



## AAC Publications

---

### Ross Peak, Blue Phoenix

Montana, Bridger Range

**In 2016, my good friend Tony Chang had mentioned to me that there was a lot of overlooked potential for long bolted limestone routes on the 1,000' northeast face of Ross Peak (9,003'), in the Bridger Range of southwest Montana.** I was intrigued, so that July, I packed up my rig and made the trip to Bozeman.

After a little research, it appeared that this expansive aspect of Ross had only two completed free lines, done between 2002 and 2006, in addition to the original ascent of the face by Jack Tackle and Gary Skaar that was climbed mostly on pins and required some aid (see [AAJ 1977](#)). With only a 30-minute drive to the trailhead from downtown Bozeman and just under an hour and a half approach, it seemed like an obvious opportunity for a route developer.

Arriving with a haulbag full of ropes, bolts, bits, and batteries, I set off to scout the face. It soon became clear that I would need some help. Looking through the list of many talented developers in Bozeman, I was able to rustle up the always-psyched Matt Abbott to help belay and bolt what would become Trial By Fire (9 pitches, 5.11) over the course of three days. Bolted entirely on lead from stances, we did our best to follow the style of those that had come before us.

The original plan that year had been to finish a route that was started by Tom Kalakay and Robert Mueller in 1996. They had only completed two pitches, but the full line would go directly up the center of the wall through a series of overhangs. Trial By Fire followed an easier weakness to the left, going through a shorter section of the major roof to avoid any aid or a bolt ladder.

After such a great trip in 2016, I returned the following July to go to work on the obvious direct line, which splits from Trial By Fire after three pitches. As I knew that there would be at least one section that would host 5.12 or harder climbing, and there were essentially no opportunities to place natural gear for aid, I decided to bolt on rappel over the course of a few days. I spent one night on a ledge about 250' below the summit, strung up in hammock between two trees that were much too close together, sleeping with one eye open as I watched an unexpected lightning storm miss me by about three miles. It was an adventure before the climbing even started.

The next day Matt joined me and helped clean pitch five and put a few bolts in on pitch six. We were not able to complete the route that day as the very hard stone drained all our batteries and broke one of our drill bits. I came back a few days later to bolt the last pitch, and then returned again a week later with Tony Chang to complete the first free ascent of Blue Phoenix (8 pitches, 5.12), leading all the crux pitches.

Overall the difficulties revolve around two 5.12- pitches (pitches 5 and 8) and a pitch of solid 5.12 (pitch 6), with fun 5.10 cruising in between. Every pitch is on high-quality gray, blue, and gold stone and features occasional patches of solid chert. The route varies in style from flowing gymnastic movement to power to fickle technical climbing right when you're getting tired.

The second ascent of Blue Phoenix is worth noting: Bozeman local Inge Perkins was struggling to find a partner to try the route that September. Her boyfriend, Hayden Kennedy, who had recently had shoulder surgery, decided to jug along behind to support her, and Inge led and onsighted every pitch

like an absolute badass. We tragically lost both of them in October 2017. They will be sorely missed.

– Evan Mathews

## Images



The 1,000' northeast face of Ross Peak in the Bridger Range, near Bozeman, Montana. This limestone face has seen only periodic attention over the years, despite being only a 30-minute drive and 1.5-hour hike from downtown Bozeman. From left to right: Unnamed (5.11-), Trial By Fire (5.11), Blue Phoenix (5.12), The Fellowship (5.10c). In August 1975, Gary Skaar and Jack Tackle made the first ascent of the face via the Northeast Face Direct (IV 5.9 A4), which climbs a natural line between Blue Phoenix and The Fellowship, possibly sharing a pitch with the latter route down low.

Article Details

Author	Evan Mathews
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions