

*Anderl Heckmair: My Life, Eiger North Face, Grand Jorasses and Other Adventures.* ANDERL HECKMAIR. TRANSLATED BY TIM CARRUTHERS. FOREWORD BY REINHOLD MESSNER. SEATTLE: THE MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS, 2002. 304 PAGES. \$24.95.

While best known for his role in the 1938 success on the north face of the Eiger, Anderl Heckmair has always embraced the classic mountaineer's lifestyle of travel, curiosity, gainful unemployment and rich experience, even extending it into his tenth decade (he was over 90 at the time of this revision and reissue of his classic memoir, *My Life as a Mountaineer*). The publisher states that this book is the first in a series of biographies in a "Mountain Masters" series; we might be curious to see what follows it, since many of the world's best-known climbers have already published an autobiography or two or three.

American audiences may have some trouble in recognizing the author's name, standing as he does in the shadow of his better-known ropemate Heinrich Harrer. Heckmair went on from the Eiger success to a life of lecturing, professional guiding, and mountaineering instruction, and continued traveling and seeking out new routes, but in a more private and less commercial fashion than many another successful climber. His one large-scale Himalayan expedition, to the Karakoram in 1953, came about as a choice between the well-known and well-funded Herligkoffer expedition to Nanga Parbat, and a smaller one put together by some friends. He chose the smaller expedition, which turned into a series of disappointments, yet never regretted having dropped out of the more successful Nanga Parbat trip. His goal, was to have memories, not fame.

Heckmair's life has certainly left him with enough of those. One of the difficulties of climbing autobiographies lies in making them seem interesting to non-climbers. In the case of Heckmair, though, we have long discussions of learning to ski, his friendship with cinematographer Leni Riefenstahl, his resulting indirect relationship with Adolph Hitler, and, finally, some long chapters on traveling in Africa, South America, and the United States. His emphasis throughout is on adventure and satisfying his innate curiosity about the world, and it is in those sections that his personality comes through most clearly.

There are some difficulties with the tone of many passages, but it is hard to tell how much of that comes from the ordeal of translating German into English and how much is actually the result of what seems to be a very real difference in attitude towards climbing in Europe as opposed to America. Throughout the book the many references to friends and acquaintances who lose their lives climbing are brief and somehow unsatisfying, but whether that is due to Heckmair's privacy and reticence or to a more general insouciance is unclear.

For most people, the book's central appeal will come from the chance to read a new first-hand account of the Eiger Nordwand ascent, and that is certainly one of its stronger chapters. By coincidence, at the time I was reading it, *Alpinist* magazine's issue #2 came out with an article by Thomas Ulrich ("In the Footsteps of Heckmair") about a modern-day ascent of the Nordwand that was deliberately completed using original clothing and equipment. (The one exception was the hemp rope, which was given a core of nylon for safety's sake). The whole project was filmed, of course, and Heckmair was consulted for points of accuracy; but the gist of the article was the respect that the reenactment engendered for the commitment and talent of the first-ascent party.

There has never been any dispute that Heckmair was the star of the 1938 show; those who wish to know more about the man, and the charges of Nazi propagandism that haunted him for years afterwards, would do well to read this book.