

But who is George Leigh Mallory? Why are these climbers so interested in him? How did he die, and what happened to him before he died? Where is his friend, Andrew Irvine?

And the most important question of all – was this man, George Mallory, the first man to reach the summit of Everest?



George Mallory

## 2 Dangers

The climbers do not stay long with the body, because Mount Everest is one of the most dangerous places in the world. There are many things that make it difficult to stay alive here. The most important of these is the height.

The top of Everest is 8,850 metres above sea level. As you climb up the mountain, the air becomes thinner – it has less and less oxygen. Most people live less than 900 metres above sea level, where the air is full of oxygen. Above 2,000 metres the air is thinner, and people find it harder to breathe. At 4,000 metres it is harder still, and at 5,000 metres most people begin to feel ill. They get headaches, feel tired, and breathe quickly all the time, like someone who has run a long way.

In 1921, when Mallory first went to Everest, no one had climbed a mountain higher than 7,500 metres, and many people did not think it was possible. 'If climbers don't have enough oxygen, they'll be too tired to climb,' they said. 'And they won't be able to think clearly, either. So they will make stupid mistakes – forget to eat and drink, or talk to people who are not there. Perhaps they'll die.'

But the need for oxygen is not the only problem on Everest. There is also the weather. Almost every week there are winds of 100 or even 200 kph (kilometres per hour). It is difficult to walk or even stand up in these winds. The wind can blow climbers off the edge of the mountain, thousands of metres to the valley below. Climbers sometimes sit in their tents for