**FERNWOOD FOR THE PEOPLE ‘*23*’**

**Hiking Approach:** Start from the Newlands Forestry Station by walking to the south to gain the steep jeep track only-just in Kirstenbosch Gardens. Hike up the track to gain the contour path at approximately 400m ASL. Turn right (to the north) on the contour path. Continue over a short section of wooden boardwalk. A short distance beyond, turn a left corner to encounter a jumbled scree slope of big boulders. The Fernwood Gully stream is a few metres further on. Hike up the streambed, including a section where the stream disappears underground, and go up leftwards to find the streambed again. Continue until the streambed ends in a dense jungle. Use a 15m tunnel up to the right to get through the jungle. Head up leftwards up steep slopes and then conglomerate boulders to then clear the forest. Traverse the steep slopes to the left to gain the streambed in the well-formed Fernwood Gully. Head up the gully and waterfalls, sometimes using the slopes to the right, for a long way until ending at the base of the enormous wall. Begin three pitches of gully climbing in the extreme left of the gorge by climbing through trees and then into the open gully. The third pitch finishes with a section of worrying looking decaying stone that can be climbed safely. Alternatively, it can be bypassed on the right by climbing up the gully. Traverse across to the big Graveyard Ledge on the left, 20m below the Long Thin Overhang.

**Abseil Approach:** Take the cable car then hike to Maclear’s Beacon and then down Smuts’ Track towards Kirstenbosch. At the first big plateau 80m lower down one is level with the top of Wormhole Buttress and Fernwood Face. A 10m tall rocky outcrop is found to the left of the path. At this point leave the Smuts Track and follow vague paths towards the summit of Fernwood Buttress about 500m to the south-east. Immediately before heading uphill to the summit turn left into a shallow valley and walk down it into the pine forest. Bear left to arrive in a beautiful campsite under an overhanging rockface about 7m tall. In front of the campsite walk 15m downslope between the pines to arrive at the precipice. A metre or two above the lowest level is a little ledge on the left with a little rock promontory to its left. Hold on the good handholds to peer 30cm around the corner to encounter the top of the abseil route that goes all the way to the bottom of the cliff.

**Abseil 1 50m:** The lead abseiler must descend with the rack and not much else. Abseil to the broken ledge 12m down. Keep to the north (Protea Buttress side) of the Rocky Tower and go over the edge of the grassy slope. Place a couple of directional pieces of gear to keep the line tending northwards to gain 3m in that direction on the descent, and to stay in on the mountain. Get to the lip of a huge roof underneath where a section of steel-grey rock meets white rock in a vertical line. Progressively place three directionals (small cams) below the roof to gain the big ledge four metres lower. Traverse easily to the next abseil point which is visible six metres along the ledge to the north. The lead abseiler must provide a ‘fireman’s belay’ to the second belayer who will remove the directionals and each time will ‘ping’ out into space. The second abseiler should use a locking abseil device like a Micro Jul or make use of a prussik. The second abseiler should have the haul-bag directly attached to the belay loop via a quickdraw.

**Abseil 2 50m:** The lead abseiler must descend with the rack. This abseil does not do a diagonal, but as it is over-vertical, directionals are required. Abseil to the big ledge with the beautiful Rooi Els tree. The next abseil point is one metre from the tree. Most parties will spend a night on this very attractive ledge on the south (Muizenberg) side of the tree.

**Abseil 3 60m:** The lead abseiler must place one or two directionals below the big roof halfway down so as to avoid being stranded a metre or two out in space at the next abseil point.

**Abseil 4 50m:** The fourth abseil gets the team to the Graveyard Ledge. After passing the Long Thin Overhang either place directionals to the south to land on the Ledge (first abseiler to belay rope), alternatively, continue into the gully and then swing/scramble across the gap to get onto the Graveyard Ledge.

**Start:** The route begins on the Graveyard Ledge approximately in the mid-point of the Long Thin Overhang at a small cairn. The route begins up a natural break approximately 15m from the Gully.

**Pitch 1 25m 20:** Climb the natural break and horizontal rails most of the way to the ledge, then rail out right for a few metres and then up to the ledge. Walk right to stance near the end of the ledge at a cairn.

**Pitch 2 30m 22:** Place important cams in the roof of the Long Thin Overhang before climbing around it to the right. Climb up to the next roof and then rail out left and around the corner for another six metres to an opportunity to stand. At this point one is back above the start of the route. Climb the crack for 10m and then do a slightly runout section to a small seated stance for one.

**Pitch 3 15m 21:** Climb up diagonally to the right to the obvious little three-finger pocket in the white wall. Step right and then go up to the ledge 4m above. Climb up diagonally to the right to regain a ledge at an abseil point.

**Pitch 4 35m 22:** Climb straight up to the rail and then go right for a couple of metres. Climb up the immaculate and sustained wall for 20m towards the big roofs, passing two ancient pitons while wending your way up. Climb diagonally up towards the left to intersect the band of highly-weathered rock. Continue diagonally up across the narrow, vegetated gully and continue in this direction for a few more metres to get to a comfortable little ledge with seating for one.

**Pitch 5 35m 22:** Climb the beautiful white and streaky wall diagonally up to the right for a few metres and then continue up black streaks on white rock until forced to step right across the void into a bottomless chimney. Continue up the chimney until able to regain the steep white wall on the left for the last six metres to the Rooi Els Ledge.

**Pitch 6 30m 22:** Climb up directly from the Rooi Els and continue straight up the break until forced to go out left for a couple of metres. Head up angling to the right and then traverse out right across a steep slab and then up to the right to gain a ledge.

**Pitch 7 17m 21:** Start a metre to the left of the arete and climb the bulging wall. Head up and then diagonally left to get to the ledge called Traverse of the Eagles (named by the 1966 party that opened Fernwood Precipice Direct) and a point on the abseil route.

**Pitch 8 20m 11:** Traverse left under the huge roof until beyond it. Stance just before the start of the tan brown rock at the end.

**Pitch 9 35m 23:** Reverse a few metres along the Traverse of the Eagles and then climb the overhanging crack/knobbly break immediately adjacent to the huge roof. Do a tenuous traverse to the right across the steep and exposed slab for a metre-and-a-half (just above the lip of the huge roof) to gain a vertical break. Do very thin slab climbing for 5m to a rail. This section is protected by a Rock 1 or equivalent small wire. Do a footless fingertips rail to the right until able to stand around the corner. Climb up and leftwards for 3m to the small roof then move a metre left and climb the overhanging crack/knobbly break. Continue up for 6m to a roof and pull through it going slightly leftwards. Four metres higher traverse a metre or two to the right to gain a chimney. Climb the chimney to a grassy ledge. Scramble up to stance on top of the rocky tower on the left.

**Pitch 10 15m 20:** Move a couple of metres left, climb the corner and then the wall on the left and then finish up the bottomless chimney.

**Descent:** Hike down Skeleton Gorge or walk to the cable car.

**First ascent:** Tinie Versfeld and Hilton Davies, 30 January 2021