

Khumbu, Nepal

# TOURISTS OR TREES?

Near Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is a beautiful region of Nepal called Khumbu. Fifty years ago, it had thick forests, and the mountains were covered with red and pink flowers. Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay started from Khumbu when they became the first people to climb Mount Everest in 1953.

Since then, thousands of visitors have come to Khumbu to enjoy the spectacular mountain scenery and to take an adventure vacation. Tourists hike between the villages and sleep in very small guesthouses.

Now, however, much of Khumbu has become a desert, partly because over 25,000 tourists pass through every year. Most of them arrive by small plane from Kathmandu, the capital. In the past, the airport there was just a grassy field, but in 2000, a new terminal was built to allow planes and helicopters to bring in more visitors.

"We must reduce the number of tourists," says one local man. "They destroy the trails when they all walk in the same place. The guesthouses are crowded. People drop their water bottles and soda cans everywhere."

But the biggest problem of tourism is deforestation. Khumbu has lost most of its trees. They were cut down to build tea houses and to use for firewood.

"Tourists don't think about the problems they cause," says one scientist. "Especially about the wood that is used to cook their foreign food and heat water for their baths. One tourist uses as much wood in a day as five local families." Now local people have to walk many miles to find firewood.

One possible solution is to cook and heat water with kerosene, but it's too expensive for many local people. "The government has got to distribute kerosene to local people," says the scientist. "It's the only way to save the forest."

People in Nepal are taking action. One group has started a program to sell cheap kerosene. Another group, the Himalayan Trust started by Edmund Hillary, has planted more than a million trees in Khumbu. This will help to save the land and to produce wood products that people can sell. In 30 years, Khumbu may have forests and flowers again.

overcrowded small hotels, planes, trails, perfect for hiking, deforestation, destruction of forests, kerosene, firewood, water pollution

Climbers ascend through the Khumbu icefall on their way to the summit.

**1. Find the information in the text**

- What did Khumbu look like 50 years ago?

a. \_\_\_\_\_  
b. \_\_\_\_\_

- What does much of Khumbu look like today?

\_\_\_\_\_

- What problems are caused by tourists in tourists in Khumbu?

a. \_\_\_\_\_  
b. \_\_\_\_\_  
c. \_\_\_\_\_  
d. \_\_\_\_\_

- What actions are people taking in Khumbu?

a. \_\_\_\_\_  
b. \_\_\_\_\_

**C** Match the columns to complete the reasons.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Tourists visit Khumbu ____          | a. because it's too expensive.                   |
| 2. More tourists go to Khumbu now ____ | b. because they want hot baths and foreign food. |
| 3. The forests in Khumbu are gone ____ | c. because the wood was used for tourists.       |
| 4. Tourists use a lot of wood ____     | d. because the mountains are beautiful.          |
| 5. People don't burn kerosene ____     | e. because it's easy to get there.               |