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In this historical image, from 1909, we see George Mallory at Moine ridge as he is climbing the Aiguille Verte ("Green Needle") Mountain (part of the Mont Blanc massif) in France. Mallory died in 1924 while he and his climbing partner, Andrew Irvine, were trying to make the first ascent of Mt. Everest. When last seen by other climbers, they were just 800 vertical feet from the summit.

In 2010, scientists at the University of Toronto reviewed meteorological records at the time of the pair's close-to-the-summit position. They were stunned to realize that Mallory and Irvine likely encountered a catastrophic loss of barometric pressure just as they were closing-in on the top of Everest. Professor Kent Moore explains:

"We analysed the barometric pressure measurements and found out that during the Mallory and Irvine summit attempt, there was a drop in barometric pressure at base camp of approximately 18mbar. This is quite a large drop; in comparison the deadly 1996 'Into Thin Air' storm had a pressure drop at the summit of approximately 8 mbar. We concluded that Mallory and Irvine most likely encountered a very intense storm as they made their way towards the summit."

To help put that significant loss of pressure in perspective, Dr John Semple (who is also an experienced climber and chief of surgery at Women's College Hospital in Toronto) tells us more: "Mount Everest is so high that there is barely enough oxygen near its summit to sustain life and a drop of pressure of 4 mbar at the summit is sufficient to drive individuals into a hypoxic state."

There's something else to consider. Mallory was writing about this 1924 climb for *The Times* and noted that he was bothered by a cough: "'If only it were not for that blessed cough,' I thought, 'even in snow up to my knees I could have gone on well enough.'"

George Mallory was 38 years old on June 8, 1924. He and his companion, Andrew ("Sandy") Irvine were hopeful they would soon be the first to stand at the top of the world.

Not far from the summit of Everest, Mallory and Irvine (this video includes archival film and recreated footage) were seen by Noel Odell, a member of their expedition. Then clouds enveloped them, and they were never seen again.

Had they made it to the top? Were Mallory and Irvine the first to reach Everest's summit? Twenty-nine years later, when Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay embraced at 29,028 feet, were they really the first to be there?

No one knew for sure. Only two points were certain: Hillary and Norgay had safely descended the mountain. Mallory and Irvine had not.

In the spring of 1999, the Mallory-Irvine Expedition went to Mt. Everest. The purpose of the mission was to find the missing men and their borrowed camera. If the small, pocket Kodak could be located—and its film developed after 75 years—the mystery of the first Everest ascent could be forever put to rest.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DEATH-ON-THE-MOUNTAIN-Vertical-Limit-K2-The-Savage-Mountain>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DEATH-ON-THE-MOUNTAIN-Vertical-Limit-K2-The-Savage-Mountain>

Media Stream



Mallory and Irvine - Climbing Everest

Video clip, placed online by escalador78, via YouTube channel.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Mallory-and-Irvine-Climbing-Everest>