



## AAC Publications

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### **Kingfisher, Southwest Ridge, Thermic Fever**

Utah, Fisher Towers

**The Fisher Towers hold a special place in my heart. Composed of Culter sandstone, mud, and a Moenkopi sandstone caprock, they are beautiful but barbaric, delightful but potentially deadly.** Each year from 2002–2015, I spent at least one weeklong trip in these towers, climbing classic routes and putting up new ones. For ten of those years, Jeremy Aslaksen joined me. Our yearly Fisher pilgrimage gave me an opportunity to step back from my job as a trauma surgeon, turn off the cell phone, and enjoy some good old-fashioned fun and fear.

In 2015, after Jeremy and I put up the Hydraform Ridge, life changed. I moved to California to start a job, got married, and had a kid. Jeremy was busy helping his daughter get set for college, and putting up his own routes throughout the Southwest. The years flew by. Discouraged that so much time had passed without a joint mission to the Fishers, we set an ultimatum: 2021 or bust.

For our objective, we picked the full southwest ridge to the top of Kingfisher. We planned to avoid Jim Beyer's 1986 route Jagged Edge (V 5.9 A4), on the upper left portion of the ridge, and minimize time on the Minotaur (IV 5.9+ C2), climbed by Duane and Lisa Raleigh in 1998. We saw a line that we felt would go with minimal bolting, but it was largely on the south side of the formation—it would be a fry fest, to be sure, in the heat of late August.

We got up before the sun the first morning, but by the time we were at the base, we were soaked with sweat. Jeremy had spent two hot weekends in July soloing, hauling, and fixing the first two pitches to get to the ridge, so the third pitch was mine. It was an offwidth followed by a horizontal chimney through hot mud. The fourth lead followed a pitch of the Minotaur, and was gloriously rowdy, with one dicey mantel after another, high above old bolts. This is what I had been missing for the past half a decade! We returned to the ground to sleep, as we would each night.

The next morning, day two, we traversed rightward under the head of the Minotaur on the north side, and then rapped 35' down onto the south face, with some 5.4 traversing required. This set us up for a pitch the likes of which neither of us had ever climbed: a traverse over a gaping mud cave that disappeared into the depths of the tower. As we passed over the void, we dropped pebbles into the maw; they clattered down beyond the light from our headlamps. At the end of this pitch, we found ourselves just below the start of the upper Kingfisher ridge. Guarding it was a chasm. I had two options: jump a gap and hopscotch on hoodoos to the opposite side, or lower down the face and aid back up. I decided to go for the jump. Jeremy gave me several large loops of slack. I shut off my brain, made a running start, and leaped for a barrel-sized hoodoo. I skipped to the next ledge, nearly skittering off, and finished on the opposite ledge.

Day three was filled with more heat-induced hallucinations and beak seams. But we were stoked come evening—only one or two pitches stood between us and the more solid cap rock.

At 4:30 a.m on day four, Jeremy started beaking up an obvious seam. Hours passed. I looked up in between dirt barrages. At a blank section he placed a couple of bolts. Finally, he arrived at the base of the capstone and lowered down. Exhausted from the day and his eight-hour lead, we retreated to camp.

Day five. Our alarms rang at 2 a.m, and we hustled to jug our ropes. We saw lightning to the south beyond Castle Valley, but far enough away that we could justify starting up. By the time I was ready to lead, the lightning and thunder were closer. I placed beaks to aid through a roof and started free climbing through the capstone. Light rain started. In the dark of predawn, we watched as lightning slammed Castleton Tower. I lowered off fast and quickly clipped into the anchor. We suddenly were surrounded by lightning bolts. We rapped our fixed lines as fast as possible and walked back to the safety of our car. It was a spectacular light show, but chillingly close.

By 9 a.m., the storm had passed. Jeremy and I looked at each other. Neither of us wanted to jug 600' of fixed line in the heat for the second time that morning, but we had to finish this thing off. Out we charged and up we went. I reached my high point and finished my pitch, then led a quick pitch to the top.

It had been five years since Jeremy and I had last roped up together. When I brought him up, we hugged, did an easy third-class scramble up the summit block, and then headed down.

That afternoon, a second storm provided another dramatic lightning show, followed by rainbows over the towers. We called our route Thermic Fever, as we are pretty sure we had heat stroke for much of the climb. Grades in the Fishers are fairly irrelevant, but we gave it VI 5.9+ A2+. It's not so hard that it isn't doable, but it's no cakewalk.

— Joe Forrester

The line of Thermic Fever. The solid lines are portions of the route seen from camp near the parking lot; dotted lines are on the hidden south side.

**Route Description (pitch lengths approximate)**

P1- 150' A1 (no bolts, bolted anchor). Up cracks toward notch.

P2 - 110' A1 (no bolts, bolted anchor). More of the same.

P3- 50' 5.6 C1 (no bolts, gear belay). Up small offwidth to dwarf crawl around right.

P4- 180' 5.9+ A1+ (no new bolts, gear belay). This route has one bolt that was part of the Duane and Lisa Raleigh route Minotaur. Long sweet pitch. It is two ropes to the ground from here on the south side using the P4 and P3 anchors.

P5- 100' 5.7 A1 (2 bolts, bolted anchors). Traverses under the head of the Minotaur. Requires some lower-off shenanigans.

P6- 40' rap onto south face onto dirt ledge. 5.3 walk east on dirt ledge (bolted anchor).

P7- 90' 5.6 A1. Cool hole going into the heart of the Kingfisher.....horrible roof to surmount (1 bolt, bolted anchor).

P8- 30' 5.5. Dangerous jump between hoodoos (1 bolt, bolted anchor, 1 rope to ground on the south side).

P9- 130' 5.6 A2 (7 bolts, bolted anchor). Traverse straight right into a beak seam, then up and right with intermittent free/aid climbing onto south face.

P10-100' A2 (2 bolts, bolted anchor). Continue to head up and right.

P11- 130' A2+ (10 bolts, bolted anchor). Straight up the beak seam until it bottoms out. Big loose flake midway up pitch directly above your belayer — tread lightly, choss ninja.

P12 - 75' 5.8 A1 (2 bolts, bolted anchor). Go through Moenkopi caprock roof, then left to obvious corner.

P13- 35' 5.6 C1 (no bolts, bolted anchor). Go right from belay up cracks to dirt scramble.

Scramble to summit, then scramble back down. Single rope raps to the belay at P11. Then it is 3 double rope raps to ground. There is an anchor out on the face (not part of the route) about 150' below P10 anchors.

#### Protection

Doubles set of cams from 0.3-#4 BD cam. One number 5 and one number 6 useful. 6#1 beaks, 10 #2 beaks, and 12 #3 beaks. Spectresx2. Screammers. Lots of rope protectors. Whole lot of water if doing this in August....

## Images



Double rainbows over the Fisher Towers after a late summer storm. During their last day of climbing on the first ascent of Thermic Fever (VI 5.9+ A2+), on Kingfisher Tower, Joe Forrester and Jeremy Aslaksen found themselves in the middle of a lightning storm near the summit, before beating a quick retreat to the ground. Their route generally follows the right skyline, with multiple pitches on the south face (far side) in the upper half.



The line Joe Forrester and Jeremy Aslaksen followed on Thermic Fever (VI 5.9+ A2+), the full southwest ridge of Kingfisher Tower, climbed in August 2021. The solid lines are portions of the route seen from their camp near the parking lot; dotted lines are on the hidden south side.



Jeremy Aslaksen following the pitch three crawl on Thermic Fever (VI 5.9+ A2+), Kingfisher Tower, Fisher Towers, Utah.

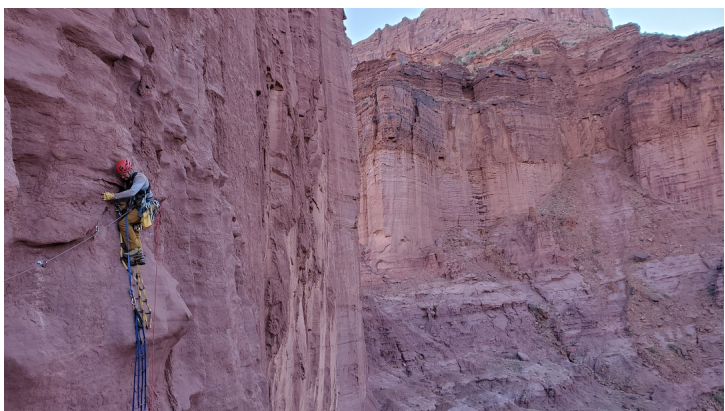


Jeremy Aslaksen heading under the head of the Minotaur at the start of pitch five on Thermic Fever (VI 5.9+ A2+), Kingfisher Tower, Fisher Towers, Utah.





Jeremy Aslaksen heading up the beak seam on pitch 11 before the sun hit him and Joe Forrester during their first ascent of Thermic Fever (VI 5.9+ A2+) in late August 2021.



Joe Forrester leaving the belay and leading off onto pitch nine on Thermic Fever (VI 5.9+ A2+), Kingfisher Tower, Fisher Towers, Utah.

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