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Timeless Conquistadors of the Useless

By Lionel Terray (Mountaineers)

If my library was to somehow catch fire and I could only save one book, the long out of print *Conquistadors of the Useless*, by Lionel Terray, would be it. The great news for readers is that this classic book has finally been reissued by The Mountaineers.

Lionel Terray was a Chamonix guide during the golden age of French climbing. In 1945 he roped up with fellow-guide, Louis Lachenal, forming one of the great ropes of all time. Together they stormed up most of the most difficult routes in the Alps, including the Walker Spur of the Grandes Jorasses, and in 1947 they made the second, and still one of the most elegant, ascents of the North Face of the Eiger Wand. Their climbs were remarkable for their speed, and consequently, how little weight they carried compared to the existing norms.

A major turning point for Terray was his participation in the controversial first ascent of an 8,000 metre peak, Annapurna, in 1950. With Maurice Herzog, Lachenal made the summit, but the frostbite that he suffered essentially ended his climbing career. For Terray, it opened the door to his becoming the most accomplished expedition mountaineer of next decade or more, largely funded by the proceeds from Herzog's famous book on the Annapurna expedition. In 1952 he was climbing in Patagonia, where he made the first ascent of the Fitzroy. In 1953 he was back in South America, where he made the first ascent of Huantsan, at 20,981", the highest mountain in the central Andes. This he followed with two assaults on Makalu, the second of which, in 1955, resulted in the first ascent.

But it is not Terray's technical brilliance that permeates this book. Rather, it is the man himself. Here is someone you will wish that you had a chance to know and learn from - about nature, the mountains and the human spirit. Since he is no longer with us, this book is all that we have. And that is why this reissue is so welcome.