

Annapurna (1st climb of an 8000m peak) by Maurice Herzog (1952)

This French expedition wanted to be the first to climb an 8,000-meter peak [no man had climbed this as this time], but first they had to find a safe route up one. 22 teams had tried & failed up to this point. The team consisted of Jean Couzy, Marcel Schatz, Louis Lachenal, Gaston Rebuffat, Lionel Terray, Marcel Ishac, Jacques Oudot, Francis de Noyelle & Maurice Herzog.

5apr1950 they entered Nepal with 6 tons of supplies. Nepal is the 2nd highest country in the world [Tibet is #1] with 8 of the highest 14 peaks in the world. Nepal has Buddhist in the north & Hindu in the south, but all are suspicious of foreigners. It took 3 weeks & 200 porters to carry the gear 120 miles to camp at the base of Dhaulagiri. The Sherpas carried the loads higher up. After weeks of failed attempts, the risks were too high & they moved on to Annapurna.

They moved base camp. Their maps were inadequate in this unknown land. Finding a safe route took time. Time was running out. Weather was tough enough, but monsoon begins June 1st & then it's over. Climbing at high altitude is extremely exhausting, but coming down seems easy. To avoid avalanches, they traveled along the ridges. Walking in afternoon snow is exhausting when each step falls past your knee.

It was snowing & very windy at camp V. Nothing could have prepared them for this. 3jun1950 they were on borrowed time, but it was now or never. Their feet were freezing [literally], but Herzog & Lachenal pushed on & made it to the top of Annapurna at 2pm. The weather turned for the worst & they raced down for their lives, but visibility made it hard. Rebuffat & Terray met them at camp V, where the storm made them stay the night. They tried to rub life back into frostbitten hands & feet.

Morning wasn't much better, but they had to go. They couldn't find camp IV in the storm. Snow absorbs sound & shouting for help was in vain. They fell in a crevasse & spent the night, only to wake up 30 yds from camp. Frostbite made travel slow & they became snow blind. More men came up to help. Schatz went back up to the crevasse to retrieve the buried camera. They got caught in an avalanche, but everyone was spared.

June 5th everyone was off the mtn & at camp II. Dr Oudot was busy trying to save limbs & lives. Herzog's blood was black & thick. June 6th they evacuated to camp I. Two times a day a painful injection of Novocain & acetylcholine was given to try to save the limbs. When the foot felt like it was in boiling water, the doctor knew it was working. It was the most painful thing ever. They reached base camp on the 9th.

The rains came & evacuating over streams were now rivers. Two of them had to be carried. By June 19th they were in the rice paddies & it was too hot for the coolies. They had to start hiring locals to be porters. Toes & fingers were amputated when they would stop for the day. They reached Tansing July 4th. They went to Katmandu to see the Maharajah. The trip was exhausting.

Base camp is at [?]; Camp I at 16,750'; Camp II at 19,350'; Camp III at 21,650'; Camp IV at 23,500; camp V at 24,600' & the top of Mt. Annapurna is at 26,493'.