

# The Untold Story of Patagonia's Cerro Torre

*Outdoors writer Kelly Cordes shares his investigative account of this mountain's history of challenge and controversy, and what it says about human nature and why we climb*

## The Tower by Kelly Cordes

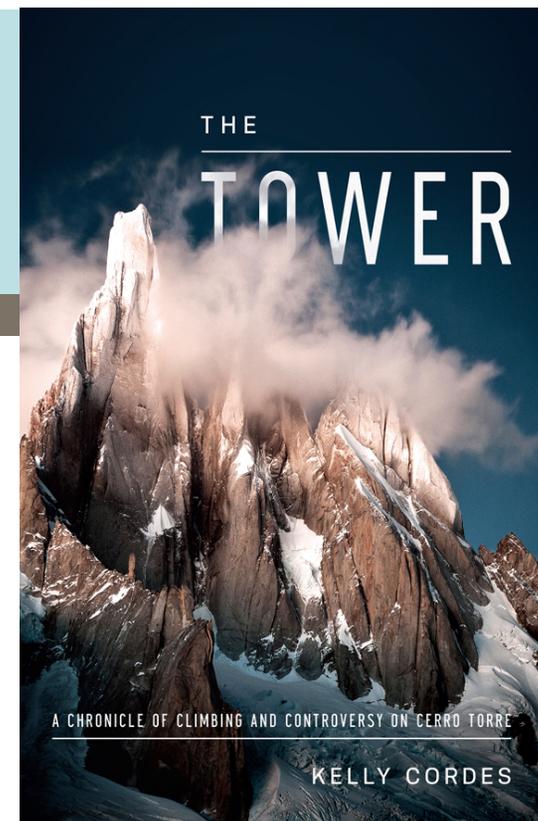
At the southern tip of Argentina, between the vast ice cap and the rolling estepas of Patagonia, rises a 10,262-foot tower of ice and rock named Cerro Torre. Considered by many the most beautiful—and dramatic—mountain in the world, it draws the finest alpinists from around the globe. Esteemed mountaineer Reinhold Messner called it "a shriek turned to stone."

Controversy has swirled around Cerro Torre since 1959, when Italian climber Cesare Maestri claimed its first ascent. His climbing partner died on the descent, and generations of climbers attempting to retrace his route have found only contradictions to his claims. In 1970, enraged by the doubts and obsessed with proving his success, Maestri used a gas-powered air compressor to hammer hundreds of bolts to be used as ladders into Cerro Torre's flanks.

The Compressor Route became a highly contentious issue in the climbing world—and, in the decades that followed, it became the most popular route on the mountain. That is, until 2012, when two young, idealistic climbers, Hayden Kennedy and Jason Kruk, removed many of Maestri's bolts. The controversy erupted anew.

In a narrative non-fiction account of Cerro Torre's complicated and ongoing story, *The Tower: A Chronicle of Climbing and Controversy on Cerro Torre* (Patagonia, November 2014), outdoors writer and elite alpinist Kelly Cordes reveals surprising findings from his two years spent interviewing sources in seven countries and scouring documents spanning the 1950s to today.

The book raises fundamental questions: What role should equipment play in climbing? Who has the right to alter a route, or a mountain? What is the impact of history on our ethics in the mountains? What is the point of alpinism: the summit or the climb? This chronicle of hubris, heroism, principle, and epic journeys offers a glimpse into the human condition, and explores reasons why some pursue extreme endeavors that at face value have no worth.



### BOOK DETAILS

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## About the author

Kelly Cordes is a writer based in Estes Park, Colorado. His climbing accomplishments include the first ascent of the Azeem Ridge on Pakistan's Great Trango Tower in 2004 (with Josh Wharton), and a new line by fair means to the summit of Cerro Torre in 2007 (with Colin Haley). He formerly served as an editor of the *American Alpine Journal* from 2000-2012, and today is a freelance writer and field-testing coordinator for Patagonia. When he's not covering a story or climbing a new route, he's perfecting his signature margarita.

## Praise

"No mountain in the world is so otherworldly and has such a troubled history. This book is the most in-depth look yet. It examines the sociological and psychological contexts that have sparked fifty years of controversies and rivalries, and how belief influences everything we—both climbers and all of mankind—do." —Climber Rolando Garibotti, author of *Patagonia Vertical*

"There's no one in contemporary alpinism better than Kelly Cordes at combining cutting-edge climbing talent, a wicked sharp pen, and a passion for accuracy in mountain reporting." —John Harlin III, author of *The Eiger Obsession*

"With passion, literary skill, and relentless curiosity, top-shelf alpinist Kelly Cordes takes us on a wild ride through the controversial history of Patagonia's Cerro Torre—the most perfect mountain on earth." —Gregory Crouch, author of *Enduring Patagonia*

## Story ideas

- The Summit Pursuit: Just how far will we go?
- What's more important: How you climb, or whether you get to the top?
- Why two young climbers' removal of some old bolts on a mountain ignited a huge controversy
- The Impact of a Myth: How Cesare Maestri's 1959 story forever shaped Cerro Torre
- A Distant Spire: How Old Patagonia became New Patagonia
- The Continuum of External Aids: From free-soloing naked to taking a helicopter to the summit, what comprises acceptable use of equipment in climbing?
- Matters of Influence and Justification: The gradual acceptance and eventual rejection of the Compressor Route
- Reinventing History: Misconceptions about Maestri's Compressor Route
- Layers of History: How post-war Italy influenced Patagonian climbing
- The seemingly crazy, but surprisingly civil, self-regulated system of alpine climbing

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"Kelly Cordes embodies the climbing spirit more than anyone I know. I admire him for the way he devotes himself completely to writing and the mountains. He is also my favorite storyteller. I can think of no one better to write the story of Cerro Torre."

—Tommy Caldwell, professional climber

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