



My Life: Eiger North Face, Grandes Jorasses and Other Adventures

Anderl Heckmair

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In 1938 Anderl Heckmair led the dramatic first ascent of the North Face of the Eiger - one of the most important events in the history of alpinism. The press had named the Eiger's north face the 'Mordwand', or 'death wall', and the Swiss attempted to ban climbers from it after a series of deaths on the mountain. Numerous attempts had been made on the peak before Heckmair, along with his German climbing partner Ludwig Vörg and the Austrians Fritz Kasperek and Heinrich Harrer, made their bid. During three days in July 1938 the two pairs linked up to make the first ascent of the long and committing North Face, fighting their way to success in deteriorating weather conditions. Heckmair's account of their epic struggle forms the core of My Life. The climb was a propaganda windfall for the Nazi party, coming as it did in the build up to World War II. Although the Austrians had Nazi connections, the Germans had no overt political links, though they had received financial support for equipment and Heckmair, through the filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, had found himself on a Nuremberg balcony with Hitler, saluting a torch-lit procession. My Life provides a fascinating insight into the athletic, personal, fanatical and political mountaineering scene of the time. Heckmair was a talented mountaineer, yet a private character, and these memoirs serve as a window both into the catalysing events of a personal obsession, and a wider political catastrophe.

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