



# **The Tower: A Chronicle of Climbing and Controversy on Cerro Torre**

*Kelly Cordes*

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Patagonia's Cerro Torre, considered by many the most beautiful peak in the world, draws the finest and most devoted technical alpinists to its climbing challenges. But controversy has swirled around this ice-capped peak since Cesare Maestri claimed first ascent in 1959. Since then a debate has raged, with world-class climbers attempting to retrace his route but finding only contradictions. This chronicle of hubris, heroism, controversies and epic journeys offers a glimpse into the human condition, and why some pursue extreme endeavors that at face value have no worth.

## **The Tower: A Chronicle of Climbing and Controversy on Cerro Torre Details**

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Author : Kelly Cordes

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## **From Reader Review The Tower: A Chronicle of Climbing and Controversy on Cerro Torre for online ebook**

### **Reko Ukko says**

Kelly Cordes writes a good summary of the controversy surrounding the history of Cerro Torre. It's nicely written and the chapters are nicely divided, jumping back and forth with the different protagonists of the story.

The hardcover is a bit strange though, the layout suggests that it maybe wanted to be a coffee table book (I actually bought it under the impression that it was, it felt like that in the marketing), but it's not and thus some of the nice pictures are perhaps a bit wasted. Also lot of white space in the text layouts which is very strange and if laid out like a regular book, it probably would have been half the size it is.

Nevertheless, it doesn't bring anything massively new to the table, but it's a pretty thorough sum-up of what happened in Cerro Torre, to the best of the author's ability to find out, given that some of the key people are already fairly old or deceased. It also delves into how the pedigree of mountaineering changes throughout the years, who do the mountains belong to and who has the right to change them given how few people are actually skilled to enjoy them.

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### **Tyson Titensor says**

Not sure if I'd recommend it to a non-climber, but for someone wanting to understand what climbing style means and how it evolved this is probably the best book I've read. Required reading for any student of climbing history. Very well written and I hope Mr. Cordes goes on to write additional books....

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### **Ralph says**

I was sucked in from the first page. Of all the very many climbing books I've read this one ranks among the very best. The writing is crisp, clear and at times humorous. Kelly does not shy from the incredible controversy of the early ascents of Cerro Torre, and he presents the facts as he sees them. I enjoyed that he started off the book with the traditional accounts of the first ascent of the peak, then slowly peels away the layers of fiction from the truth. The book brings us up to the latest ascents and current state of climbing in Patagonia.

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### **Raven says**

An engaging and mindful read which covers alpine ethics, the history of mountaineering, and the accessibility of the mountains in all their complexity. The author tells a fantastic story, and he has a lot of historical material and access to people who were there in the early days of Cerro Torre to work with. I

appreciate his commitment to truth, and unsparing look at how that evidence-based approach can cause difficulty in a mountaineering community where one's word is one's bond... and yet hypothermic people near the point of death can often have very different experiences of the same event. Recommended!

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### **Brian says**

I received this book as part of a Goodreads giveaway.

I'm not very knowledgeable, nor a particular fan of mountaineering but I did find this book fascinating. The time and effort that enthusiasts put into this sport is phenomenal, and they should definitely be acknowledged as among the best athletes in the world.

I enjoyed the view into the growth of the sport from the late 1950's to present day although I must admit I kept hoping someone would find some evidence to validate the story of Maestri's climb of Cerro Torre.

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### **Carlo Martini says**

It's a well-written and fascinating story, but after a few captivating chapters it gets stuck on climbing ethics, and the book turns into an all-out bashing of anything that is not "climbing by fair means" or "alpine style". The whole story of climbing on Cerro Torre goes in the background, and the focus is only on who climbed what by what means. It becomes boring and only attractive to a small range of specialized readers who can understand the issues pertaining to the debate.

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### **Dave says**

"Never has a technical peak, especially so far from any population centers and mainstream hype, drawn such unmitigated and even unhinged passion. And never has a mountain been so influenced by one person, as Cerro Torre is by Cesare Maestri."

Remember that multimedia article covering the 2012 Stevens Pass avalanche? That got all kinds of press and recognition for being 'groundbreaking online journalism'. This book reminds me of that but in paper form. Kelly's placement of pictures, diagrams, personal narrative, interviews, and historical research are all carefully timed. Listening to an interview of him he said, while laughing, something along the lines of "the book was horrible to write, tons of work, I never want to do it again, I can't believe I ever wanted the task." Well it turned out great.

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### **Laura says**

This book didn't grab me at first. However, once the author began revealing evidence rather than laying out every person who ever attempted the route, I became intrigued. I didn't love this one quite as much as some of the outdoor books I've read in the past but still a good read for anyone in the outdoor recreation community

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## **Arianna says**

I bought this book on a whim from Amazon and I quite enjoyed it. Centered on the he said/she said of Cerro Torre, one of the hardest climbs in the world and most controversial (you'll find out why), "The Tower" is written from a climber's perspective and delves into the world of mountaineering, specifically traditions behind mountaineering. It's an interesting study of trust, passion, and human motivation. A novice climber myself, I found the premise of the novel intriguing and the included stories about other climbers hard to walk away from. I also found myself aching to go to Patagonia (summer trip, anyone?).

Though somewhat hard to get through in places, "The Tower" reawakened my excitement about climbing. Which is actually a bummer, because winter. But if Cerro Torre's covered in rime and ice and 60 mph winds and people climb it, why should winter deter me, right?

If nothing else, it was an inspiring read.

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## **Germano says**

This is by far the best book about mountaineering I've read so far. Very accurate yet enjoyable, if I had to find one defect I'd say that the various "episodes" are a bit disconnected. At any point in the book, it feels that everything has been already said, and nothing more is there... there's no anticipation of what will "happen". Yet, once accustomed to this, it's really interesting and engaging.

One note: I'm italian, and probably the book as a whole reads differently to an italian, there's a sense of pride and involvement. The "villain" is italian, and also many of the "heroes" are. The author spends a lot of time commenting the italian ways, and I'm deeply impressed by his insights and quiet appreciation. It's always really interesting to read how "other people" see us. Priceless.

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## **Grant says**

The Tower is a superb history of climbing on Cerro Torre, and the controversy that surrounds it. The book is well-researched and equally well-written, and I was strongly reminded of Jon Krakauer's writing. However, the book is not a strictly journalistic account, as Cordes is not shy about injecting his own experiences and opinion into the story, but I found this to be a boon and not a detriment. It includes awe-inspiring photos of the mountain, and helpful maps, timelines, and appendices. Anybody interested in alpinism and rock climbing should read this book, but I expect the subject matter and themes would appeal to those who aren't (yet) passionate about climbing.

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## **Joanna says**

What a great book! Extremely well-researched, with great photographs, interviews, & cross-references. Though it covers a broad scope of information- mountaineering ethics, history, cultural and political

environments, etc- it's all well-centered around an engaging central character, namely Cerro Torre, and its attendant cast of characters and climbers.

An excellent expose' in the vein of Krakauer's early mountaineering books.

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### **Jorge says**

I came to this book from an NPR interview of the author and the nagging knowledge that—having lived for years in Argentina—I've never heard about Cerro Torre. Its neighbor the Fitz-Roy has been more famous and well-photographed, but on reading the tale of “the Tower” one can only wonder why Torre has been less popular.

The story of the quest to climb this mountain, which is a thing better belonging to a SF movie set in a distant planet, involves dangerous climbs in awful weather, vertical walls and a topping, insanely large iceberg-like ice cube that looks unreal; it's as much extraordinary as enthralling. I learned what mountaineering really means to its practitioners, and about the parallel society of adventurers bound by a personal code of freedom. At the center is the controversy surrounding the possibly fake first climb of Torre, which reaches mystery-novel levels, although it gets somewhat dull by the end (without spoilers.)

The book, however, suffers from a dual personality disorder. It might have wanted, with all the historical photographs and full-page color views of the monstrous mount, to become a coffee-table item. But, in its standard hardcover format, there's a lot of weird white space, and the text is unevenly distributed. Worse, there's a lot of repetition and I had the feeling of reading some paragraphs more than once. This makes the central thread somewhat boring at the end, and ruins the delightful stories about climbers and their world. Finally, there's also very little about Argentina, and not a single decent map that will allow me to precisely where Cerro Torre is without the Internet. As an Argentine in origin, I can't forgive this.

Overall, this book is a good and original read and, for those like me who'd only climbed a couple of non-threatening mounts and sloped mountains—in my youth—and have never hang by a rope thousands of feet high, it's an armchair adventure that deserves consideration.

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### **Sam Thompson says**

An entertaining and informative book on the climbing history of this tower. Enough climber jargon and word porn to satisfy most who enjoy the sport, but the central theme of Cesare Maestri really kills this book. Almost every chapter the author sees fit to remind us who Maestri is, what he's done, and why it's controversial. By the end of the book I just wanted to scream at the book "SHUT UP WE KNOW!". Much of the book is very disjointed as well. One chapter will have a page describing a completely unrelated person or series of events, then drop the subject without any warning. Then 3 chapters later the book picks back up from where that random page left off and continues on. Once you accept the fact that the author intended you to read this book as a schizophrenic amnesiac, you're able to relax and enjoy the climbing stories pretty well.

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## **Gabrielle says**

This is a great read. I'm not a climber and have no desire to hang off mile-high cliffs, but I love mountain adventure books and this is a stand-out. I finished it the day after I got it from the library.

The fascinating part of the story is the controversy surrounding Cerro Torre's early ascents. Cordes examines the history in a rational, analytic way, and he's not afraid to arrive at unpopular conclusions and disagree with some highly-respected people in the climbing world. With personal experiences on Cerro Torre to back up his own credibility, this book is a well-crafted mix of historical narrative, personal adventure story, and rumination on climbing ethics.

I'm withholding a star simply because Cordes strays into jargon somewhat often, and while I'm familiar enough with climbing to be able to figure out his meaning from context, I think many people wouldn't. The glossary at the end of the book could have been better highlighted.

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## **Lloyd Fassett says**

5/11/18 - saw the author give a talk at the High Desert Museum. He presents really well.

7/27/18 - There are some really good chapters in this book. Kelly Cordes has a future in writing. I wish he had stuck more to his personal experiences and the myriad of interesting stories around Cerro Torre though. This book was too much about the controversy about if an Italian was the first to successfully climbed it in 1959. He didn't. There's an overwhelming lack of evidence for proof, but the book is pretty consumed by going through the details of something I believed from a summary paragraph.

I'm more interested in the human drama and drive that leads people to climb, or race cars, cave dive....what is the payoff? What's it feel like to go back into that race car and to the mountains after the people around you have died? There's an incredibly touching story in the book of a female climber that dies that was more moving to me than the story of the Italian's supposed 1959 summit. As an adventurer myself, that woman's story will stick with me.

I hope Kelly Cordes writes more. He's got a promising future, but this book is too much about a whacky Italian that gets more attention than he deserves.

I made all my highlights visible, but here's a quote I liked in particular:

"The mountains are sacred, transcendent places, places of inspiration and consequence, where trust and actions and honesty matter. Places where, in fleeting moments, I've known the beauty of belief to merge with the power of truth. Moments as fragile and precious as tiny crystals of rime, carried off by a furious wind."

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## **Becky says**

From the moment I looked at the cover of this book I was captivated. There are few peaks as charismatic and beautiful as Cerro Torre, and yet it is often overlooked in alpine story telling in favor of bigger peaks or more

traditional peaks, but that does not mean Cerro Torre does not have a history and story as fraught with bravery, controversy, and drama as the best of them.

Cordes takes you on a tour of the history of alpine climbing by telling the story of Cerro Torre, from the first attempts (and lies) to the current, breath-taking new routes that are being explored. I think, for me, that is what made the book so alluring. It was never just about Cerro Torre, it was about the history and the evolution of equipment, the evolution of the philosophy of climbing, the fight about any-means and fair means, the honor of climbers, the honor of countries, and the honor of nature. Cordes loves mountains, and he loves this mountain, and he loves his tribe of climbers, and his charisma and devotion to all of them shine through the book as he attempts to discover the truth behind not just Maestri and Fava's (almost certain) deception regarding their first ascent but behind our motivations for conquering mountains.

This might just be my favorite book on climbing. I love *Into Thin Air*, but where that one is tragic, I think Cordes' book is a celebration. Despite the sometime-loss of life, or limb, or the heart breaking lies that have been told, he still celebrates the awe of this peak, the things that can and have been done once people put their heart and soul into it, and the fact that no matter what we do, Cerro Torre will continue to stand.

If you are not familiar with climbing or geological terms than Cordes includes a great glossary at the back, but if you are using the Kindle version it's not always easily accessible. I recommend reading with your phone nearby to look up terms.

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## **Bill Leach says**

A history of climbing on Cerro Torre in Patagonia. A spire in the Fitzroy group with vertical walls, it was beyond current mountaineering techniques through the mid twentieth century.

In 1959 Cesare Maestri claimed that he and Toni Egger had successfully climbed the north face of the peak from the Col of Conquest. However, Egger had fallen and died on the descent. While it was usual at the time to take climbers at their word, doubts arose that as to whether they had actually been successful.

Subsequent climbs from the Col of Conquest revealed no evidence of earlier climbs, lending no support to the Maestri claim of a 1959 ascent. An increasing number of leading climbers questioned Maestri's claim to have made the peak.

In reaction to the doubts, in 1970 Maestri went to the extreme of using a compressor to install bolts using a 300 pound air compressor directly up the southeast ridge. The route ignored all natural features and therefore was at odds with the idea of climbing a peak "by fair means". This became known as the compressor route.

In 2012, Hayden Kennedy and Jason Kruk climbed the SE ridge by fair means. On the way down they removed 120 of Maestri's bolts. Surprisingly, this resulted in significant outrage amongst a group in El Chalten, possibly as it meant they would have no longer have any likelihood of attaining the summit.

The book is largely about the controversy surrounding the compressor route. The author reviewed all remaining evidence he could find and interviewed all extant persons who knew anything of the events. Included are accounts of the more important ascents over the years.



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## **Leanna Gingras says**

I wouldn't recommend this book to a non-climber, as it's honestly a purist alpine windbag arguing over climbing semantics. For climbers, though, it's a really solid polemic on why fair means ascents matter and why historical truth is important, examined through the lens of Cinco Torre, with a special focus on Cesare Maestri's highly controversial ascent and subsequent bolting of the Compressor route. The narrative could be tighter with better transitions between timelines, and in particular he didn't do a smooth job of laying out the events of 2012. Overall, though, I liked it.

Cordes quotes a statement from the Piolets d'Or awards that pretty much nails it for me: "It turns out that the physical presence of the bolts was not nearly as important as their psychological impact, and their tendency to focus attention on the manufactured path, rather than on the mountain's natural features that allow passage."

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## **Gerald says**

Beautiful and deadly mountain. With questionable claims of conquests, specifically first ascents, the book provided an interesting look at the integrity, or lack thereof, found in the mountaineering community. Alongside the storyline of false claims, came the controversy surrounding creating crutches (installation of bolts into the rock) which allow the less skilled to achieve that which only the elite could achieve otherwise.

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