

Books

HIGH IN THE THIN COLD AIR

by Sir Edmund Hilary and
Desmond Doig.

Doubleday \$6.95

Reviewed by James Bonner

Everyone knows Sir Edmund Hilary, the conqueror — with Sherpa Tenzing — of Everest. Desmond Doig, the co-author of this book, is a newsman (*Calcutta Statesman*). He speaks the Sherpa Tibetan dialect, and — best of all — he is a perceptive observer and a fine writer.

High in the Thin Cold Air is the story of the Hilary expedition of 1960-61 to find the Abominable Snowman, the Yeti. They did not find the Yeti, but the expedition did spend ten months in the high Himalayas of east Nepal, including a full winter at 19,000 feet, the first winter stay by a party at so high an elevation in the Himalayas.

This book, wonderfully interesting throughout, is really three stories, the first of which is the story of the Yeti hunt, which ended in the well-known Yeti scalp incident. The scalp, an heirloom of a family of the village of Khumjung, was borrowed by Sir Edmund, spirited off to a succession of experts in various museums, unanimously declared to be a fake (made from the hide of a Tibetan blue bear or mountain goat), and chivalrously returned to its owner.

The second story, and perhaps the most engaging, is that of the daily life of the Sherpa people. The Sherpas, of whom I am a great admirer, live in the villages of Namche Bazar, Khumjung, Thyangboche and Pangboche — all at elevations of 15,000-plus feet — and at the foot of Mount Everest. Desmond Doig, with his ability to speak their language, has written one of the few, and one of the very best accounts of Sherpa customs and culture, illustrated with 88 pictures, many in color.

The third story is the mountaineering one — life at 19,000 feet during

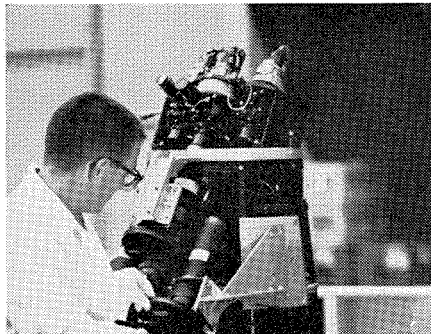
the Himalayan winter (easy except for the physiological tests conducted daily to follow the course of acclimatization of the mountaineers), the climb of Amadablam (technically a very difficult peak, and therefore hard), and the attempt on Makalu (impossible).

The World Book Encyclopedia supported the search for the Yeti, and a fine trip the search turned out to be. As for the existence of the Yeti, the Nepalese liaison officer of our own 1961 Himalayan expedition, knows the answer — which he would, I am sure, have given to the World Book Encyclopedia free of charge.

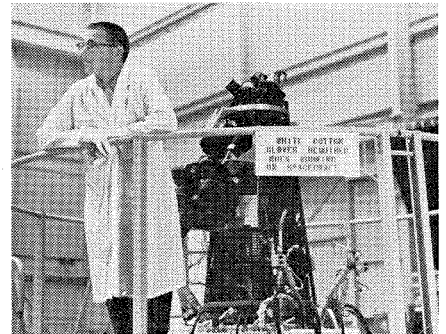
"Certainly," said he, in answer to the direct question, "there used to be lots of Yeti, but now they have all come down out of the mountains and turned into farmers."

James Bonner, professor of biology at Caltech, and an avid, international mountain-climber, made a Himalayan expedition of his own last year, on his way back from a biochemical congress in Moscow.

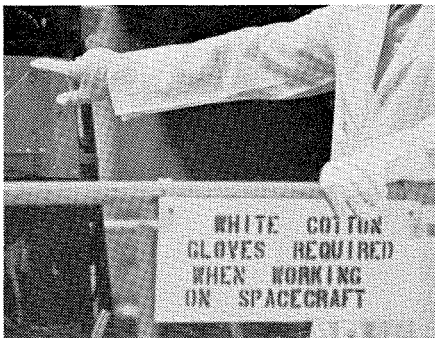
Busy?



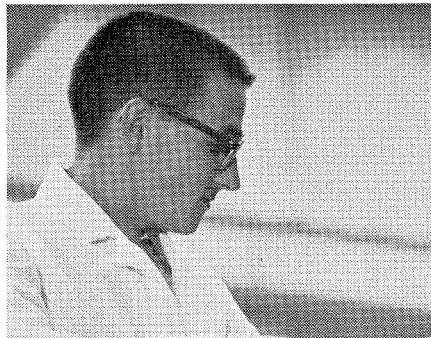
Very. A look at the sophisticated instrumentation on this spacecraft will tell you why. It's hard work, alright. But worth it.



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