

The mystery of Everest

I am going to talk about a man who tried to conquer the highest point on Earth and about expedition that was trying to solve the mystery: Did he succeed or fail? That man was George Mallory. In June 1924 he and his friend Irvine joined forces. They took advantage of Mallory's experiences on Everest- he tried two times before- and Irvine's mastery of oxygen bottles. "We expect no mercy from Everest," Mallory told a friend before his final expedition, but he wasn't convinced that they will succeed. He had just a strong wish and he wrote to his sister: "We've got to get up this time!" On June 6th 1924 Mallory and Irvine set out from Camp 4 high on Mount Everest. Two days later they vanished in clouds. Nobody ever saw them again. Where they first to stand atop Everest?

The first evidence of their progress was found in 1933 by British expedition. They found an ice ax that belonged to Irvine. Next important discovery was in 1975. A Chinese climber reported seeing a body he described as an "English". At that time no one took report seriously. Until this year. In April an expedition went to Northeast Ridge – the ridge where the route to the Everest is situated and where Mallory and Irvine disappeared. Mallory and Irvine research expedition had five members. One of them was Conrad Anker who also wrote the article for National Geographic. The expedition first found an oxygen bottle which was situated below the spot where the ice ax was found. Then the spread and search for any other objects or leads. At 8200 m Anker found two bodies. But he could see that the bodies were only few decades old. They weren't the climbers he was seeking. On May 1st they were still searching. The others were on the ridge, but Anker went even lower to a terrace below. And there he found another body. He didn't immediately recognize who that was. He sat down next to the body and then he realized he found one of two people he was searching for. Then he called the others. But because the radio could be monitored by many climbers, they agreed that they will use coded messages. He tried to call others by inviting them for "tea and Snickers". But only one came to him. Next call was for "mandatory group meeting". And soon all five were standing by the bodies final resting place. One cut off the shirt's collar and they could read the label with stitched "G. Mallory". They searched the body and found few objects but nothing special. They were hoping to find his camera which could solve the mystery. Then they covered the body with rocks and Mallory who was missing for 75 years was left in peace again.

Without camera we will never know if he and Irvine were standing on the top of the World. But there are some good reasons to believe they didn't. The place called Second Step is 30 m high rock wall. Anker tried to free-climb it but he failed. If he could not do it with all the modern equipment, how could Mallory and Irvine. Next reason is that their gear and supplies were insufficient. Without crampons and other important objects those two in 1924 should have been superhuman, as Anker says. And there is one more important reason. They were climbing late in a day, so if they came to the top they should bivouac in the open. But on Mallory's body were no marks which leads to believe that they didn't spend the night outside before dying. But there is still a question how and why did they die. Anker thinks that the crucial clue is that the body of Mallory has no gloves. It is very possible that he took them off because of a better grip. And then he could slip and possibly pull Irvine off a ledge too.

But despite this Mallory and Irvine expedition was truly amazing. It is really unbelievable how high did they come with their resources. They pioneered the route to the Northeast Ridge and nowadays this is one of most climbed direction. If they did or if they didn't reach the highest point, they will always be heroes on the World's highest peak.

But there I have got a question. I think they knew that they have very little chances. And Mallory two times before almost died on Everest. He was crazy when he tried again. The top was first reached 30 years later by Hillary and Norgay and they were very lucky to stay alive. What is in us, humans, that makes us hungry of danger and impossible things?

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Unknown words:

mastery (n.) – great skill of something

ice ax (n.) – a gear of climber, a tool with specially designed blade for grip on ice

oxygen bottle (n.) – an object like a big bottle that contains oxygen for breathing

ridge (n.) – a line along the top where two sloping surface meet

route (n.) – a way to go from one place to another

collar (n.) – a part of shirt around your neck

peak (n.) – top of a mountain

gear (n.) – important objects that you need to achieve a goal

pioneer (v.) - to be the first who does the thing

crampons (n.) – metal plate with pointed pieces of metal, worn on shoes for climbing on ice

