**SHOULD EVEREST BE CLOSED?**

It has been described as the highest junkyard in the world, covered in discarded mountaineering detritus and suffering under thousands of tourists’ boots every year. Environmental groups are to push for a radical solution: the temporary closure of the world’s highest mountain.

Warnings that an ecological disaster is imminent in the area around the mountain have largely been ignored amid years of turmoil in Nepal. But conservationists think that growing political stability in the Himalayan kingdom means that the time has come and that the damage caused every year by thousands of climbers and tourists can no longer be ignored.

Campaigners warn that the price of tourism is discarded rubbish and medical waste and the colonisation of the area by restaurants and internet cafes. PT Sherpa, (a spokesman for The Kathmandu Environmental Education Project), spelled out the strain being placed on the indigenous population. ”Providing enough electricity and water for the small communities surrounding Everest and the other Himalayan mountains becomes very challenging when there are tens of thousands of additional tourists and climbers in the region competing for these same resources,” he said. “Nepal is ravaged by water and air pollution caused by industrialisation and increased tourism. Water supplies for local villages, delivered through irrigation systems in the mountains, are being critically depleted and urgent action needs to be taken.”

This year a geological team, sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme

(UNEP), found signs that the landscape of Mount Everest has changed significantly since Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay first conquered the peak in 1953. A primary cause is the warming global climate, but the research party concluded that the growing effect of tourism was also critically taxing the region surrounding the planet’s tallest mountain.

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