

14 Keep unskilled climbers off Qomolangma to reduce pollution

Global Times | Horacio Galanti

Published on October 14, 2013 23:18

I have been climbing around the world for more than 20 years and have seen changes in the glaciers and the way people care about pristine environments like the great mountains.

Mount Qomolangma, commonly known in the West as Mount Everest, which I climbed earlier this year, is a very special place.

Since the first confirmed summit of Qomolangma in 1953, more and more people are attracted by this peak and therefore there has been an increase in pollution on the mountain.

Since 2000, the regulations about bringing back oxygen bottles, organic waste and other inorganic products, including cans, ropes, and destroyed tents, have been stricter in Nepal, as I saw firsthand.

However, back in the 1980s and 1990s, with the explosion of the "commercial expeditions" and the lack of regulations, the mountain was heavily polluted, and you can still see old ropes, tents, aluminum poles, cans and old oxygen bottles.

One main reason for the pollution on Camp 3 and Camp 4 on the Nepal side of Qomolangma is the harsh conditions, the exposure to steep terrain and the lack of oxygen. Many climbers are just "surviving" and they don't care about abandoning gear or organic waste that will never decompose.

It would be extremely helpful to establish a team of rangers to coordinate evacuations, helicopter rescues and to control environmental matters on those camps. Unfortunately, the extreme altitude and weather conditions make this task difficult to achieve.

Because enforcing regulations will be always challenging on those elevations, the final responsibility lies on the shoulders of everyone, including the individual climbers who venture into the "death zone," to be prepared and conscious about the environment and the implications of their actions for future generations.

Probably half of the climbers on Qomolangma shouldn't be there due to lack of experience and inadequate preparation. Introducing a way to issue permits for people with proper experience will help to keep the mountain clean for years to come, in addition to rangers patrolling the slopes to oversee the proper disposal of garbage and the dismantling of Camps at the end of the climbing season.

A good example to follow is the way that Alaska is preserving the Denali National Park, where Mount McKinley lies, near the Arctic Circle.

Every canister of propane-butane gas, used to melt snow and cook at high altitude, is numbered by the rangers and counted again in your way down, the same applies to tents and group gear. And they have established strict regulations, marking with bamboo wands places as urinals and "bathrooms" on the high camps.

They have also established specific crevasses to dispose of organic waste and there are random patrols of climbing rangers monitoring environmental issues.

The park also provides biodegradable bags for organic waste, and a dedicated team of porters are climbing at the end of the season, "sweeping" the mountain and bringing back old garbage abandoned by expeditions in the 1980s and 1990s. The same methods can be applied to Qomolangma.

With a combination of climbers' awareness, better education about the environment, some enforcement from the government and a final "sweep" of the mountain at the end of the season by a group of porters who have been working in the mountain and are properly acclimatized, we will see a significant improvement in the existing pollution on Mount Qomolangma.

Keep unskilled climbers off Qomolangma to reduce pollution

I have been climbing around the world for more than 20 years and have seen changes in the glaciers and the way people care about pristine environments like the great mountains.

Mount Qomolangma, commonly known in the West as Mount Everest, which I climbed earlier this year, is a very special place.

Since the first confirmed summit of Qomolangma in 1953, more and more people are attracted by this peak and therefore there has been an increase in pollution on the mountain.

Since 2000, the regulations about bringing back oxygen bottles, organic waste and other inorganic products, including cans, ropes, and destroyed tents, have been stricter in Nepal, as I saw firsthand.

However, back in the 1980s and 1990s, with the explosion of the "commercial expeditions" and the lack of regulations, the mountain was heavily polluted, and you can still see old ropes, tents, aluminum poles, cans and old oxygen bottles.

One main reason for the pollution on Camp 3 and Camp 4 on the Nepal side of Qomolangma is the harsh conditions, the exposure to steep terrain and the lack of oxygen. Many climbers are just "surviving" and they don't care about abandoning gear or organic waste that will never decompose.

It would be extremely helpful to establish a team of rangers to coordinate evacuations, helicopter rescues and to control environmental matters on those camps. Unfortunately, the extreme altitude and weather conditions make this task difficult to achieve.

Because enforcing regulations will be always challenging on those elevations, the final responsibility lies on the shoulders of everyone, including the individual climbers who venture into the "death zone," to be prepared and conscious about the environment and the implications of their actions for future generations.

Probably half of the climbers on Qomolangma shouldn't be there due to lack of experience and inadequate preparation. Introducing a way to issue permits for people with proper experience will help to keep the mountain clean for years to come, in addition to rangers patrolling the slopes to oversee the proper disposal of garbage and the dismantling of Camps at the end of the climbing season.

A good example to follow is the way that Alaska is preserving the Denali National Park, where Mount McKinley lies, near the Arctic Circle.

Every canister of propane-butane gas, used to melt snow and cook at high altitude, is numbered by the rangers and counted again in your way down, the same applies to tents and group gear. And they have established strict regulations, marking with bamboo wands places as urinals and "bathrooms" on the high camps.

They have also established specific crevasses to dispose of organic waste and there are random patrols of climbing rangers monitoring environmental issues.

The park also provides biodegradable bags for organic waste, and a dedicated team of porters are climbing at the end of the season, "sweeping" the mountain and bringing back old garbage abandoned by expeditions in the 1980s and 1990s. The same methods can be applied to Qomolangma.

With a combination of climbers' awareness, better education about the environment, some enforcement from the government and a final "sweep" of the mountain at the end of the season by a group of porters who have been working in the mountain and are properly acclimatized, we will see a significant improvement in the existing pollution on Mount Qomolangma.

Horacio Galanti, a civil engineer and high altitude mountain climber from Argentina currently living in Canada

Posted in: [Viewpoint](#)

Actions: [E-mail](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)  | [Kick it!](#) | [DZone it!](#) | [del.icio.us](#)