

# **Annapurna Study Guide**

## **Annapurna by Maurice Herzog**

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# Plot Summary

"Annapurna" is Maurice Herzog's account of the first expedition to ever climb a mountain higher than 8,000 meters: the Annapurna peak in the Himalayas of Nepal. Herzog, the leader of the French expedition, is one of two climbers who reach the summit, along with Louis Lachenal. Facing tremendous difficulties from the terrain, altitude sickness, severe weather and cold, the team makes its way back out of the mountains with Herzog and Lachenal carried by porters.

The expedition is mounted by the French Alpine Club to go to the region of the peaks of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna in Nepal to explore possible routes to either summit, and to attempt to climb one of them should a suitable route be found. The expedition treks to the village of Tukucha, roughly between the two peaks, where they set up a base of operations.

After several attempts to explore Dhauligiri, the expedition decides the conditions are too dangerous to make an attempt on that peak. They turn their attentions to Annapurna. Herzog leads a small team to the north of the mountain. However, discovering that a great barrier of mountains blocks access from that route, they are unable to even see the peak. He retraces his route and looks farther to the south.

After identifying a route to the northern face of Annapurna, the expedition, aided by Sherpa guides and native porters, sets up a base camp from which a series of higher camps will be established. Eventually six camps are placed up the mountain, with Camp V at the foot of a long snow field that leads to the summit.

It is from Camp V that Herzog and Lachenal make their historic climb on June 3, 1950. Their feet begin to freeze during the climb and Herzog loses his gloves, but the men reach the summit and make their way back down. They reach Camp V, but become lost, along with two other climbers, as they descend from there. Herzog also suffers a fall on the way down, as his hands and feet become frostbitten. Temporarily ignoring his injuries, he assists two Sherpas in descending down to Camp II, where they will be more safe from the risk of avalanche brought on by the warmer temperatures that come with the annual monsoon storms.

Herzog and Lachenal are treated by the expedition doctor, but each must have his toes amputated, and Herzog loses most of his fingers. They are carried out of the mountains as the expedition makes its way back to India and then to France. Before his departure, Herzog is honored for his bravery by the Maharajah of Nepal.

# Chapter I Preparations and Chapter II The Himalaya

## Chapter I Preparations and Chapter II The Himalaya Summary and Analysis

The first chapter opens in the spring of 1950 in Paris. The final preparations are being made for an expedition by the French Alpine Club to explore and possibly climb one of the major peaks of the Himalayan Mountains in the region of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna in Nepal. A committee has been formed, led by the club president Lucien Devies, and a team has been assembled under the leadership of the author, Maurice Herzog.

The team members include Jean Couzy, Marcel Schatz, Louis Lachenal, Gaston Rebuffat, and Lionel Terray. They are all experienced mountaineers who have been chosen from among the best climbers. The team will also take along a photographer, Marcel Ichac and a doctor, Jacques Oudot. All of these men have been hand-picked by Herzog, and he praises their abilities highly. Another man will join the team as a translator, Francis de Noyelle. Noyelle is familiar with India and Nepal and is picked to act as a kind of ambassador for the team and to help make local arrangements.

The team meets with Devies, who gives them their mission. To this point, nobody has succeeded in climbing any peaks higher than 8,000 meters although 22 expeditions from around the world have tried. This team is to travel to Nepal and attempt to climb either Dhaulagiri, at 8,167 meters or Annapurna, at 8,075 meters. The expedition will begin with a three-week trek to the Nepalese village of Tukucha, which is between the two peaks, from which they can examine the geography of the area and make their decision on which peak to assault.

The chapter ends as each member solemnly takes an oath to obey the expedition leader, Herzog, in everything he says. Herzog is touched by this devotion, and realizes the heavy responsibility he has undertaken.

Herzog introduces the main figures in the opening chapter. He also sets the serious tone of the book. The expedition is like a military assault, with an orderly and efficient team of men pledged to obey a chain of command. Devies, whose health prohibits him from joining the team, is the general who gives the company its orders.

The team's departure from France opens the second chapter, entitled "The Himalaya." The first leg of the journey is a flight to Delhi, in India. They present a problem to the customs officials in India when they arrive with several tons of mountaineering equipment, but after a few days of negotiation their equipment is released and they are allowed to proceed by air to the town of Lucknow, India.

In Lucknow, they first meet some of the Nepalese Sherpas who will accompany them as guides and climbing partners, Angawa and Ang-Tharkey. Further on, in Nautanwa, they meet the rest of the Sherpas, Ang-Tsering, Dawatondou, Sarki, Foutharkey, Aila, Angawa and Adjiba.

On April 5, the team finally crosses the Indian border into Nepal. They are met by G.B. Rana, called "G.B." by the team members, who arranges for porters to help carry the equipment and food on the trek to Tukucha.

As they proceed on foot, they increase in elevation until the fields of crops give way to pine forest, which reminds Herzog of the forests of France. As they look over the geography of the land, they begin to suspect that the maps they have may be inaccurate. They expect to find a pass providing access to Annapurna called the tilicho Pass, but none of the local people have heard of such a pass.

After just over two weeks of trekking, the team arrives in Tukucha, a mountain village. They proceed through the town to an open area just beyond it, where they choose to set up base camp It is April 21.



# **Chapter III The Hidden Valley and Chapter IV The East Dhaulagiri Glacier**

## **Chapter III The Hidden Valley and Chapter IV The East Dhaulagiri Glacier Summary and Analysis**

For the next two days, the team stays busy setting up camp. Herzog describes the busy little village of Tukucha, where the men spin and weave goat hair into strong fabric, and where the main source of income seems to be providing lodging for caravans passing through.

The team sets about examining the ridges leading up to the summit of Dhauligiri. According to their maps, the north ridge of the mountain looks like a good possibility. Couzy ascends to a high point and reports back to Herzog that the ridge, although completely covered in ice, would be worth exploring as a route to the summit, but he does not see any good way to get onto the ridge. The way is blocked by large seracs, pillars of ice jutting up from the glacier on the east side of the mountain.

Herzog splits the team into smaller groups to spend a few days climbing in the area and scoping out the lay of the land. Herzog goes with Ichac, the photographer, to get a closer look at the north ridge of Dhaulagiri and discover that their map has left out an entire valley which they dub "hidden valley." They also catch a glimpse of the summit of Annapurna for the first time.

The teams assemble back in camp and discuss what they have found out. They agree they must explore more. A nepalese guide visits the camp and they ask him about the Tilicho Pass that supposedly provides access to Annapurna. He does not seem to be aware of any pass, and Herzog decides they must go look for it. Couzy and Schatz are sent to find what they can.

Herzog begins to suffer from fatigue and headaches owing to the altitude, and decides he must have his men start to camp at higher and higher altitudes to become acclimated.

Chapter IV is called "The East Dhaulagiri Glacier" Oudot returns to the camp to report that he and the others have not found the Tilicho Pass, but that the other two have gone on to explore further. Herzog takes Lachenal and Rebuffet and the Sherpas Ang-Tharkey, Foutharkey and Sarki to explore the East Glacier. After some dangerous climbing and threatening weather, they decide that route is too difficult. They return to camp. Couzy and Schatz have returned to report they have looked at some ridges leading to the summit of Annapurna, but found no pass.

Herzog sends out teams to further explore the possible routes to the summit of Dhauligiri. As he waits in camp, they are visited by a Buddhist Lama, a holy man in

robes. They converse with him, and Ichac asks him if the team should try to climb Dhauligiri. The Lama considers for a few minutes and tells them that it is not "propitious" for them to try to ascend the mountain and that they should turn their attention toward Annapurna. When the reconnaissance teams return from the slopes of Dhauligiri and report how difficult an ascent would be, Herzog decides that the team will indeed focus on Annapurna.

# Chapter V Looking for Annapurna

## Chapter V Looking for Annapurna Summary and Analysis

Chapter V opens with Dr. Oudot performing various tests on some of the mountaineers. These involve testing lung capacity and other unpleasant procedures that the men do not like, but Herzog is pleased that Oudot is taking his role seriously.

Herzog, Ichac and Rebuffet prepare to trek to Manangbhot, a village to the northeast of Annapurna, to explore the possibility of approaching the summit from that direction. They set off with several porters while another team makes another attempt to find a possible route up Dhauligiri.

Herzog's team stops first at a small village called Tinigaon where they stay the night and inquire about the location of the Tilicho Pass. A native guide claims to know where the pass is, and they hire him to lead them. As they proceed, however, it becomes clear the guide is really just a shepherd who does not know the way. They continue on with the guide following behind.

The group consults its map, but is puzzled when they cannot see the peak of Annapurna where they expect it. They discover a pass of sorts that leads down to a large frozen lake, which is not on the map. After some consideration they decide they must cross the frozen lake, which makes the porters nervous. However, they are able to cross the ice safely and find another pass at the other end. Herzog names these passes the West and East Tilicho Passes.

To the south of their route lies the Great Barrier, a long ridge of peaks where they expected to see Annapurna, but do not. They guess that it may lie somewhere south of it, but still have not seen the summit. The group sets up camp and Rebuffet and Herzog go on with two Sherpas toward Manangbhot to get some supplies, crossing a rushing river on the way, into which Herzog falls, getting completely wet.

They receive a warm welcome in Manangbhot, where they are mistaken for Americans. They are concerned to learn that there are no supplies to spare in Manangbhot. Herzog writes out a message for Foutharkey, one of the Sherpas, to take back to the camp near the Tilicho Pass. In his message he lays out what they have seen and their puzzlement about not finding Annapurna. He tells them they expect to return to camp the following day. Ichac and Ang-Tharkey set off to take photographs along the Great Barrier to get a better idea of their location.

Rebuffet, Herzog and the Sherpa called Pansy go on past Manangbhot to see if they can get a glimpse of Annapurna. None of the natives they ask are familiar with the mountain. They return to Manangbhot, having depleted most of their food and not learning anything.



They prepare to head back. Herzog sends Rebuffet and Pansy on a shortcut directly to the main camp at Tukucha while he sets off alone to the camp at Tilicho. Herzog takes only a bit of chocolate for food, and on his way back falls into the river again, soaking him through. He wrings out his clothes, but is shivering cold. He has only an hour of daylight left and at least four hours to camp. He eats his last piece of chocolate and spends the night in the open, shivering.

The next day he is very hungry and can barely walk. Moving just a few yards at a time and stopping to rest, he slowly makes his way to within 20 yards of the camp, where he collapses and crawls the last few yards on his hands and knees. Once he is seen, the Sherpas rush to help him. They lay him down by a fire and prepare some food. He eats voraciously and falls into a deep sleep.

The next day, the team gathers to discuss what they have learned. The route to Annapurna must be to the south of the Great Barrier, they determine. The team from Dhauligiri brings discouraging news. Beyond the glacier is an impassable snowfield full of crevasses.



# Chapters VI Council of War and VII The Miristi Khola

## Chapters VI Council of War and VII The Miristi Khola Summary and Analysis

It is now May 14th, and Herzog calls together his team to discuss what to do. Herzog is worried that they are losing time, and determines that they must decide which mountain to climb, and which route to explore. The consensus among those who have tried to find a possible route up Dhauligiri is that the mountain is too dangerous. Herzog temporarily defends the idea of trying to ascend Dhauligiri in order to exhaust all the arguments. The author here seems to suggest that he had already made up his mind they should attempt Annapurna and is leading his team to the same conclusion on their own. The final decision is still Herzog's, and he writes that he takes it very seriously. He decides they will attempt Annapurna, but will not start a direct attack yet. Instead, he decides to send an advance party of Lachenal and Terray to leave right away to set up a camp and explore possible routes to the summit. Other parties will follow with supplies and equipment so that the advance party's camp can be converted to a base camp for the assault if it seems possible.

For the time being, Herzog stays behind to rest from his ordeal and take care of accounts in camp. He does laundry and writes a letter to Devies in France apprising him of his decision and what the team has found out about the region so far.

Chapter VII is called "The Miristi Khola," which is the name of the river that drains the northwest face of Annapurna, and flows through the region leading to the area where the team hopes to begin its ascent of Annapurna.

Herzog and Rebuffet leave Tukucha by horseback to meet with the advance party. They ride as far as they can and send the horses back. Along the route, they have to cross the turbulent river named in the title of the chapter. They meet with the advance party and find out what they have learned.

Terray and Lachenal have climbed along a spur that seems to offer a possible route to the summit. It includes some difficult rock climbing, but should be passable. They did not see a clear route to the top, but feel it is the best chance. They propose to Herzog that they move the base camp up the spur and prepare to make a summit attack. Herzog is cautious, however. He decides it is too big a risk to commit to the spur as a route and says they will explore the route further before making a decision. He writes back to Noyelle at Tukucha to tell him what supplies are needed.

# Chapter VIII The Spur

## Chapter VIII The Spur Summary and Analysis

It is now May 19, and Herzog, Rebuffat, Terray and Schatz are up early preparing to climb the spur identified by Terray and Lachenal as a possible route of ascent. The weather is good at first, and the men set out with Sherpas. Their plan is to climb as high as possible with the Sherpas, sending them back when it gets too difficult, and look for possible places to establish future camps if the spur turns out to be a suitable route.

The climbing soon becomes too hard for the Sherpas, who are sent back while the four French men continue on along the narrow ridge of the spur. The weather changes and begins to deteriorate. They construct a small temporary ledge to pitch a single tent, and Herzog and Rebuffat stay on the ledge while Terray and Schatz return to camp.

Herzog and Rebuffat spend a cold night on the ridge. Early the next morning they survey the snowfall from the night before. Rebuffat thinks it is too dangerous to go on, but Herzog wants to press on to fully examine the possibilities. Suddenly they hear the ice axes of Lachenal and Terray climbing up to them. Hardly slowing down the two climbers who had been along the route before, Herzog and Rebuffat follow them further up the ridge. A little further they find a wider spot that would have been ideal for camping, but the bad weather before had prevented them from reaching it. The four men discuss the route. Terray is the only one in favor of trying the ascent by that route. Herzog feels it is too difficult for the entire expedition to try the dangerous climbing required to get even as far as they had come. Nevertheless, he decides to continue with Terray to settle the question, while Lachenal and Rebuffat return to camp with instructions to return the next day to either back them up or help them down.

Terray and Herzog spend the night on the spur and start out the next morning, moving carefully along a treacherous and very steep snow ridge. Ahead they find a ridge of rough ice and snow that looks like cauliflower. Deciding finally that the route is too treacherous, they decide to turn around. On their way back, they meet Schatz, who has come up to help them.

Back at Base Camp, they learn the Lachenal and Rebuffat have been exploring a route that may lead up to a plateau with some promise as a place to launch an ascent. Herzog was able to see the plateau from the spur, and is optimistic about it. Meanwhile, Schatz believes he has spotted a possible route he wants to explore.

The following day, Schatz sets out early to explore his route, while Herzog and the others follow along the path set by Lachenal and Rebuffat along the wall of the Great Barrier on the edge of the glacier. As they climb, they meet a Sherpa coming back with a message that Lachenal and Rebuffat have reached the plateau and camped. The team reaches their camp after dark.

# Chapter IX Annapurna

## Chapter IX Annapurna Summary and Analysis

It is now May 23rd and the day dawns brightly. For the first time, the climbers have a clear view of the upper portion of Annapurna and their enthusiasm almost overwhelms their assessment of the difficulties. Herzog listens to the opinions of his team on the possible further route and is pleased to find they all seem to share his same assessment of how they should go.

They are eager to get started. The monsoon, an annual storm system, is expected in early June, so time is running out. Much of their equipment is still back in Tukucha, awaiting the formation of a final plan. Herzog writes up orders to move all the needed supplies and equipment to establish a new base camp in support of this route, and sends Sarki back with the message. They have no Sherpas left to help them, but to save time, Herzog, Terray, Lachenal and Rebuffat pack up most of their equipment to carry themselves up the mountain to establish another camp, Camp II.

It is hard going, owing to the heavy loads and the high altitude. The snow numbs their feet while the bright sun scorches their skin. They meet up with Schatz, who tells them that his route is too dangerous. They make way toward the center of the plateau as the weather worsens. Their goal is only to establish Camp II. They pick a spot and Terray offers to return to Camp I with the Sherpas, staying there himself while sending them down the easier route to Base Camp.

The next day the sun is shining. The team's next goal is to establish Camp III farther up the mountain. They are excited to start climbing. They encounter some difficult patches as well as some dangerous sections where there is the threat of avalanche and falling ice. Herzog displays his prowess as a climber by negotiating an extremely difficult and dangerous section of overhanging ice, anchoring a piton and rope for the other climbers to use.

They continue to climb, but the weather and time forces them back before they can find a suitable place for Camp III. They stow some of their equipment, marking the spot, and begin to descend. Schatz suffers a fall. He is shaken, but alright.

The poor visibility prevents them from finding Camp II, but they are able to see traces of their earlier path through the snow and decide to move on to Camp I. They find Camp I, where Terray has stayed. He tells them there is not enough room for all of them there. They have been moving supplies to the camp from Base Camp, but they being saved for the final assault. Schatz stays with Terray and Herzog, Lachenal and Rebuffat proceed on to Base Camp as darkness falls.

At Base Camp, Herzog is thrilled to find several tents, supplies and equipment. The "rear guard" has been busy moving everything to Base Camp in support of the climb.

# Chapter X The Sickle

## Chapter X The Sickle Summary and Analysis

On the evening of the 24th of May, the team holds a small party at Base Camp in honor of finding a promising potential route to the top of Annapurna. They sleep late the next morning, enjoying the relative comforts of the larger camp. Herzog is optimistic of their chances as he leads a team up to Camp I, determined not to return to Base Camp until they have reached the summit. Terray has gone on ahead with Sherpas to take equipment up to Camp II and higher for a possible third camp.

Herzog meets Terray in Camp II and learns where he has left equipment at about 22,000 feet altitude. He takes off with two Sherpas, hoping to establish a third and fourth camp to support the future ascent. They find the cache of equipment left by Terray, but it is not in a suitable spot for a camp, choosing instead the shelter of a crevasse that is nearly filled with snow. This is now Camp III, and the three men stay there for the night.

The next day presents some treacherous conditions for the advance team, but despite the sometime reluctance of the Sherpas Herzog blazes a trail up along a crescent-shaped glacier they have dubbed "The Sickle." Here Herzog decides to establish Camp IV, at about 23,500 feet. They head back down toward Camp III.

At Camp III, they find Couzy, Schatz, Rebuffat and Lachenal. They are suffering from the altitude and seem to be in poor spirits, Herzog notes. Dawatond, one of the Sherpas who accompanied Herzog to Camp IV also begins to complain of pains in his abdomen. Herzog takes them down to Camp II, which they reach as night falls.

# Chpater XI Camp II

## Chpater XI Camp II Summary and Analysis

Terray greets Herzog in Camp II. Terray is worried about the condition of the four climbers at Camp III, and Herzog shares his concern. Herzog confides in Terray that he is confident in Terray's condition, however, and suggests that the two of them will probably be the first to reach the summit as they are the strongest climbers and in the best condition at that time. Terray does not disagree, but replies that because he is in better shape he should begin at once moving equipment and supplies further up the mountain. Herzog is reluctant, because this will split them up, making it unlikely they will both be rested enough at the same time to climb to the summit together. He relents, however, with a compromise that Terray should take some equipment up to Camp III and then return to Camp II rather than go on. Terray agrees.

Herzog rests in camp the next day, as Terray climbs up to Camp III. Lachenal and Couzy come down from Camp III, and their headaches from the altitude lift, putting them in a more optimistic mood. Later in the day, after the snow has started to fall, Schatz comes down into camp alone. Herzog is angry with him for having come down by himself, considering it an unnecessary risk, but he is soon forgiven. He tells Herzog that Terray and Rebuffat decided they would go on the next day to organize Camp IV.

Herzog receives messages carried by Sherpa from the lower camps that things are in motion and supplies and equipment were being transported. He sends out word to Ichac to report their progress by telegraph back to Devies in France. He is concerned to learn that the monsoon has struck Calcutta early, meaning it will be in the mountains within a few days.

After careful preparations, Herzog and Lachenal leave for Camp III. They are astonished to see, after a short while, the other climbers heading back down the route toward them.

# **Chapters XII The Assault and XIII The Third of June**

## **Chapters XII The Assault and XIII The Third of June Summary and Analysis**

Herzog and Lachenal meet Terray and Rebuffat on their way down to Camp II and ask them why they are descending. They reply that the climbing the previous day was very difficult, taking them all day to reach Camp IV, which they had to dig out from under avalanche snow. Herzog and Lachenal try to convince them to come back up to Camp III but they insist on going down to recuperate.

Herzog, Lachenal and the Sherpas Sarki and Ang-Tharkay continue on to Camp III where they stay that night. Their next day's goal is to reach Camp IV and re-establish it. The conditions are good, and they reach it sooner than they had expected. They take down the tents and climb a steep ice slope at the edge of the Sickle glacier, where they establish the new Camp IV at the top of the wall, on the edge of a large snowfield. The Sherpas have some difficulty climbing the ice slope, but by cutting steps are able to make it. Lachenal and Herzog stay at the new Camp IV, while the Sherpas return to the site of the previous camp to stay that night.

It is a cold night. Everyone is up early the next morning. The plan is to traverse the snow field and establish a fifth camp from which the final attack on the summit can be made. Herzog is optimistic despite the extreme cold and difficulty from altitude. The snowfield, while steep, seems to run all the way up to the summit with no major technical difficulties.

They establish Camp V on the face of the snowfield. Herzog respectfully asks Ang-Tharkay if he would like to join him and Lachenal the next day in climbing to the summit. Ang-Tharkay thanks him for the honor, but replies that his feet are beginning to freeze, and he wishes to return to the lower camp.

Herzog and Lachenal spend a difficult night camping on the steep slope. Snow piles up on the uphill side of their tent, nearly crushing Herzog, and Lachenal on the downhill side is in danger of falling down the slope. High winds batter the tent, keeping them awake all night.

Meanwhile, Herzog writes, Terray and Rebuffat had been resting at Camp II and preparing to go back up the mountain. Ichac, Oudot and Noyelle also had made their way to the camp. Schatz and Couzy were making their way from Camp III to Camp IV, followed by Terray and Rebuffat, who carried the remaining equipment from Camp III up to Camp IV.

Chapter XIII is titled "The Third of June," which is the morning that Lachenal and Herzog emerge from their treacherous night on the snow slope. The thin air at this high altitude added to their fatigue makes even the slightest movements difficult. They put on as much clothing as they have and take only what they think they will need to keep their packs light. Herzog puts an extra pair of socks in his pack.

As they climb toward the summit, they are aware that their feet are starting to freeze. They stamp them and try to keep moving to ward off frostbite. The climbing is not technically difficult, but the effects of altitude make the going slow, and Herzog hints, clouds their judgment.

At one point, Lachenal, concerned about his freezing feet, asks Herzog what he would do if Lachenal turned back. Herzog replies that he would go on alone. Lachenal replies that in that case, he will keep going. Herzog is touched by this.

As they move slowly toward the summit, Herzog describes a kind of elation that overcomes him. He no longer notices the exertion required to move and seems to be walking on air. They gradually move higher and higher until they reach the summit. It is now about 2 p.m. and they have been climbing for eight hours.

They pause only long enough to take a few photographs, for Lachenal is eager to get back down to Camp V. They begin to descend, and Herzog drops his gloves, watching them slide away down the snow slope. His hands are now bare. He notes that at the time, he did not think of the extra socks in his pack that might have served as emergency gloves, foreshadowing the bad case of frostbite he will later suffer from.

They descend as quickly as they can. Herzog finds Rebuffat and Terray waiting at Camp V.



# Chapter XIV The Crevasse

## Chapter XIV The Crevasse Summary and Analysis

Rebuffat and Terray are overjoyed to see Herzog, but are also concerned about Lachenal, who is not with him. Herzog is so excited to see his fellow climbers and report the success of their expedition that he is unaware of the damage the cold has done to his hands and feet.

They suddenly hear Lachenal crying for help. He has slipped and slid farther down the slope beyond the camp. Terray goes out into the worsening weather and brings him in. Terry and Rebuffat each attend to Herzog and Lachenal, massaging their frozen feet and hands. They spend a stormy night at Camp V.

The next morning they set out in blowing snow toward Camp IV. They are roped together. Lachenal and Herzog have trouble walking because their feet are frozen and swollen.

They lose their way in the snow, backtracking several times trying to find the upper Camp IV. Herzog writes in retrospect that at this point he had given up on surviving the descent. Darkness begins to fall. They decide they must dig a hole in the snow for overnight shelter. They stop near a snow-filled crevasse and begin to dig, but Lachenal suddenly disappears through a hole in the snow. He has fallen into a small cavern that turns out to be a suitable shelter for all of them. They spend a sleepless night huddled in the small snow cavern.

The next morning, an avalanche overhead showers snow over them, but they are able to dig their way out and climb to the surface. Herzog uses all his strength to get out, and confides in Terray that he thinks he will probably die.

The weather clears slightly and they again wonder which way to go. Suddenly they hear a cry. It is Schatz, at Camp IV, which is only a couple hundred yards from where they took shelter in the cavern.

# Chapter XV The Avalanche

## Chapter XV The Avalanche Summary and Analysis

Schatz comes to help the men into the upper Camp IV at the top of the ice slope at the edge of the Sickle glacier. Couzy is waiting in camp. Herzg writes that upon reaching the camp, his will to live returns out of the joy he feels seeing his fellow climbers and from the appreciation they have for his reaching the summit. At Schatz's suggestion, they all climb down to the more protected location of the lower Camp IV.

Herzog begins to worry about the conditions. It is warmer than usual, which makes the snow unstable and more susceptible to avalanche. The first priority is to get lower down the mountain to Camp II. He ropes himself to two Sherpas, Aila and Sarki, and with the others begins to make his way as quickly as possible down the mountain.

Herzog's hands are nearly useless, as his fingers are frozen. He relies on the Sherpas to help him. As they make their way carefully down, Herzog is suddenly swept over by an avalanche, tumbling him and the Sherpas down the mountain. He finds himself suspended by his rope upside down on the steep slope. Remarkably, the rope is caught on a ridge of ice with the two Sherpas at the other end, balancing them. They are bruised and frightened, but all survive.

They come to a wall and have to descend. Herzog grasps his climbing rope as best he can to get down, and then belays it to the Sherpas so they can descend. The rope tears the flesh away from his frozen fingers, which he describes in jolting detail, but he decides that losing his fingers comes second to bringing everyone back safely.

As they near Camp II, Sherpas come to assist all of them back into camp. Herzog collapses at the mercy of Dr. Oudot. Lachenal arrives, barely able to walk on his frozen feet. Schatz is in good shape, but Terray has been temporarily blinded by the intense sunlight and has to feel his way into the tent.

# Chapter XVI The Retreat

## Chapter XVI The Retreat Summary and Analysis

All the climbers are now assembled at Camp II, which has taken on the air of a hospital with Oudot treating everyone. Herzog is now numb to above his elbows and ankles and asks Oudot frankly if he thinks he will be able to save his limbs. He expects he will probably lose both hands and feet, but Oudot replies that he thinks he can save something. He tells Herzog he will return with some injections he thinks will restore circulation.

Lachenal's hands are fine, but his toes and heels are frostbitten. Rebuffat has only some small patches of frostbite on his toes, and is temporarily snow blind. Terray is also temporarily blind but otherwise in good shape. Couzy is uninjured, but weak.

Ichac and Schatz assist Oudot in the extremely painful series of injections that Herzog and Lachenal undergo. The pain is nearly unbearable, and Terray must hold Herzog tightly as Oudot injects each leg and each arm with Novocain and acetylcholine. He tells Herzog that he expects he will lose one or two joints of each finger, but should still have use of his hands.

After a few days of treatment, preparations are made to move the injured climbers down the mountain. The team has a single sledge, which can be used to slide a patient down held by ropes, and a device called a cacolet, which allows a person to sit in a sling held over the shoulders of another. Herzog is carried in the cacolet by a Sherpa to Camp I.

At Camp I, a small celebration is held, with everyone sharing a single bottle of champagne. Herzog is given another set of painful injections and breaks down in tears to his friend, Terray, about the probability that he will not be able to climb again. Terray tries to encourage him. The extent of his injuries are not yet known.

The next day is June 9. Herzog is carried again in the cacolet down to Base camp where the porters have arrived to carry everything down on the trek out.

This chapter is unique in that Herzog includes a long passage from the journal of Ichac, who has been observing the higher camps through a telescope at Camp II. He uses Ichac's point of view to fill in some of the activity that takes place while he and Lachenal are climbing to the summit and back.

The next day is June 9. Herzog is carried again in the cacolet down to Base camp where the porters have arrived to carry everything down on the trek out.

# Chapter XVII In the Woods of Lete

## Chapter XVII In the Woods of Lete Summary and Analysis

As the chapter opens, the expedition is listening to a special weather report being broadcast for them, informing them that the monsoon rains are moving their direction and should be arriving soon. The team makes its way through the rain to the woods of Lete that give the chapter its title. Here they plan to wait for the equipment that remained in Tukucha to be brought to them before the final trek out. Herzog is in constant pain and must be carried on the back of a porter. The way is often treacherous, and he is sometimes consumed with fright as his carrier makes his way along high ledges or across raging rivers. He copes by trying to put himself into a semi-conscious state and ignoring the bumps and jostling as much as he can.

He continues to be treated by Oudot, who has now restocked his medical supplies from their equipment at Tukucha. Infection threatens his decaying fingers and toes and Oudot gives him penicillin to ward it off. Herzog closes the chapter with a description of a kind of vision he experiences in the haze of a high fever. He is surrounded by his friends and he has completed his mission to reach the top of the mountain. He is now ready for death, and asks for death to take him. His friends come in procession and give him his ice axe, then leave along a narrow path, knowing that he would be safe.

# Chapters XVIII Through the Paddy Fields and XIX Gorakhpur

## Chapters XVIII Through the Paddy Fields and XIX Gorakhpur Summary and Analysis

Herzog is awakened from his vision by a stab of pain from the injection of penicillin given to him by Ichac. The rain continues to fall and the team prepares to leave the wood. Lachenal and Herzog are placed on stretchers. As they move into the lower areas, the temperature begins to climb, and many of the porters turn back, unable to cope with the heat.

Herzog has no appetite, but Oudot insists that he eat, threatening to force feed him if necessary. He is improving slightly and begins to take more interest in what is happening. The team has difficulty employing enough porters and resorts to practically forcing any able-bodied men to help them carry their equipment.

Oudot continues to treat Herzog's frostbitten digits. He cleans the dead tissue away and every few days amputates a finger or toe. There is no anesthetic, and the amputations are done whenever possible using a large pair of surgical scissors.

Chapter XIX is entitled "Gorakhpur." The expedition continues toward the village of Tansing and then to Nautanwa and to Gorakhpur by train. The going continues to be rough with a shortage of porters in the heavy rain. Oudot continues to amputate fingers and toes from Herzog and Lachenal when possible.

They reach the train and travel in relative comfort to the India/Nepal border. Whenever the train stops and is still for a time, Oudot takes the opportunity to operate on Herzog's fingers.

Herzog has been invited to Katmandu by the Maharajah of Nepal to receive congratulations on the expedition's success. It is decided he will go, attended by Oudot and with Ichac and Noyelle. The team splits up in Gorakhpur, with the remainder of them going on to Delhi in India.

# Chapter XX There Are Other Annapurnas

## Chapter XX There Are Other Annapurnas Summary and Analysis

The final chapter describes Herzog's appearance before the Maharajah of Nepal. Still unable to walk, he is carried into an elaborate ceremony dressed formally and seated in a chair. He is presented with an award for bravery, the Gurkha Right Hand, which he accepts on behalf of his entire expedition.

Herzog closes the book as he and Lachenal and the others are preparing to land back in France. He thinks about the incredible hardships he and the others faced as they skirted the line between life and death and the stark contrast between their life for the past months and the comfortable life they have at home. The mountains have provided them with a challenge they all seem to need as badly as air or water. He looks forward to "other Annapurnas," implying that while his mountain-climbing days may be over because of his injuries, he looks forward to facing challenges of another kind.

# Characters

## Maurice Herzog

The author of the book and the leader of the French Alpine Club's expedition to explore the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna region of Nepal and climb one of the peaks if it proves possible. Herzog, like his fellow climbers, is a veteran of World War II and takes a military approach to his task. Each of the climbers swears an oath to follow his direction while on the expedition.

Herzog takes his duty seriously, and often places himself at the front of dangerous situations. He also shows an independence and stubbornness that sometimes endangers his life, as when he sends the rest of his party ahead on their return from Manangbhot and nearly dies of cold and hunger when he cannot make it back to camp quickly enough by himself. He solicits the opinion and advice of his fellow climbers, but considers his own decisions to be final.

Herzog pairs with Lachenal to make the final ascent to the summit of Annapurna. He is badly injured by frostbite during this part of the climb, and feels himself about to die from weakness. He is eventually carried down from the mountains on the back of a native porter. As a result of his injuries, he loses all his toes and many of his fingers.

Herzog receives an award for bravery from the King of Nepal for his ascent of Annapurna, which he accepts on behalf of the expedition.

## Louis Lachenal

A climbing instructor and mountain guide. Lachenal, along with Herzog, is one of the two climbers to actually reach the summit of Annapurna on June 3, 1950.

Lachenal accompanies Herzog on the attempt to find the Tilicho Pass in the expedition's first try to identify a route up Annapurna. He is later sent by Herzog, along with Terray, to establish an advance camp at the foot of Annapurna and to explore possible ascent routes. Lachenal and Terray favor a route up a spur on the northwest side of the mountain, but after exploring it himself, Herzog decides it is too dangerous.

On the day of the summit, according to Herzog, Lachenal seems to be affected by the altitude such that he does not understand what is happening. He wants to turn around, afraid for his freezing feet, but Herzog decides to follow him to the top. Lachenal falls on the way down and slides past Camp V, but Terray is able to hear his cries and bring him into camp. Lachenal ends up having to have all of his toes amputated because of frostbite.

It is Lachenal who accidentally discovers the snow cavern in which the four advanced climbers escape a powerful storm while descending from Camp V.



## **Jean Couzy**

The youngest member of the climbing team. Couzy is an aeronautical engineer. Along with Schatz, Couzy helps hurry the climbers down from the mountain.

## **Marcel Schatz**

Manager of a tailoring business. Schatz is instrumental in getting the climbers down safely, as he is among those in the best condition following the climb.

## **Gaston Rebuffat**

An avid climber and guide. Rebuffat and Terray are the two climbers who reach the highest point short of the summit, at Camp V. They are camped there when Lachenal and Herzog return from the summit and help the injured climbers return to Camp IV.

## **Lionel Terray**

mountain guide and ski instructor. Terray and Herzog become close during the expedition, as Terray helps him cope with the extremely painful treatments for frostbite. Terray, along with Rebuffat, are the two other climbers who reach Camp V, and assist Lachenal and Herzog in descending to Camp IV following their dangerous return from the summit.

## **Marcel Ichac**

The expedition's cameraman. Ichac is pressed into duty as a nurse by Dr. Oudot, and assists in giving injections.

## **Jacques Oudot**

The expedition's doctor. Oudot is required to attend to the frostbite injuries of the team, particularly those of Herzog and Lachenal. He is sometimes too direct for Herzog's liking. He performs several amputations on the men without benefit of modern facilities, instruments, or anesthetic.

## **Francis de Noyelle**

The expedition's translator and ambassador to the native peoples. Noyelle stays at the rear of the expedition for the most part, taking care of the crucial resupplying of the higher camps.





## **G.B. Rana**

The Nepalese guide who helps the team arrange for local help. Rana proves invaluable in helping the expedition get help from the native people of Nepal. He is promoted and receives a raise in pay from the Maharajah as a reward.

## **Ang-Tharkay**

The chief of the Sherpas who accompany the French climbers. Herzog offers Ang-Tharkay the opportunity to go with them to the summit, but he declines and goes to a lower camp.

## **Sarki**

One of the strongest and most trusted Sherpas along the trip, Sarki contributes significantly to the expedition.

## **Lucien Devies**

President of the French Alpine Club and leader of the Himalayan Committee that oversees preparations for the expedition.

## **G.B. Rana**

The Nepalese guide who helps the team arrange for local help. Rana proves invaluable in helping the expedition get help from the native people of Nepal. He is promoted and receives a raise in pay from the Maharajah as a reward.



# Objects/Places

## Annapurna

A Himalayan mountain in Nepal of 26,493 feet in height. One of the highest mountains in the world, it is the first mountain higher than 8,000 meters to be climbed.

## Dhaulagiri

A Himalayan mountain of 26,795 feet in height, somewhat higher than Annapurna. Herzog and his team consider making an attempt to scale to the summit of Dhaulagiri, but consider it too dangerous.

## Tukucha

A village situated near the foot of Dhaulagiri where the expedition sets up its main base of operations.

## Base Camp

The site at the foot of the north Annapurna glacier where the expedition establishes a large camp to support and supply the higher camps.

## Camp V

The highest camp established short of the summit. Lachenal and Herzog leave from and return to Camp V on the day they reach the summit.

## Tilicho Pass

The semi-mythical pass that the expedition believes may provide an easy route to the foot of Annapurna. They find a pair of passes at either end of an ice lake which they name the Tilicho Passes.

## French Alpine Club

The climbing club that sponsors the expedition.



## **Couloir**

A gully or small valley on the side of a mountain. Often dangerous because falling rocks, snow and ice are channeled through them.

## **Piton**

A metal spike with a ring on it that can be driven into stone or ice to provide an anchor.

## **Crampon**

Pointed metal attachments worn over climbing boots for walking on hard snow or ice.

## **Crevasse**

A deep split in a glacier.

## **Serac**

A tower of ice, often unstable.

## **Chamonix**

A town in the French Alps, where Herzog and many of the other climbers live and work as guides.

## **Massif**

A group of associated mountain peaks

# Themes

## Climbing Expedition as a Military Mission

The year is 1950 and Herzog and his fellow French climbers, all young men, have recent experience and memories of serving in the military. It is not surprising, then, that the expedition is laid out like a military operation, and that Herzog employs language reminiscent of a battle campaign in describing it.

In the opening chapter, the president of the French Alpine Club has assembled a hand-picked team for the expedition, and he carefully lays out their orders in a formal fashion. It is like a general sending out a special squad on a dangerous mission. Each man pledges his obedience to their leader, Herzog, and contemplate the weight of their orders.

Herzog describes the long treks into the Himalaya as "marches" and when he sends small teams out to explore possible routes it is referred to as "reconnaissance." It is as if they are spying on the enemy and learning about his defenses. In this case, the mountain is the enemy. When Herzog calls all the men together to decide on what to do, he calls the chapter "A Council of War." When they are finally pressing forward toward the summit of Annapurna, he entitles the chapter "The Assault" and when they are leaving the area, triumphant but battered, he names the chapter "The Retreat."

This military outlook might seem natural given the nature of the expedition and the men involved. It also signifies an adversarial relationship to the mountain. It is something to be taken, to be won over.

## Transformation Through Struggle

As Herzog approaches the summit of Annapurna, he writes, "I smiled to myself at the paltriness of our efforts, for I could stand apart and watch myself making these efforts.... This diaphanous landscape, this quintessence of purity - these were not the mountains I knew: they were the mountains of my dreams" (p. 186). He has been transported to what he describes as a higher kind of awareness through his struggle to reach the top of Annapurna. It is as if gravity has stopped having any effect, he writes, and he has a vision of having taken humanity somewhere it was never meant to be, of stepping over a boundary that man is not supposed to cross.

Elsewhere, Herzog writes that an ideal is something toward which we always struggle but never attain. He has attained his ideal, however, in reaching this summit, and has been transformed by his struggle. Suddenly he struggles no more. It is as if there is no gravity. He stands outside himself and sees the labors that led up to this attainment as insignificant in relation to it.

Unfortunately for Herzog, it seems that he also recognizes that in this moment of bliss, he ignores the more earthly nature of his body. His feet are freezing. When his gloves slide away down the mountain he watches them go and does not remember that he has extra socks in his pack that he might use for temporary protection.

Later, he will lament his fate when it seems the loss of his fingers and toes will prevent him from ever climbing again. In the end, however, he returns to his philosophical outlook and ends the book by writing, "There are other Annapurnas in the lives of men" (p. 282), suggesting that he is undertaking a new struggle toward another ideal.

## The Role of a Leader

Herzog takes a high view of his responsibility as a leader, as is demonstrated in the first chapter as the Himalayan Committee of the French Alpine Club assembles in Paris to form the team that will make the expedition to Nepal. He writes, "Each in turn, my colleagues swore to obey the leader of the Expedition in all circumstances, especially at moments of crisis. They were pledging their lives, possibly, and they knew it....In that moment our team was born. It was for me to keep it alive."

Throughout the book, Herzog shares his thoughts at times when he makes sometimes difficult decisions. The first such decision that must be made is whether or not to try to climb Dhaulagiri, the higher of the two mountain they have set out to explore. After learning what he can from the others on his team who return from short exploratory climbs around the mountain, Herzog decides for himself that it would be too dangerous to try to climb the mountain. He does not announce his decision arbitrarily, however, as he describes it. Instead he calls all his team together to discuss the matter and leads them around to the same conclusion he has reached. He even plays "devil's advocate" at one point and proposes another line of attack on Dhaulagiri. He writes that he wants to make sure the whole team is behind his decision, implying that letting them come to that conclusion themselves will strengthen their support for his own decision.

He acts in a similar way when Lachenal and Terray enthusiastically propose the northwest ridge of Annapurna as a possible route to the summit. Herzog is wary of committing to the route, but he agrees to explore it with them. Even after Lachenal and Terray have climbed with him up to the point where they agree it would be too difficult, Herzog wants to press even farther to completely rule out the possibility.

As the leader of the expedition, Herzog appears to believe he should be the first man up and the last down from the mountain. He blazes some of the most difficult parts of the route to the summit and establishes rope lines on difficult stretches of climbing. Even though he feels he is about to die on the descent, he soon regains his attention and realizes all the climbers must get down as soon as possible. Despite his severely injured fingers, he helps the two Sherpas roped to him descend safely.

Once everyone is down from the mountain, Herzog must place himself at the mercy of his team, as he cannot walk or use his hands and is extremely weak. In this stage of the

expedition, he relinquishes his role as leader, recognizing that he cannot completely function as he once did.

# Style

## Perspective

Herzog writes in the first person singular, past tense. It is the perspective of a single observer of the events described, told after the fact. Herzog is a direct participant in most of the events he depicts, and he includes his own memories and thoughts to provide explanation and motivation. He occasionally does describe events where he is not present, but does not always indicate his source of information. Instead, he describes these events as an outside observer. On one occasion, he includes a passage from the journal of one of the other climbers to fill out some facts and times of which he himself had no direct knowledge.

Herzog takes his duty as the leader of the expedition seriously, and his perspective is of a person who sometimes feels the strain of this responsibility. He is mainly optimistic in his outlook and very confident in his abilities and those of the men he leads; but he is eventually reduced to welcoming death on more than one occasion as a result of the extreme difficulties he faces. His confident perspective seems to dissipate at these moments, but not his apparent bravery, for he seems to welcome the challenge nonetheless.

## Tone

Herzog writes in a documentary style, relating times and events in a direct fashion. He frequently employs military imagery in his description of the expedition's activities, which adds to the direct tone of the writing. He employs a tone that is sometimes condescending toward the native Nepalese porters that are hired by the expedition, and while he expresses admiration for most of the Sherpa guides that climb alongside the French climbers, his admiring tone is tempered by a similar condescension.

Herzog also grows pensive and introspective at times, however, and the tone sometimes takes on a mystical air, as when he is describing the elation he feels when he takes the last few steps to the summit. He also describes his thoughts as he feels he is approaching death, both when he is descending injured from the mountain and becomes lost in the snow, and when he is being treated for his injuries and suffers from infection and high fever.

Herzog's frank descriptions of his injuries from frostbite and the extensive and painful treatment he undergoes are sometimes horrifying in tone. The dead tissue of his fingers and toes decays in the unsanitary conditions, and he must endure repeated amputations of his digits without anesthetic.

In the end, however, Herzog strikes an optimistic tone. He is, after all, driven by the desire to overcome obstacles, he writes. He implies that his injuries are just another "Annapurna" for him to conquer.

## Structure

The book is divided into twenty chapters arranged in chronological order. Most of the chapters are named after the location where most of the events in that chapter take place.

The events of the book begin as the French Alpine Club is making preparations in France, but the scene moves rapidly to the Himalaya in the second chapter, as they trek into Nepal to establish a base of operations. Chapters III through V describe the expeditions exploration of possible routes up Dhaulagiri and a way to reach Annapurna. In Chapter VI, they reject an assault on Dhaulagiri as too dangerous and focus on Annapurna. Chapters VII through XII depict the advance exploration of possible routes and the establishment of higher and higher camps along the route to the summit of Annapurna. Chapter XIII describes the day on which Herzog and Lachenal reach the summit and return to their camp, injured. Chapters XIV through XVI cover their dangerous descent and return to base camp with the rest of their team. Chapters XVII through XIX describe the difficult trek out of the mountains in the heavy monsoon rains, with Herzog and Lachenal being carried by porters. The final chapter covers Herzog's official reception by the Maharajah of Nepal. The book ends as the plane carrying them all back to France is about to land.





## Quotes

"Clearly it was a tremendous undertaking; but i had complete faith in my colleagues. our party was the best that could be assembled, and we all appreciated one another's individual qualities." Chapter I, p. 24

"Later, when we came to explore the country, we found that the Miristi gorges were impassable; the famous Tilicho pass was not where it was marked on the map." Chapter II, p. 37

"Since our arrival at Tukucha we had all nursed a secret hope of discovering a safe and easy ridge that would lead us straight to the summit of Dhaulagiri or Annapurna." Chapter III, p. 40

"I was lost in the heart of the mountains, over 14,000 feet up, soaked through, weary and very hungry. Should I have the strength to climb up the last fifteen hundred feet?" Chapter IV, p. 83

"Soon it became very cold and started to snow; we were certainly above 18,000 feet. I looked up to the ridge and tried to spot a site for the tent. For the moment we could see nothing but some treacherous-looking ledges, and these were few and far between." Chapter VIII, p. 109

"For the first time Annapurna was beginning to reveal its secrets. The huge north face with all its rivers of ice shone and sparkled in the light. Never had I seen a mountain so impressive in all its proportions. " Chapter IX, p. 121

"I drove my ice-axe in right up to the hilt and found that the snow was well-consolidated. I went forward now with more confidence and made a little platform on which I turned around, taking a few steps in each direction, then I started dancing about and finally jumping. It held!" Chapter X, p. 150

"The Sherpas were not at all happy. They were not expert on this sort of ground, but as they were afraid of getting left behind they made all possible speed." Chapter XI, p. 173

"My joy was touched with humility. It was not just one party that had climbed Annapurna today, but a whole expedition. I thought of all the others in the camps perched on the slopes at our feet, and I knew it was because of their efforts and their sacrifices that we had succeeded." Chapter XII, p. 189

"For our comrades it was a tragic moment; Annapurna was conquered, and the first eight-thousander had been climbed. Every one of us had been ready to sacrifice everything for this. Yet, as they looked at our feet and hands, what can Terray and Rebuffat have felt?" Chapter XIII, p. 194



"I was clear-headed and delirious by turns, and had the queer feeling that my eyes were glazed. Schatz looked after me like a mother, and while the others were shouting with joy, he put his rope around me." Chapter XV, p. 207

"One always talks of the ideal as a goal towards which one strives but which one never reaches. For every one of us, Annapurna was an ideal that had been realized." Chapter XX, p. 281

# Topics for Discussion

Is Herzog a reliable narrator? Does it make a difference in the book?

Discuss how Herzog views his role as a leader of the expedition.

What role do the Sherpas and porters play in the expedition? How do the French climbers view them and treat them?

Discuss Herzog's ecstatic feelings at the top of the mountain. What consequence do they seem to have?

Is Herzog a good leader? Why or why not?

How does Herzog react to his extensive injuries? Does his reaction change?

How does Herzog relate to the other French climbers on the expedition?

What do you think motivates Herzog and the other climbers?