

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in “Once Upon a Climb: Stories from Everest”

Your Story Matters

You Bring the Yellow Border to Life

We are not all the same. It is our differences that make the National Geographic Society, and our world, a better place. We embrace each person’s identity, experiences, and abilities, and we commit to cultivating an environment where **everyone** benefits from opportunity, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging. We all have a story to tell. When we share and celebrate our stories, the yellow border comes to life.

Historic Representation Matters

We’re Amplifying Stories from Historically Marginalized Groups

National Geographic has had a hand in some of the most extraordinary stories of exploration and discovery around the world since we got our start in 1888. One of those stories comes from Mount Everest. The Society has awarded some 174 grants for projects on Everest and its surrounding area. We’ve covered stories in the Himalaya in dozens of magazine articles, films, and television shows, starting in 1933. And we’ve sponsored several major expeditions to the mountain, including those in 1963, 2012, and 2019.

Our mapmakers, mountaineers, and scientists have worked tirelessly to visualize, climb, and understand this mountain. As we work to bring their incredible stories to life, we acknowledge that the history of mountaineering on Everest is typically told from a White, Western, male perspective. While the achievements of men like Mallory, Shipton, and Hillary are integral to the history of the mountain, we are committed to amplifying stories from historically marginalized groups alongside some of the better-known tales.

Foremost, Mount Everest is located along the Nepali–Tibetan border. It would not be possible to talk about this mountain without acknowledging its significance to the people who live in its shadow. We are delighted to bring to light the voices of indigenous people who live among the high Himalaya. We start with a discussion of Everest’s many names—Chomolungma in Tibetan, Sagarmatha in Nepali. We draw attention to local perspectives on the mountain, and throughout the exhibition, we thread the twin history of its meaning to foreign and native peoples.

In addition to a focus on the cultures and religions that hold Everest sacred, we also shine a spotlight on individuals from marginalized groups whose extraordinary achievements inspire us all. These include...

- Tenzing Norgay—Half of the first pair to successfully summit Everest, Sherpa Tenzing Norgay is a mountaineering legend. We are honored to be the first museum in the U.S. to display many of his belongings that went with him to the top of Everest on that historic climb in 1953.
- Nawang Gombu—Part of the first American team to summit Everest in 1963 and the first man to summit Everest twice, Sherpa Nawang Gombu is Tenzing Norgay’s nephew.

- Radhanath Sikhdar—A brilliant 19th-century Bengali mathematician who first calculated Mount Everest's height as the world's highest mountain
- Betsy Cowles—The first American woman to visit Everest via Nepal in 1950
- Junko Tabei—Hailing from Japan, Tabei was the first woman to successfully summit Everest in 1975.
- Sibusiso Vilane—South African Vilane was the first Black man to reach Everest's peak, in 2003.
- David Liano Gonzalez—A Mexican man recognized as the first person to scale Everest from both the north and south sides in the same climbing season in 2013.
- Elizabeth Hawley—An American-born woman who kept the Himalayan Database, the closest thing to an official record of climbs made in the mountains of Nepal
- And many, many diverse people who worked on Everest as part of the 2019 National Geographic and Rolex Perpetual Planet Everest Expedition.

We look forward to sharing these compelling narratives with visitors in a variety of ways, including through artifacts, photographs, written accounts, film footage, and other audio-visual means. By embracing a diverse group of voices, we hope to open people's eyes to this global crossroads at the roof of the world. That's how we're bring the yellow border to life at the National Geographic Museum—one story at a time.