

The Wilberhorse; v5a3IV ***

Topo by Tom Johns

Further up the valley from Hut stream lies a mystical creature known only as the Wilberhorse. We sought it out and found a little gem hiding in the hills that starts with a kick and just keeps on coming.

Canyon summary

Map: BW19 Taylors Camp

Highest Waterfall: 110m

Minimum Rope: 2x 110m

Anchors: Bolts and simple natural anchors

Length: 1.2km

Drop: 400m

Rock type: Greywacke

Catchment: 1.6km²

Flood Danger: moderate - high

Recommended season: Summer – Late Summer

Approach: 3.5 – 4.5 hours

Descent: 4 – 6 hours

Return: 1 – 2 hours

Total: 8.5 – 12.5 hours

Approach by car:

Important! Although the Wilberhorse is on DOC land the access is across working stations, unless permission is given then you cannot access this canyon. Before you head up the valley call Algidus Station on (03) 318 5846 and ask, they are happy for people to walk across their land but they like to know who's up there.

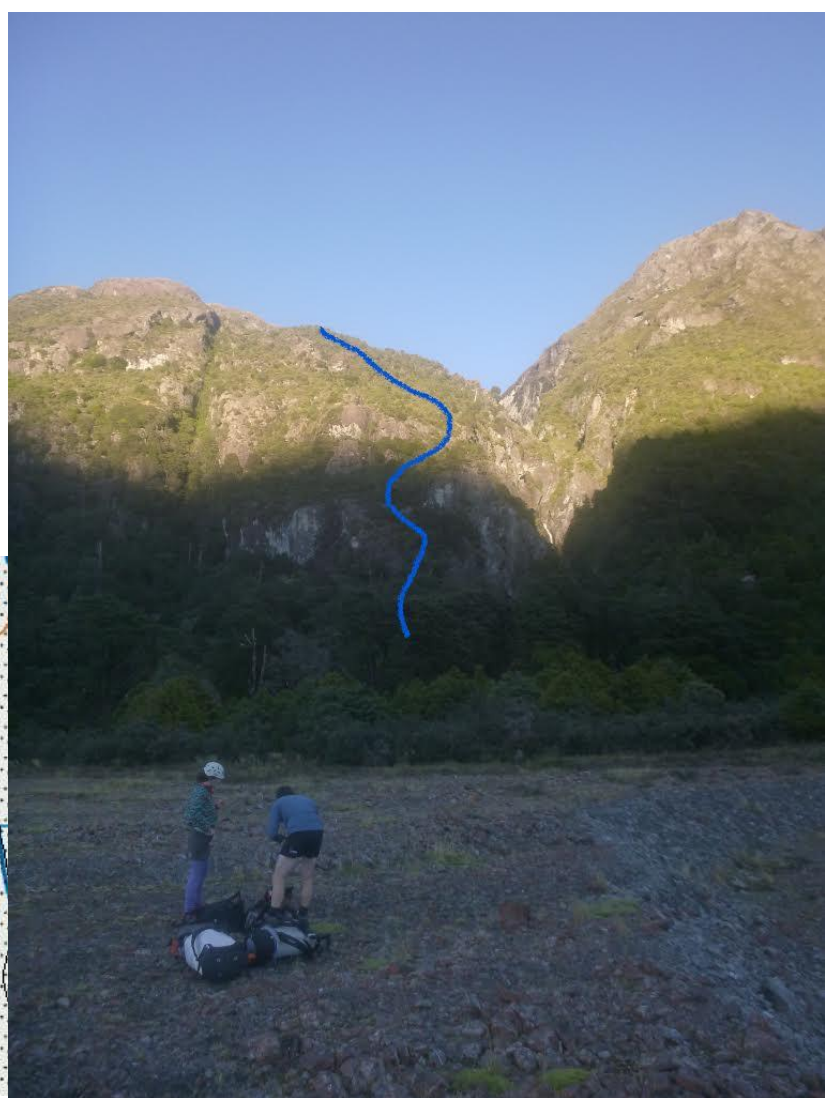
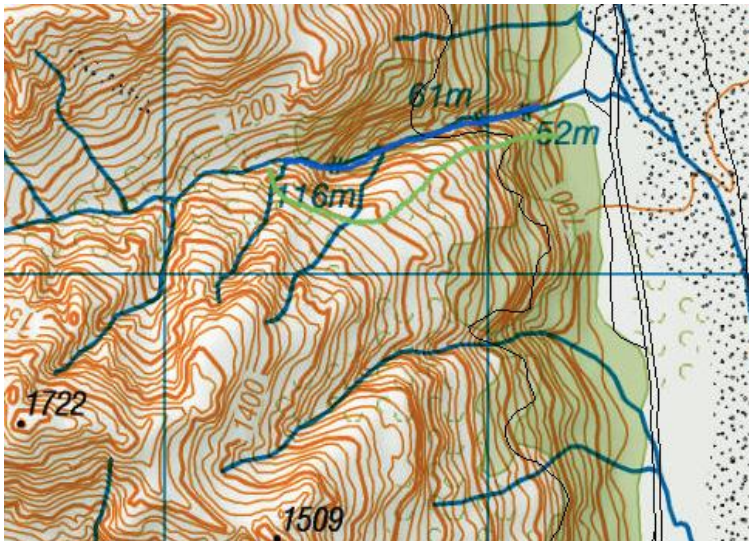
Approaching from Christchurch drive towards Windwhistle. Once at Windwhistle follow signs to Olympus Ski field taking Coleridge Road. At Dog Box corner turn onto Homestead Road and follow this and signs to Glenthorne Station. Turn left onto Harper Road and keep going until you reach the group of houses and the canal (past the Olympus turnoff).

Permission to use the Glenthorne Station track can be granted and a key hired by calling the Station Manager (03 3185822) If you have been granted access to use the Glenthorne Station track then you'll have directions, if not then turn right after the first canal bridge and follow the road around the river bed until you get to the Wilberforce Canal, following the track past the intake gets you out and into the riverbed. From here it's all wheel marks and rough tracks up the Wilberforce until your destination is reached.

Because there are working stations on either bank of the river it is important to stay in the Riverbed unless you have received permission to use the station tracks.

At the time of writing (Feb 2018) it is possible to as far as 6450, 2578 on the topo map.

If you have a vehicle capable then crossing the river is an option, but be wary, as it is a long walk out if you get swamped or stuck.



Approach on Foot:

Crossing the Wilberforce. Pick a spot where the river is braided and be careful, it is worth walking to where the river is in multiple channels. Crossing should not be attempted by people inexperienced in river crossing and river crossing techniques are advised.

Crossing the river above 280 cumecs (fighting hill **on the Rakia** readings) would be very hazardous even for experienced river crossers. It is worth noting that the Wilberforce has a long history of drowning people and vehicles and demands respect and care at all flows.

Depending on how far up the river you have driven the stream bashing will be long or short. Once you've made it to the base of the canyon the best route up is on the east side up and through the bluffs (see photo). There are several breaks in the bluffs that get you through them and deposit you at around 900m. From here head up through the scrub until you get a view of the big waterfall, then climb some more before sidling around above the gullies and bluffs. Descending into the stream is easiest if you aim for a couple of hundred metres upstream of the start of the canyon as the closer gullies end in small bluffs.

Route Description:

NOTE: As of the first decent the canyon is rigged for exploration. All the bolts are stainless 10mm but there are several single bolts anchor stations in this canyon!

After about 50 of stream and easy downclimbs (plus a possible jump slide if the pools are deeps enough) R₁ leads into the canyon. R₂ is a short pitch to get you to the anchors for R₃. R₃ is done as one pitch and the waterfall fans out from about 50m making the bottom half quite wet although you're not in the main flow. It might be possible to avoid R₃ by rappelling into the canyon off trees and shrubs after this pitch, but you would be missing most of the fun. R₄ has anchors on top of a big flat block and has an awkward downclimb to load the rope, if the pool ever gets deep enough, this would be a wild jump.

The next section is a series of shorter rappels from bolts and slung boulders finishing in a sweet little jump. Some of the other pitches may be jumpable in the future if the pools deepen.

The lower section starts with what could possibly be a wild slide from half way down, this leads into a series of great pitches. R₁₁ is best tackled on the true left to avoid the chasm and stay on the rope to get to the anchors for R₁₂ which is quite slippery at the top and difficult to avoid the flow. R₁₃ is in the flow before a great jump into a bottomless pool. The last pitch has a sharp edge somewhere around the 5m mark which caused a core-shot on the first descent which will need managing. From the base of R₁₄ it's a gentle 200m out to the main riverbed.

Water Level:

The Wilberforce River provides the best gauge of water levels. If you can't cross the river then the canyon probably won't go (you'll be on the wrong bank). The first decent was done when the Rakaia was reading 280 cumecs (<https://www.ecan.govt.nz/data/riverflow/sitedetails/168526>) and dropping

Escapes:

The high walls of the canyon will make escape very challenging under the best circumstances. There may be some potential escapes during the middle section but none after R₁₁.

Because the stream carries a lot of gravel most of the pools are not very deep so jumping or slides require checking first.

First descent: Tom Johns, Ashley Stewart, Rocky Smith, Sarah Hamilton, Danny Kingan. 11/3/2018

