

- Comment on the speaker's use of language and the effects created for her listeners.

Helen Clark's Eulogy for Sir Edmund Hillary¹

On 29 May 1953 a young New Zealander stood on top of Mount Everest with his climbing companion Tenzing Norgay.

That young man was Edmund Hillary, soon to be knighted², and to become the most famous New Zealander of our time.

- 5 Sir Ed's achievement on that day cannot be underestimated.

He went to a height and a place no man had gone before.

He went there with 1950s, not 21st Century, technology.

He went there with well-honed climbing skills, developed in New Zealand, Europe, and Nepal itself.

- 10 But above all, he went there with attitude, with a clear goal, with courage, and with a determination to succeed.

That attitude, Sir Ed's can-do pragmatism, and his humility as the praise flowed for him over the decades, endeared Sir Ed to our nation and made him an inspiration and a role model for generations of New Zealanders.

- 15 Today we all mourn with Lady Hillary, with Peter and Sarah and all Sir Ed's extended family, knowing that their loss is personal and profound, and valuing their willingness to share this farewell with us all.

We mourn as a nation, because we know we are saying goodbye to a friend.

- 20 Whether we knew Sir Ed personally a lot, a little, or not at all, he was a central part of our New Zealand family.

My parents and grandparents' generation followed Ed's adventures.

Those of us who cannot remember the news of that great climb grew up knowing of the man and the legend, as today's children do.

And how privileged we were to have that living legend with us for 88 years.

- 25 Prior to Sir Ed's conquest of Everest, the mountain had often been described as the Third Pole. It had defeated fifteen previous expeditions. Reaching the summit seemed to be beyond mere mortals. It was considered one of our world's last great challenges.

- 30 So when the news broke of the ascent by Ed Hillary, a beekeeper from New Zealand, and Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa³ from Nepal, it made headlines around the world. This was one of the defining moments of the twentieth century, and earned these two brave men their place in history.

There then followed many other achievements of note.

Earlier this month, the fiftieth anniversary was observed of Sir Ed's journey to the South Pole when he became the first person to make the land crossing since Amundsen and Scott.

35 In Kiwi⁴ style, Sir Ed did the crossing on a tractor.

From the early 1960s, Sir Ed began the work which is his living legacy, founding the Himalayan Trust dedicated to the wellbeing of the Sherpa people in the high mountain valleys of Nepal, and supporting the education of their children and the development of health services.

40 Sir Ed lent his prestige as patron to so many good causes. Schools and other institutions, organisations and facilities bear his name with great pride.

And Sir Ed also served our country with distinction as High Commissioner to India, based in New Delhi with accreditation to his much-loved Nepal.

45 Sir Ed described himself as a person of modest abilities. In reality he was a colossus. He was our hero. He brought fame to our country. We admired his achievements and the great international respect in which he was held.

But above all, we loved Sir Ed for what he represented: a determination to succeed against the odds, humility, an innate sense of fair play, and a tremendous sense of service to the community, at home and abroad.

50 Sir Edmund Hillary's extraordinary life has been an inspiration to our small nation and to many beyond our shores.

As individuals, we may not be able to match Sir Ed's abilities or strength, but we can all strive to match his humanity and compassion for others.

His values were strong; they are timeless; and they will endure.

May Sir Edmund Hillary rest in peace.

Adapted from Prime Minister Helen Clark's tribute to Sir Edmund Hillary at his state funeral. Published in the *New Zealand Herald* (22 January 2008).

¹ Sir Edmund Hillary: a New Zealand mountaineer, explorer and philanthropist (1919–2008)

² knighted: honour bestowed by the monarch of the United Kingdom

³ Sherpa: local Himalayan guide

⁴ Kiwi: colloquial term for a New Zealander