

Pioneer deserves to keep his mountain

Contributed by Kim Ollivier
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The suggestion by the Hermitage Hotel and Alpine Guides to rename Mt Ollivier Mt Hillary shows a fairly casual disregard for history. If implemented it would seem to me somewhat akin to the recent midnight removal of war memorial pillars from Greymouth.

I don't doubt the sincerity of the suggestion, but since Mt Ollivier is a relatively easy climb, and within range for anyone setting out from the Hermitage, it seems impossible to avoid the impression that the proposal has a commercial aspect.

Did someone imagine the amount of traffic the mountain would generate as guided tourists set out to climb Mt Hillary, easily done as a daytrip? In that sense it might seem like cashing in on Hillary's footsteps.

As to the history: Mt Ollivier is a small peak (1933m) behind the Mt Cook Hermitage. It was named to mark the life of Arthur Morton Ollivier, who was a pioneering mountaineer.

The name commemorates an outstanding leader who died in the prime of his life. This is noted on a plaque in the Hermitage foyer and Sir Ed would have been well aware who Arthur Ollivier was. The mountain itself has become nationally famous only since he mentioned climbing it as his first mountain in the 1997 television documentary *Hillary: A View from the Top*.

Naturally they flew to the top in a helicopter to film the view. How will the story read if the peak is already named Hillary instead of after an earlier inspirational mountaineer?

As well as being a keen sportsman, Ollivier was an energetic leader in Canterbury, establishing community, sporting and voluntary organisations that are still here today, such as Lancaster Park.

He migrated to New Zealand as a young boy in 1853 as part of a family of 10 and attended Christ's College, excelling in many sports and going on to become an accountant in Christchurch. From 1867 to 1883, Ollivier took a leading part in Canterbury cricket, and played often both in New Zealand and in Australia. In a provincial game against Australia in 1878 he won a cup for the highest scores (36 and 1) among the Canterbury XV, so not much has changed there.

He later made 141 runs during an innings in 1879. Centuries were so rare as to be great events in those days of Canterbury cricket - this was only the second recorded up to that time.

He pushed for the establishment of a dedicated sports ground and raised money to purchase the land for Lancaster Park in 1880.

Besides being selector, he did a good deal of coaching and was strict on making players practise fielding. He retired from cricket in 1883, "carrying with him" said the Lyttelton Times, "the respect and regret of all those with whom he had played. He has been a steadfast and enthusiastic supporter of the game."

After recovering from a stroke he took up mountaineering and was a very active member of the Alpine Club. He was in the party for the ascent of Mt Rolleston in 1892 with George Mannering, attempted Mt Cook in 1893 and took part in the Fitzgerald expedition to Mt Cook in January 1895.

He encouraged women to participate in mountaineering, taking his wife and other women on expeditions into the Alps.

A man of many and varied interests, he threw himself heart and soul into whatever he did, and won distinction in everything he tried. He twice represented the province in rugby. He was one of the finest chess players in New Zealand and won the NZ championship in 1888.

As an amateur gardener he had few equals, winning prizes for his roses, and supported the Christchurch Horticultural Society. A keen fisherman, he took a prominent part in the work of the Acclimatisation Society. A lover of music, he was secretary of the Musical Society, and sang in St Marks choir.

In addition to his sporting activities he was a member of the Heathcote Roads Board, a key member the Christ's College Board of Governors because of his accounting background and was principally responsible for reviving the Old Boys Association by drafting a new constitution. He was later president for three years.

His obituary in the school magazine reads: "Arthur Ollivier was a man of business, an athlete, noted for his outstanding public spirit, of the readiness with which he always lent his aid wherever it was wanted, of his kindness of heart, geniality

of manner and unflinching courage in face of the long struggle against a hopeless illness." He died of liver cancer in 1897, aged 46.

There is a large tombstone at the Woolston cemetery but I much prefer the mountain name as his memorial. I, too, would like to find a suitable memorial for Hillary, but it should not entail the obliteration of a significant figure in Canterbury provincial history.

An annual holiday does not seem to reflect Hillary's life of activity and selflessness either.

Perhaps the current wave of enthusiasm to rename may be easily satisfied by the Geographic Board if it simply replaced all features called "Victoria" with "Hillary" in their database. Or not.

The larger point may be that we could all wait a while before we rush into lightly considered name revisions.

* Kim Ollivier is a great grandson of Arthur Ollivier and lives in Auckland.

Mount Ollivier, New Zealand 1933 meters, 6342 feet Latitude/Longitude (WGS84) 43° 44' S; 170° 4' E Country New Zealand State/Province Canterbury Links

Search Engines - search the web for "Mount Ollivier":

Microsoft Live Search

Google Search

Yahoo Search

Photo: Mount Ollivier was the first peak ever climbed by Sir Edmund Hillary, and remains a popular scramble from the nearby Mount Cook Village area. Web Maps Microsoft Local Live Map Ranges Continent: Australia-Oceania

Range2: New Zealand

Range3: Southern Alps

Island South New Zealand Ownership Land: Mount Cook National Park Prominence Clean Prominence: 33 m/108 ft

Optimistic Prominence: 33 m/108 ft

Nearest Topographic Higher Peak: Kitchener

Key Col: 1900 m/6234 ft

Isolation Distance to Higher Peak: 0.95 km/0.59 mi

Nearest Higher Neighbor: Kitchener (S)

Route #1 Scramble

Trailhead: Mt. Cook Town 720 m/2362 ft

Vertical Gain: 1213 m/3980 ft

Distance (one way): 4.35 km/2.7 mi

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