



DRAGONS' DEN

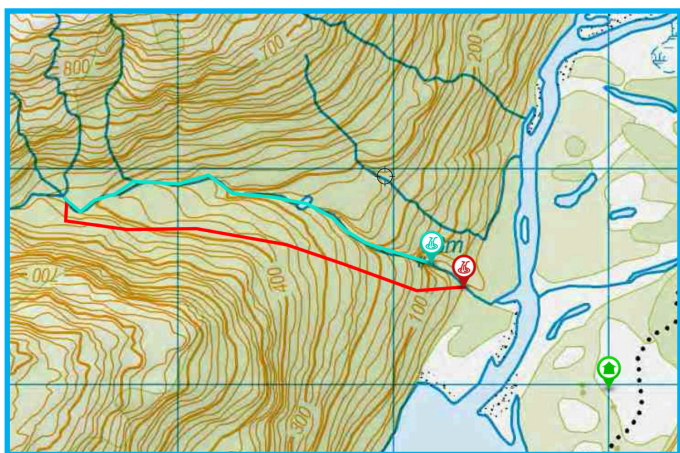
Canyon v5a4IV ★★ ★

Location

Pyke river/Lake Alabaster, Fiordland, New Zealand

Character

A medium to high volume canyon, with technical pitches and two crux vertical sections which give the canyon its grade. The 80m is the scenic and technical crux, with big views across the Pyke river valley and some exposure.



Map: CA09 - Alabaster Pass

Car park: [Hollyford road end](#)

Camping spot: CA09 171 618

WGS84: S 44.49562 E 168.18368

Start canyon: CA09 149 629

WGS84: S 44.48431 E 168.15897

Approach

Leave your car at the start of the Hollyford track.

Hike or packraft for approximately 25 km to the North of Alabaster lake, where you can camp on an open clearing. More information about the packrafting trip can you find [here](#).

Approach on Foot

Cross the Pyke river on the North side of the lake. A packraft is useful for the crossing to keep your equipment (and you) dry, but it is not essential as the deep section of

the river is relatively short.

Follow the Pyke to the Dragon's Den stream. Continue up to the 80m waterfall, and assess the flow there.

Follow some animal tracks TR side of the stream, which climb steep at first and then flatten out a bit. Keep following the canyon until you can walk into the canyon around the 430m contour.

Rock

Pyroclastic breccia

Water

The canyon takes a serious volume of water and some descents are in, or very close to, the full force of the flow. Some rappel anchors can be awkward to access, depending on the flow. A 7m pitch has two siphons to avoid, but this is easily done if you're paying attention.

Catchment

15 km²

Anchors

Exploratory rigging!

Most descents are equipped with (single) 10 mm stainless steel 306 expansion bolts and [Tebylon](#) Hangers. Trees are rigged with 5 mm Dyneema (HMPE) or webbing and a [Tebylon half ring](#). Some 10 mm holes were drilled for temporary bolts.

Gear

2 x 80 m ropes and a (re) bolting kit.

Route Description

The descent starts relatively friendly with some nice and easy waterfalls up to 30 m. A short walking section with a tributary on the right brings you to the first of two crux sections. Here the water plummets 50m into the "Dragon's Den" from which there is no escape. A guided rappel can be rigged here to avoid the water if the flow is too

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Topo by E. Birkhoff
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high for your taste. Some smaller, technical pitches will bring you to a more open part of the canyon. After a 100 m walking section, you will reach the second and final crux of the canyon; the 80 m high waterfall as seen on the approach. A handline on the right will provide access to the main anchor. A difficult 15m abseil with a deviation halfway down will bring you to the second set of anchors. From here it's a 60 m drop to the valley floor. You abseil past some sharp edges on the way down requiring careful rope management.

Time

Vehicle park to camping spot	1 day
Walk in from camping spot	2 h 30 min
Canyon descent	5 h
Return to camping spot	45 min
Total (from camping spot)	8h15min

Escapes

No escapes have been identified. Some escape routes might exist on the right, but they will almost certainly involve some exposed (lead)climbing.

Notes

First descent: 08-03-2025 and 09-03-2025

[Dutch Canyoning Expedition](#) - Erik Birkhoff, Erwan Coq, Pepijn Hocksema, Bas Hetterscheid, Britt Joosten, Jaap Sikkema, Bram de Vries, Loys van Asten

An excellent adventure in a remote setting. A very rewarding adventure!



**The Belly of the beast
Between R 7 & R 8**

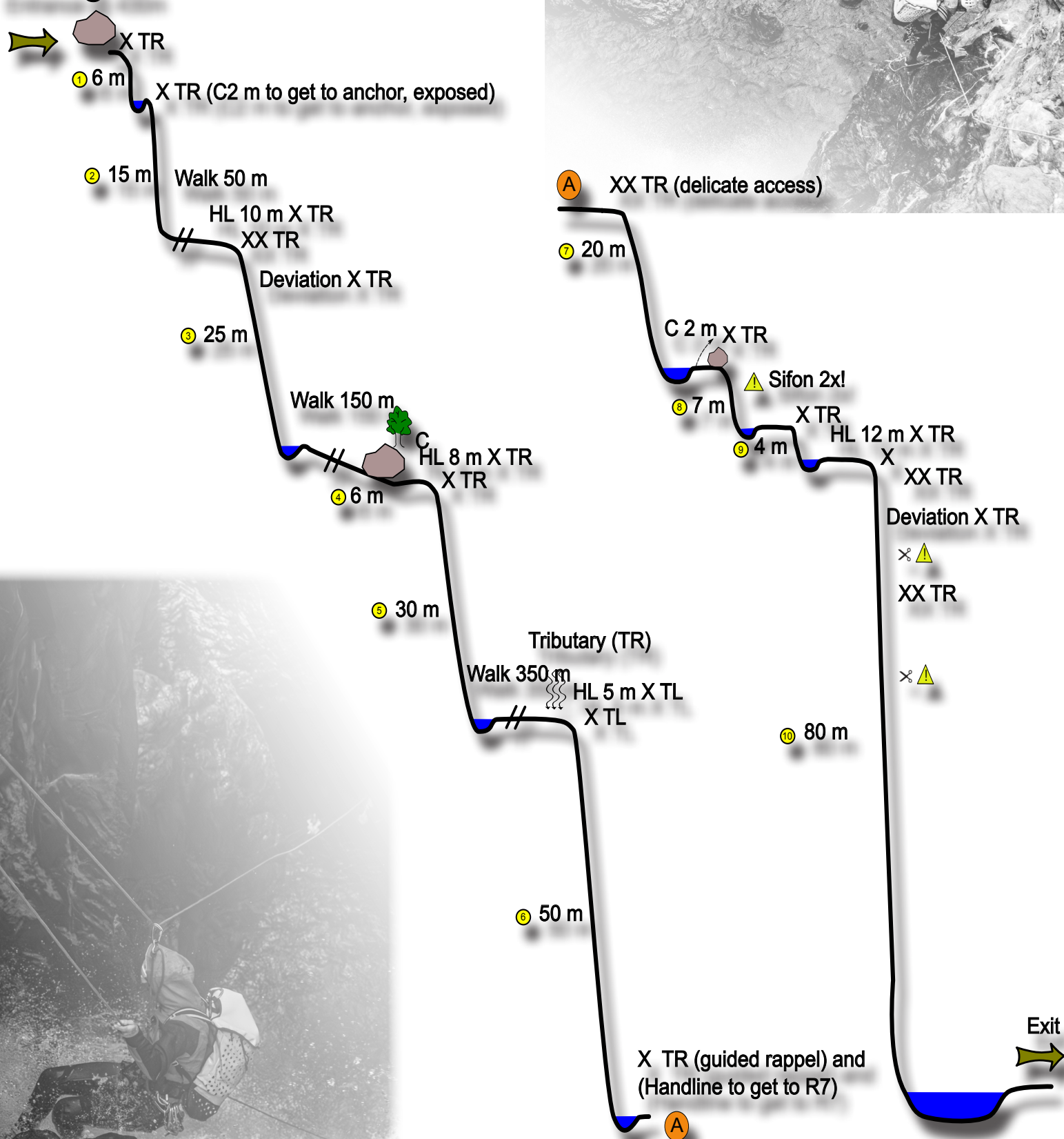


R10
80m Cascade



R10, from the top

Entrance @ 430m



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R6, The entrance into the enclosed section

EXPEDITION NZ 2025



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