

Torre Egger's Southeast Face

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ALL THREE OF US, Janez Jeglič, Franc Knez and I, had been to Patagonia twice before. In 1983 we had made the first ascent of the great dihedral on Fitz Roy's east face and a new route on the Aguja Mermoz too. (*A.A.J.*, 1984, pages 218-219). On January 16, 1986, together with three other members of a Yugoslavian expedition, we had reached Cerro Torre's summit, having climbed a difficult new route on the east face (*A.A.J.*, 1987, pages 114-122).

Our third sojourn in Patagonia in November and December of 1986 was the most successful of all. We scaled the southeast face of Torre Egger, the impressive tower which lies in the shadow of the higher Cerro Torre. Our route was the most direct one and abounds in extreme difficulties. We stood on the top on December 7, 1986. Later in December we climbed a new route on the north face of El Mocho.

On November 9, we pitched Base Camp beside the Laguna Torre. During the following days we carried food and equipment to a bivouac site at the foot of the southeast face. We had to make use of every *hour* of decent weather; changes are sudden and dramatic. We outwitted the weather, often walking from Base Camp to the bivouac in order to climb that same day.

November 18. This was the first real day of climbing. In cascades of water and with falling snow, we climbed the first 180 meters of ice. It soon became apparent that we should have to ascend the first section expedition-style. The upper part would be scaled alpine-style.

November 19. Although the weather was bad, we succeeded in climbing 40 meters of great technical difficulties on ice. This part was extremely dangerous because of ice falling from both Cerro Torre and Torre Egger.

November 20. We managed 95 meters of extremely difficult free climbing in the "Chocolate Dihedral," despite great cold and ice-filled cracks. From our high point, the mountain towered up, completely vertical.

November 21. The long system of cracks was running out. We were at the crux of the route. The aid climbing was of utmost technical difficulty (A3), but we did manage to find our way into a new crack system. From there to the top, the wall was a great overhang.

November 29. We could scale only 40 meters of the overhanging wall. The weather was foul with gale-force winds and snow falling horizontally and building up on any slight irregularity.

PLATE 15

Photo by Silvio Koro

TORRE EGGER's Southeast Face.



December 1. We surmounted 90 meters of cracks and a dihedral. Despite the overhang, all was covered with thick snow.

December 6. Finally, we succeeded in climbing the "Bloody Crack," which was wide enough for N° 4 Friends. Filled with ice, it was very dangerous aid climbing. We were now 550 meters up on the route. We had no more rope to fix. There was only one possibility: to climb from there to the top as fast as possible, alpine-style.

On December 7 at three A.M., we set out. Before dawn we were already at the top of the fixed ropes. Lightly equipped, we had no bivouac gear and so could not look forward to spending the night on the face. It would have to be ascent and descent on the same day. The snowy summit seemed far above the vertical wall. The climbing was difficult and slow. It was not until seven o'clock in the evening that we reached the summit snow-cap. Powder snow was a terrible obstacle, but we found an icy channel which led us to the summit. At eight P.M. we finally stood atop Torre Egger in a clear evening but in a gusty gale. As we happily and proudly shook hands, we admired Cerro Torre, where we had stood only ten months before.

A quarter of an hour later, we started the descent. Near the top, one of us had to stand on the long ice pitons in the powdery snow while the other two rappelled one after the other. It was certainly risky. We speeded up, and yet when night fell, we still had 700 meters to descend. We lit our headlamps and reached the bivouac at one in the morning. We had had 22 hours of climbing and extreme effort without rest or food. Only ten years of mountain experience gave us the proper psychical and physical conditioning.

On December 8, we removed the fixed rope from the route on Torre Egger. On the 9th and 19th we were joined by Roberto Pe from an Italian expedition and together we made a new route on the north face of El Mocho. On the first day we climbed 250 meters. We slept at the bottom and the next day climbed the upper part of the face, following prominent cracks.

We must admit that our triumph was only possible because of the network of fixed ropes. Taking into consideration the height of the faces and the rapid and unpredictable weather changes, it was almost impossible to climb in pure alpine style. The proof is that almost all routes in Patagonia have been first done with fixed ropes. Some day the routes may be climbed free, solo and in one day. This is a natural development, a kind of staircase where every new step follows the older ones.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Patagonia, Argentina.

NEW ROUTES: Torre Egger, 2987 meters, 9800 feet, Southeast Face, Summit reached December 7, 1986 (Janez Jeglič, Silvo Karo, Franc Knez).

El Mocho, c. 2000 meters, 6562 feet, North Face, December 9 and 10, 1986 (Jeglič, Karo, Knez, Roberto Pe).