

Kiwi Canyons Grading

Introduction

The modern sport of canyoning has its roots strongly centered in Europe, and in particular France. As the sport began to really take off, a number of French Outdoor Associations standardised their grading systems in 2003.

The gradings presented here are the English translation of those agreed on by the French Federation of Mountain Climbing (FFME), with support from the French Federation of Speleology (FFS) in conjunction with the National Union of Mountain Guides (SNGM), the National Union of Professionals Climbing and Canyoning (SNAPEC), the National Union of Professional Speleology and Canyoning (SNPSC) and the Federation of French Alpine Clubs (FCAF).

There are several different canyon grading systems around the world, as our canyons are most similar to the European ones, the French grading system is used in NZ as it aligns with 'best international practice'.

Grading any technical activity is always an exercise in compromise. The grading is indicative of the most difficult section of the canyon and reflects the technical skill required to descend that part. In the grade, there is no way to distinguish between a canyon with one difficult section and another canyon where the whole canyon has difficult drop after difficult drop.

The gradings must be used in conjunction with route descriptions and CanyonTopo to gain a better understanding of the overall difficulty of the trip. Remember that Canyons change with every flood, to the point that the initial grade may change.

Assumptions

The gradings here assume the following;

- An average water flow for the usual season that particular canyon is descended.
- A group of 5 people, who have not been in the canyon before, but have suitable experience and skills to descend the canyon.
- The level of difficulty is set by at least one of the situations in the table being found in the canyon.
- The jumps are considered optional

Grading

Canyon grading has 3 parts. Difficulty, Commitment and Quality.

Difficulty

The letter 'v' (for vertical difficulty) followed by a number from 1 to 7.

The letter 'a' (for aquatic or water difficulty) followed by a number from 1 to 7.

The current difficulty numbers only reach 7, but more difficult canyons in the future could require higher numbers. Rock climbing grades used in the descriptions are from the free climbing Australasian Ewbank system and the Aid climbing Grade. See [Wikipedia grade comparison](#).

Commitment

A roman numeral which indicates the commitment and duration of the canyon. I to VI or greater.

Quality

An optional star system indicates the quality/beauty/fun factor of a canyon. 0 stars through to 4 stars.

Examples:

v3a2III**

DIFFICULTY

	V: Vertical difficulty	A Aquatic difficulty
1 Very easy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No rappels, rope normally unnecessary for progress. No climbing or down climbing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No water or calm water. Swimming optional.
2 Easy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rappel anchors are very easily reached. Rappels are very easy $\leq 10m$. Easy climbing and down climbing with little exposure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swims less than 10m in calm water. Simple jumps less than 3m. Short, low angled slides
3 A little Difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low Vertical flow. Rappels land in pools with calm water. Rappel anchors are easily reached. Rappels are easy. $\leq 30m$. Rappels are separated by enough room to regroup. Setting hand lines is easy. Climbing moves to grade 12. A little exposure, which may require the use of a rope. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swims less than 30m in calm water. Slight current in places. Simple jumps between 3 and 5m Long or moderately angled slides.
4 Difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low to moderate vertical flow that can begin to cause imbalance or entrapment. Rappels anchors are difficult to reach and/or Rappels $> 30m$ Setting handlines is difficult and delicate. Mult-pitch rappels with relatively spacious re-belay stations. Rough rock edges requiring rope wear management. Rappels with obscured sections and/or landings pools. Landing pools have current. Climbing moves to grade 15 or A0. Exposed and/or requires belaying and protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prolonged immersion in cold water. Moderate current in places. Simple jumps between 5 and 8m Jumps with difficult trajectory and/or landing of less than 5m. Siphons of less than 1m in length and / or depth. Large or steep slides.
5 Quite Difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium to high vertical flow. Crossing the flow requires correct route selection and balance. Multi-pitch Rappels may have hanging re-belays. Requirement to cross pools with current during the descent. Canyon surface is very slippery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prolonged immersion in cold water resulting in a substantial heat loss. Current strong enough that it could affect a swimmers path through the water. Hydraulics such as eddies, recirculations, holes may trap a

	<p>and/or has significant obstacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retrieving the rope is difficult or has to be done whilst swimming. • Exposed climbing moves up to grade 18 or A1. 	<p>Canyoner for a short period of time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple jumps between 8 and 10m. • Jumps with difficult trajectory and/or landing of 5 to 8m. • Large Siphons up to 2m in length and / or depth.
<p>6 Very difficult Exposed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong to very strong vertical flow • Sustained waterfalls • Crossing the flow is very difficult, requiring effective management of selected route and / or balance. • Requirement to build advanced and/or delicate natural anchors • Rappel anchors are very difficult to reach. • Setting hand lines is very difficult and very delicate. • Exposed climbing moves to grade 19 or A2. • Canyon surface exceptionally slippery and/or loose. • Rappel landing pools are turbulent and/or with significant current. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate current that makes a selected swimming path or stopping point difficult to achieve. • Hydraulics such as eddies, recirculations, holes may trap a Canyoner for a moderate period of time.. • Simple Jumps between 10 and 14m • Jumps with difficult trajectory and/or landing of 5 to 8m. • Siphon of up to 3m depth and / or length. • Technical siphon, up to 1m deep, with possible current.
<p>7 Extremely Difficult Very Exposed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very strong to extremely strong vertical flow • Very sustained waterfalls that lead into one another without a gap. • Crossing the flow is extremely difficult; requiring anticipation and specific rope management, maneuver, balance, support and pace. • Exposed climbing moves > grade 19 or A2 • Limited visibility of route and frequent obstacles. • Requirement to move through powerful current at the end of a rappel or rappel landing in a very turbulent pool with powerful current. • Control of breathing: sections where you must hold your breath. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong current that makes a selected swimming path or stopping point extremely difficult to achieve • Hydraulics such as eddies, recirculations or holes may trap a Canyoner for a prolonged period of time. • Simple jumps greater than 14m • Jumps with difficult trajectory and/or landing greater than 10m. • Siphons over 3m in length and / or depth. • Technical and committing siphon, more than 1m tall, with current or no visibility.

COMMITMENT / DURATION

COMMITMENT DURATION	CRITERIA
I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to get out of a flood quickly. • Escape is easy throughout the Canyon • Total time (approach, descent, return) less than 2 hours.
II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to get out of a flood in less than 15 mins • Escape takes up to 30 minutes. • Total time (approach, descent, return) is between 2 and 4 hours.
III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to get out of a flood in less than 30 minutes. • Escape takes up to 1 hour. • Total time (approach, descent return) is between 4 and 8 hours.
IV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to get out of a flood in less than 1 hour. • Escape takes up to 2 hours. • Total time (approach, descent return) between 8 hours and 1 day.
V	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to get out of a flood in less than 2 hours. • Escape takes up to 4 hours. • Total time (approach, descent return) is between 1 and 2 days.
VI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting out of a flood takes more than 2 hours • Escape requires more than 4 hours. • Total time (approach, descent return) is more than 2 days.

QUALITY

No stars	Canyons that have been descended, but are not really worth the effort required. Included so people searching for new canyons know to discount these streams.
*	Locally Significant Canyons. Good canyons that are worth the effort required to descend
**	Regionally Significant Canyons. Canyons of above average quality that are worth returning to several times
***	Nationally significant Canyons. The highest quality canyons, with an excellent mix of good access, beauty, fun and challenge.
****	Canyons of International significance. (Not used in NZ so far)