base camp staff with, throughout, the common theme of social injustice. Over the years attitudes have thankfully changed since the early days when colonialism was rife and quite honestly, the locals employed on the early expeditions were often treated woefully. Things have improved although not as quickly, or as universally, as it should have. Whilst the locals were initially regarded as little more than beast of burden in spite of the fact that many did 'porter' to quite high altitudes. More correctly they are now regarded as (High Altitude Workers (HAWs)) as their many and varied skills have at least become recognised.

So much has been written over the years regarding major expeditions from the popular, or leading mountaineering

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countries of the world whilst other less well-known participants have often been neglected with little documentation of events or participants involved. Women, both as participants or biographers, have also received less attention than they deserved. Social injustice prevails still today in some cases, however this book seeks to set the record straight and examines the changing role of the local population. Many of whom are taking control of their 'mountain' moving on from HAWs to owners of trekking/mountaineering guiding companies. It is fair to say however that the transition, has, at times been far from easy.

The overriding theme throughout the book relates to numbers involved, numerous expeditions over the years and fee-paying clients, both of whom either directly or indirectly can be held responsible for the amount of garbage on the mountain. Equipment has to be carried up there and although some efforts in more recent years has gone into clearing up the mess, it is mostly abandoned. Of course trekking groups have contributed to

rubbish on the approach but what of the effect on the economy, that is massive and a driving force. The lodge owners benefit from both fee-paying customers and those employed during the season as 'porters' who also require food and lodging. The numbers, are staggering. Add on the filmmakers, photographers, writers and theatre companies and no wonder the internet and wifi is so important in those once remote valleys.

With around 20 contributors, most of whom have access to archives, this book has been diligently researched from a wide variety of sources and attempts to set the record straight. For the editors to bring together the work of so many contributors must have been a mammoth task and in this they have succeeded.

It is a work of great importance and the undoubted 'yardstick' for all things 'Everest'. Having said all that, on a personal note, it is a little dry at times, and not always an easy read.

For you scholars who want the whole story – you will find it invaluable. ■