

Barry's Route F3 *****

FA: Pitches 1 to 3: D. Barry, C. Gebhardt. 29 Jan 1938

Pitch 4: M. Moore, M. Winter, M. Makowski. 18 Aug 1963

Overview

This is a classic route made famous by the death of Dick Barry while trying to make the first ascent of the peak. The crux pitch is on good rock, but is exposed and perhaps more difficult to second than to lead. It is overall a far more serious route than the *Standard Route*.

Approach – 2 hr

Take the route described for the *Standard Route* till about 100 metres below the col between Cathkin Peak and Monk's Cowl. From here, traverse out to the right along a broad grass ledge that crosses the north face of Monk's Cowl. Continue around a corner where there is a rock shoulder. Just past the rock shoulder it is possible to scramble up to a higher grass ledge. Walk to the right along this grass ledge on the west face. After rounding a corner, ascend a small, short gully and scramble up to reach the next rock band on the west face.



CLIMBING TIME

7 hours from Keith Bush Camp.

ASPECT

West-facing; mostly shady

BEST TIME

May to September, but will be chilly in July and August

GEAR

- 2 x 50-m half ropes
- Standard 'Berg rack
- 5 x pitons and hammer

Start: 20 metres right of the ridge separating the sheer north face from the more broken west face, at the base of a 10-metre rock slab with some overhanging blocks near the top.

1. 15m (E): Climb the slab to under the blocks. Traverse a few metres to the right, then climb up to the grass ledge above. Cross the broad grass ledge diagonally to the right, to the bottom of a small gully leading through the next rock band. Climb the gully, then traverse left along a grass ledge until the next rock band can be climbed via a shallow recess to another grass ledge. Traverse left along the ledge to a peg located just before the ledge peters out. Belay here for the next pitch.

2. 25m (E): Climb a metre or two onto a big flake, then move up diagonally left into a sloping groove/slab, which is visible on the left-hand skyline from the belay. Move up and around the corner onto a steep slab and straight up this to reach a belay on a large grass ledge. Walk to the right to the base of a large recess.

BARRY'S DEATH ON MONK'S COWL

Barry's Route takes its name from Dick Barry who died trying to make the first ascent of Monk's Cowl on 29 January 1938. Barry had made a name for himself both in South Africa and in Britain as being a top cragsman, and had made almost 90 major first ascents in the United Kingdom. He also made first ascents in France, Austria and Switzerland. His attempt to climb the Cowl for the first time was his only ever trip to the Drakensberg.

During his attempt on Monk's Cowl, Barry was climbing with Colin Gerhardt and the accident occurred from the cubbyhole stance at the start of the crux traverse to the right (pitch 4). Gerhardt was seconding the pitch and, just as he arrived at the stance, a handhold broke. Barry had in fact put his hand out to help his companion onto the ledge. Gerhardt fell the full length of the rope and pulled Barry off the stance. The two tumbled several hundred metres, still roped together. Miraculously, both survived the fall, but Barry was unconscious and all their spare rope and food were still in a rucksack in the cubbyhole high above. After regaining consciousness, they tried descending further in thick mist, going separate ways. Barry fell again, this time sustaining fatal injuries.

The body was recovered some three days later, and Dick Barry is buried in a marked grave near the now Canopy Tours in the Champagne Valley. Fourteen years later, their bag was found in the cubbyhole by Des Watkins and Gilly Bettle when they were accidentally trying the same line. The rucksack still contained food and rope and even a bottle containing Barry and Gerhardt's name to be placed on the virgin summit.

3. 25m (F2): Start up a slab and climb up to a belay in the higher of the two cubbyholes spaced about 3 metres apart – protection is sparse on this pitch. Cam sizes 1 to 3 and a few pegs may be useful.

4. 30m (F3): From the second cubbyhole, move out and up diagonally to the right for a few metres until it is possible to traverse to the right along a narrow rock ledge, with several fixed pegs, to reach the base of a crack. Move up through the crack (well protected) to gain another small ledge. Move slightly to the right to the base of two exit cracks and climb the right-hand crack to reach a belay at the edge of a broad grass ledge. At this point, join the *Standard Route* where it comes around the corner from the south side.

Descent – 1 hr 30 min
(to the base of the route)
As for the *Standard Route*.

