

Terminology

Three important matters of terminology deserve comment. The first is the word ‘Himalaya’, which quite frequently appears, incorrectly, as ‘Himalayas’ in English-language publications. ‘Himalayas’ is a double plural, as explained clearly by Professor Ram Rahul, quoted in the editorial of Volume 32 of the *Himalayan Journal*:

I have used the collective name Himalaya (Him, snow, plus alaya, home) in place of the commonly used Himalayas, which is a double plural and a grammatical monstrosity. Indeed, to use the word Himalayas is as absurd as referring to Englishmen as Englishes or using the word alphabets for two or more letters and characters of an alphabet. Moreover, Himalayas jars on ears accustomed to the euphony of Sanskrit words and phrases. It is curious that it is only in English that the name suffers a corruption. In all other languages of the world, including other Western languages like French and Russian, it is what we in India have called it from time immemorial.

The second matter concerns the name for the highest mountain in the world. It is now preferable around the world to use the local, indigenous names for mountains rather than those given later by Western explorers. For example, the highest peak in North America is now called Denali (Mt McKinley). Most agree that Chomolungma is probably the best local name for Mt Everest, although Sagarmartha is often used on the Nepalese side of the mountain. Climbers, however, almost exclusively use Everest to refer to it, partly because of tradition and partly because it is simply shorter and easier to say than either of the local names. In this book, I have mostly stuck with the common usage of the mountaineers themselves—that is, with Mt Everest.

The final point concerns the geographical definition of the term ‘Himalaya’. Strictly speaking, the Himalaya are the narrow range that curves in a great arc from Bhutan in the east to near the India–Pakistan border in the west. I have, however, used the term as a short version of ‘Greater Himalaya’, which includes—in addition to the Himalaya itself—the Pir Panjal, the Karakoram, the Pamir and the other great ranges of Asia.

This text is taken from *Himalayan Dreaming: Australian mountaineering in the great ranges of Asia, 1922–1990*, by Will Steffen, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.