

[See also Great Awakening; Great Awakening, Second; Methodism; Missions, Christian; Protestantism; and Religious Revivals.]

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KATHRYN LOFTON

EVEREST, MOUNT. At approximately 29,035 feet (8,850 meters), Mount Everest is the highest mountain on earth. The discovery, documentation, and climbing of this Himalayan peak have captured the world's imagination and constitute an integral part of South Asian history. The southern face of Mount Everest is situated

in the Kingdom of Nepal, while its northern ridges lie in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. Although it straddles the Sino-Nepalese border, for official purposes the mountain is located in Nepal at 27°59' N and 86°56' E.

The mountain goes by many names, including Sagar-māthā in Nepali and Sanskrit and Chomolungma in Tibetan. The mountain was identified as the highest in the world in 1852, thanks to trigonometric calculations by the Indian mathematician Radhanath Sikdar (1813–1870). Previously referred to as Peak XV by English speakers, the mountain was named Everest in 1865 in honor of Sir George Everest, the British surveyor-general of India from 1830 to 1843 and director of the final stages of the Great Trigonometric Survey of India. Some Indians believe that Mount Everest should be named after Sikdar.

Some controversy exists about the mountain's exact elevation. Variations in light refraction, gravity deviation, and the snow level of the summit all contribute to varying readings of Mount Everest's height. In 1999 a U.S. team took precise GPS (Global Positioning System) measurements, which confirmed the height at 8,850 meters plus or minus 2 meters.

Since the 1920s, mountaineers have attempted to climb Everest, usually by way of the South Col via the Khumbu icefall from Nepal, or across the northern ridge from the Tibetan side. The climbing window is short because of summer monsoon rains and winter snows, so most summit attempts are made during April and May. A 1953 British expedition led by John Hunt (1910–1998) included Edmund Hillary (1919–2008) from New Zealand and Tenzing Norgay (1914–1986), a Sherpa from the Nepal-Tibet border who had connections to Darjeeling in India. They took the southern route through Nepal, and at 11:30 A.M. on Friday, 29 May 1953—coincidentally the day of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation—Hillary and Norgay became the first climbers known to have reached the summit.

Twenty-nine years earlier, on 8 June 1924, George Mallory (1886–1924) and Andrew Irvine (1902–1924), both from the United Kingdom, had perished in an Everest summit attempt. Recent research expeditions have reignited the debate about whether Mallory reached the summit before his death. A year earlier, on a speaking tour in the United States, to the question, "Why climb Everest?" Mallory famously replied, "Because it is there." A 1996 attempt on the summit ended in disaster with the deaths of eight climbers in a storm, sparking a debate about the merits of commercial expeditions. In 1997 the journalist Jon Krakauer (b. 1954), himself in the climbing

party, published *Into Thin Air*, a controversial best seller that chronicles the tragedy.

Despite the high cost of climbing permits, Everest remains a popular destination for mountaineers. Modern expeditions are careful to minimize environmental impact, often collecting trash and spent oxygen cylinders left by earlier climbers, or searching for the frozen dead bodies of colleagues. The Sherpa community, whose homeland lies along the southern slopes of the mountain, continue to practice seasonal trade and traditional agriculture alongside mountain tourism and guiding.

[See also *Mountain Climbing and Tourism*.]

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MARK TURIN

EVOLUTION. The theory of evolution, most commonly associated with the English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1882), did not spring forth from his mind like Athena from the mind of Zeus. Rather, Darwin developed his theory in light of his predecessors and attempted to provide a compelling scientific account of the “mystery of mysteries,” the origin of new and diverse species. It is important to point out that Darwin did not use the word “evolution” to describe his theory. In the first edition of *On the Origin of Species* (1859) the word “evolution” does not appear. Darwin, however, did use the verbal form “evolved” as the last word of the text in the famous line, “from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved.” Darwin referred to his own theory as the theory of descent with modification and preferred this characterization because he thought it helped to distinguish his theory of species change from preceding ideas.

The Meaning of the Word. The word “evolution” comes from the Latin verb *evolvere*, defined as “to unfold or disclose.” This definition carries with it an implication of teleology, or a predictable process or a directional sequence of events with a particular outcome. By the mid-nineteenth century the word had both vernacular and biological uses that were consistent with this definition. The citations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* demonstrate the common usage as far back as the seventeenth century. It was then that a biological meaning was also attached to the word. An anonymous English reviewer of

Jan Swammerdam’s *Historia insectorum generalis* wrote that when Swammerdam (1637–1680) was discussing the insect metamorphosis “nothing else [is] to be understood but a gradual and natural Evolution and Growth of the parts.”

This association of the word “evolution” with embryology and development led Darwin to avoid its use as a descriptor for his theory. Darwin was at pains to distinguish his theory of descent with modification from the teleology of the developmental process and to demonstrate in the *Origin* that the process of divergence and speciation occurred, not according to some predetermined plan or in a particular direction toward a certain outcome, but rather in response to constantly shifting and changing environmental conditions.

The History of an Idea. Western conceptions of the nature of species originated with the ancient Greeks, but the immutability of species was generally assumed until the seventeenth century. Modern theories of species change resurfaced as a result of the rise of the mechanical philosophy and the scientific revolution of the Enlightenment. Indeed, in the third edition of *Sylva Sylvarum; or, A Naturell History in Ten Centuries*, published posthumously in 1631, Francis Bacon (1561–1626) wrote “the Transmutation of Species is, in the vulgar Philosophy, pronounced Impossible . . . seeing there appear some Manifest Instances of it, the Opinion of Impossibility is to be rejected; and the Means thereof to be found out” (p. 132).

The materialist philosophers of the Enlightenment sought explanations for the existence of life that did not invoke supernatural intervention. Life was the result of the interaction of natural causes, including spontaneous generation, and therefore was not guaranteed the stability of divine guidance. The possibility of species change then seemed plausible. Most natural philosophers, however, remained more interested in the origin of life—the possibility and process of spontaneous generation—than in the process of species change.

It is also important to recognize that most Enlightenment natural history was concerned with the desire to classify rather than to explain. This is perhaps most evident in the work of the Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus (Carl Linné, 1707–1778). In his *System of Nature* (1735) Linnaeus sought to understand the pattern of creation. Building on the idea of the great chain of being—an ordered hierarchy of nature from the simple to the complex culminating in humankind—Linnaeus created the basis for modern taxonomy. He realized, however, that the world is not simply based on a formal pattern of