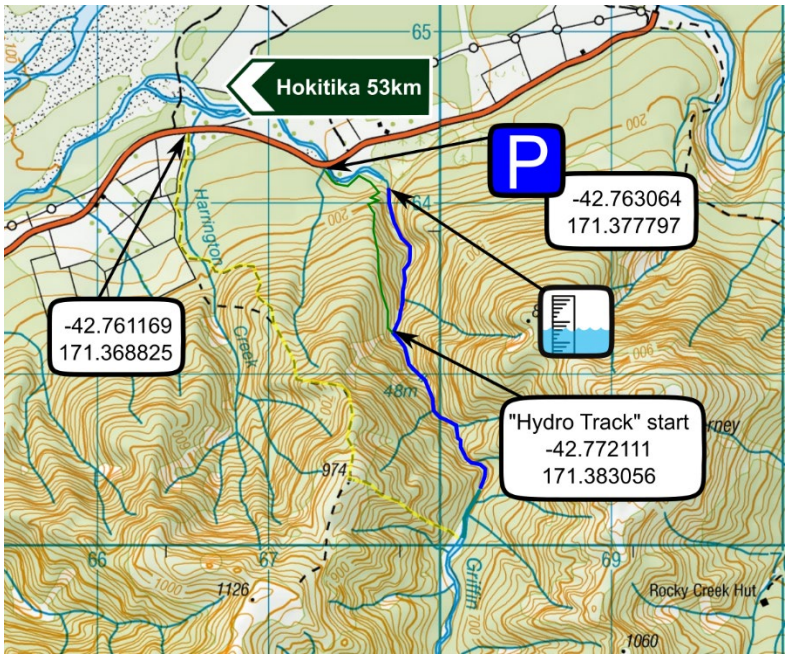
GRIFFIN Creek v4a5IV★★★


The canyoner is standing on the access track

Location
Taramakau Valley, West Coast

Character
A long day out for fit and capable teams. High volume, big pools, big jumps and technical swims – one of the top canyons in New Zealand.

Map


Approach by Car
The carpark is on SH73, about 53km / 40 mins from Hokitika. (Google Map pin -42.763064, 171.377797)
Look for a turn off on the TL, upstream side of the bridge.

Approach on Foot
The walk into Griffin is steep, rough and sometimes tricky to follow. It requires a high degree of fitness and backcountry experience to follow.

From the carpark, first head up the TR of the creek to check the water level reference point. Then head west on the highway, across the Harrington Creek Bridge. Where the bridge guardrail ends, you should be able to spot the start of the Griffin Creek tramping route. (GPS coords -42.761169, 171.368825)

Look just on the bush side of the fenceline. This track follows the fence for about 300m before entering the forest.

Two important things to note before you continue:

This track is no longer maintained by DOC, but receives some maintenance from Permolat volunteers. There's more info on the route on their remote huts website.

The actual track location is different than where it is shown on the current Topo50 map.

10 minutes from the highway, the track passes over a river flat, and re-enters the bush on the same TL side. About 15 mins from the highway, the track crosses Harrington Creek. The creek **must be crossed without getting wet feet**, to avoid spreading Didymo or other pest species from Harrington into Griffin.

The track then climbs very steeply through the bush to the scrubline. About 2hr from the highway, at a junction marked with a pole and water trough, turn left and descent steeply towards Griffin Creek. The 35 minute descent is even steeper than the ascent, but the track is fairly well defined.

Rock
Schist, solid where it counts.

Catchment
14 km^2

Anchors
Mostly double bolted 10mm with ring hangers. Some anchors have been damaged by floods. Check the trip logs on kiwicanyons.org or ask locally for more information. Be prepared to repair or replace anchors.

Gear
Max drop is 29m. Recommend at least 2x60m ropes per group.

Time
Approach	2h30min
Canyon descent	7h
Return to vehicle	5min
Total	**9h35min**

Flash Flood Danger

High. Big catchment, high rainfall area, but quite a few places where you could wait out a flood.

Route Description

There is a lot of downclimbing through bouldery rapids, with strainers and hydraulics. Mostly these are easy to avoid, but to make it through this long route in the specified times, you must be able to quickly assess any water hazards and as well as downclimb options to pick a safe and efficient route. All members of the party should be of similar high fitness and skill level – good teamwork in the 'non-technical' parts of the canyon is vital to efficiency and safety.

All the anchors are sited to avoid the worst of the vertical flow. Most rappels end in huge deep pools, which can sometimes be jumped. There are some very big, technical jumps possible, but these are not marked on the topo. The big pools frequently flush over the next drop or push you towards undercuts. These hazards are easy to avoid with good whitewater reading and swimming technique, but there are several places where choosing the wrong line, or failing to make an eddy could be fatal.

The TR Bodengo Falls sequence, via R8, 9 & 10 is incorrectly described in the 2015 guidebook.

At the top of R8, the best choice for most groups is to traverse left into steep bushy terrain, and sidle downstream until you're past the R8/R9 waterfall. Find a sturdy tree and rappel about 25m to large slabs on the TL of the last drop in Bodengo Falls. R10 anchors on the TL are on this slab, allow a dry rap into the huge pool.

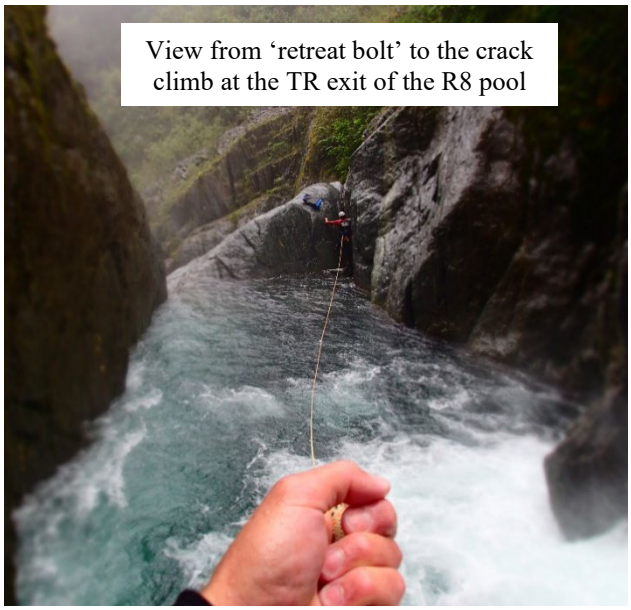
The TR route follows the water, but is extremely technical and not intuitive. There is a belayed swim, a difficult slippery climb, a delicate traversing rappel, one aid move, then a rappel with a deviation to finish.

If the following description is confusing, then the bypass is for you. If you've got a strong team with excellent problem-solving skills and are very careful to ensure you always have a line of retreat, then following the water through the Bodengo Falls section is an excellent and highly technical bit of canyoning.

The full rope sequence from R8 to the R10 deviation needs to be rigged cave-style, and the security of all anchors and deviations confirmed before any ropes are retrieved or anyone commits to the sequence.

From the TL, R8 goes straight down a slab, and reaches a very small ledge about 3m above the water. A single 'retreat bolt' is set on this ledge.

One canyoner should remain on the ledge and belays the leader, who does a tethered swim to a rock corner at TR end of the pool.



View from 'retreat bolt' to the crack climb at the TR exit of the R8 pool

The leader then has to make a tricky 3m crack climb to reach the R9 anchors.

R9 goes down a shallow grove on slabs the water. The goal is to reach a single bolt, then aid up 2m to a higher ledge where the R10 anchors are on the TR.

In slippery conditions, the last steps to reach that single bolt are exposed to a pendulum into the flow.

On R10, there is a deviation bolt on the far right, where the angle of the bedrock changes from slab to steep. You'll need to go down and confirm it is still in place: clipping the deviation is vital to prevent a rope-sawing pendulum into the flow. About 5m below the deviation there is a ledge to get off the rope to do a 13m jump into the pool.

If any of the moves are too difficult, or anchors damaged, you'll need to retreat up the ropes you've left in place. Once everything is good to go, you can retrieve ropes as you go, whilst protecting each canyoner.

The corridor is the narrowest part of the canyon, with tricky scrambles, downclimbs and swims to avoid water hazards.

About 100m below the corridor, on the TL, is the 'Hydro Track' which is a reasonably marked track that sides out to the car park in about 45 minutes. This track can be used as an escape (if you've taken longer than expected) or access (to do just the lower canyon).

Below here, there's still about 2hrs of canyoning to go. Take a moment to ponder how Justin Venable must have felt paddling the 30m drops in the lower canyon, during the first kayak descent of this section, solo, in Jan 2015.

The final narrows offer a few more jumps, swims, scrambles and hydraulics before finally releasing you. Time for a victory beer!

Escapes

There are reasonably frequent places where you could scramble out of the water course to avoid a flood.

Full escape back to the car would involve extremely steep travel through thick bush, especially in the upper half of the canyon.

First descent

Nic Barth and Neil Silverwood 6 Mar 2013.

Warning ! – Hydro scheme

The corridor is the site of the future Griffin Creek Hydro Scheme intake.

Applications for the scheme were first applied for in 2011, before the 2013 first canyoning descent. Between 2018 and 2022, the NZ Canyoning Association and Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ tried to stop the scheme being built through a public campaign and court action. Sadly, this was not successful, and although nothing has been built as of 2025, there is nothing to stop construction beginning at any time.

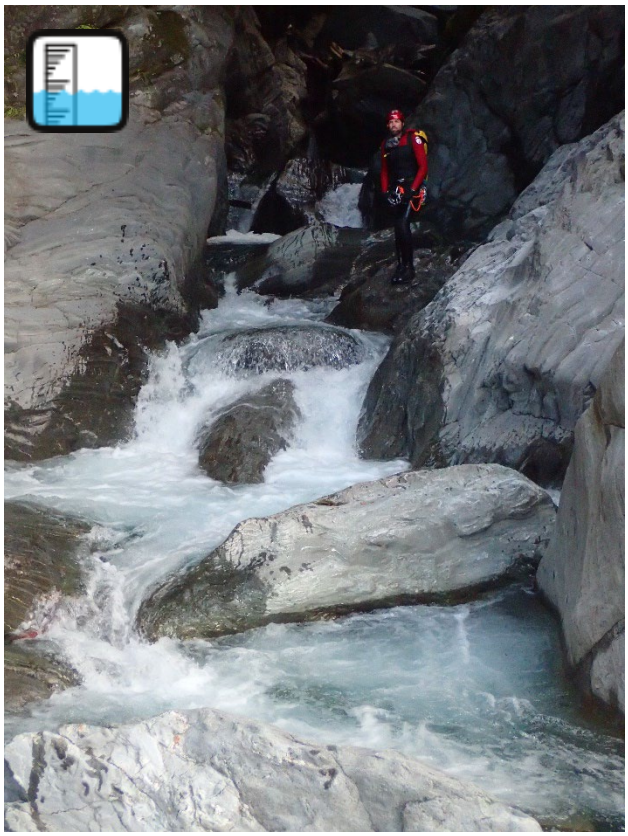
So, if you turn up to the bridge and notice construction traffic – maybe it's best not to continue. Construction would cast debris into the lower canyon, and most likely create a major hazard for canyoners coming through the corridor

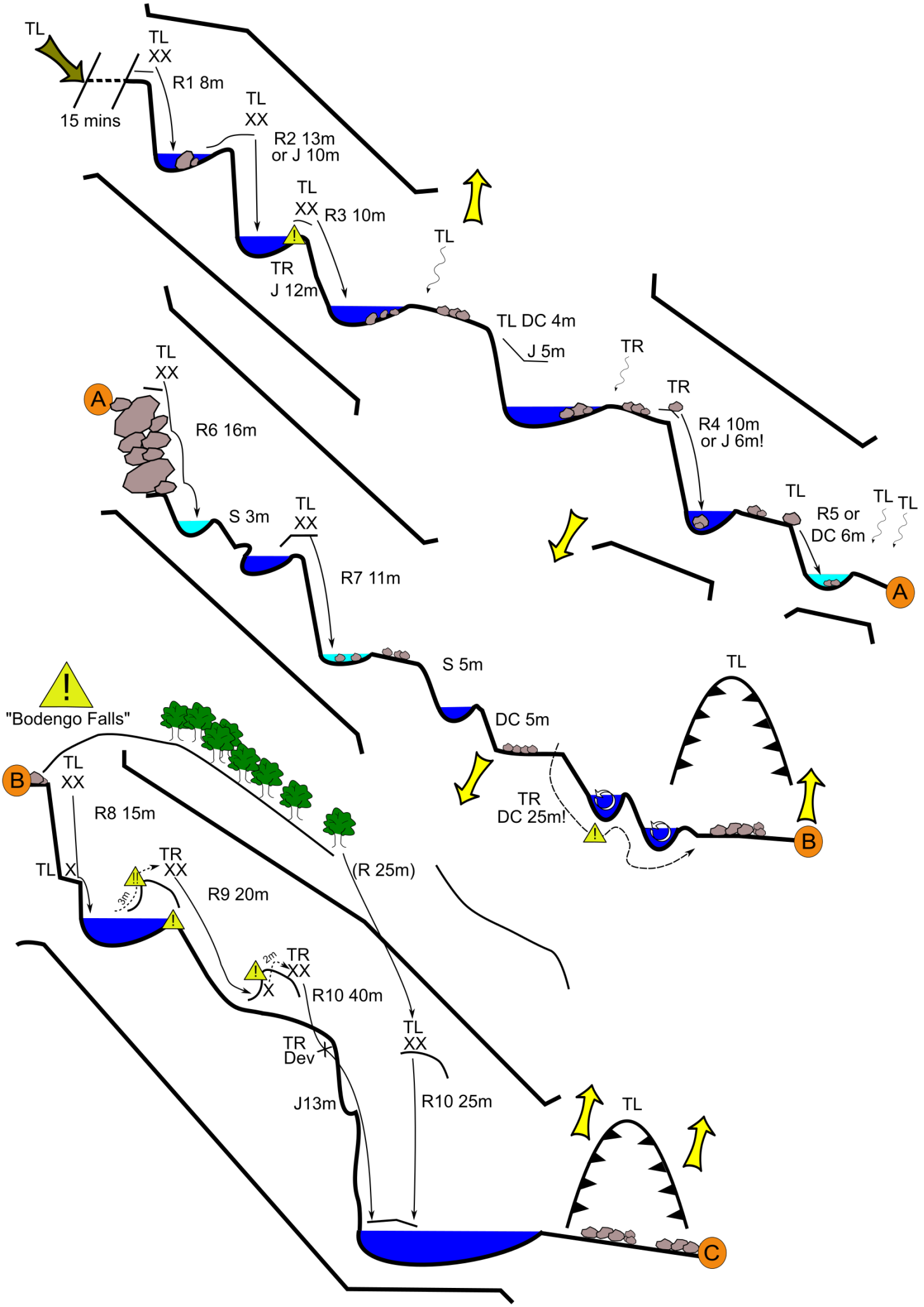
Water

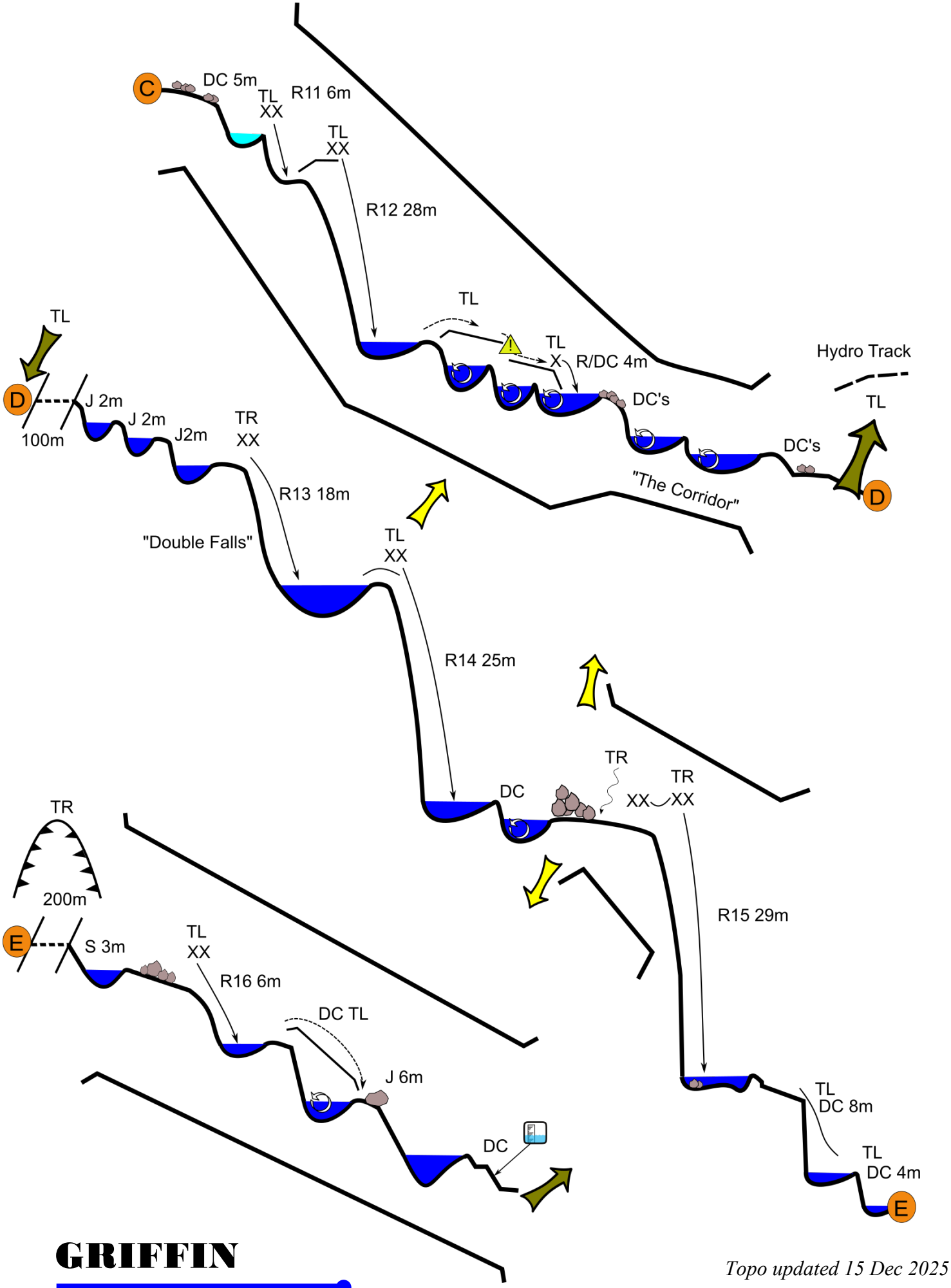
The photos below are taken from where the creek exits the bedrock canyon.

The photo with the canyoner shows a normal flow, suitable for fit, expert canyoners, experienced in long, high-volume canyons.

The photo on the right is likely to be near the upper limit for expert teams with prior knowledge of the canyon. But this upper limit has not been verified yet.




TL
TL XX
R1 8m
15 mins
TL XX
R2 13m or J 10m
TL XX
R3 10m
TR
J 12m
TL
TL DC 4m
J 5m
TR
TR
R4 10m or J 6m!
TL
TL
TL
R5 or DC 6m
A
TL XX
R6 16m
A
S 3m
TL XX
R7 11m
S 5m
DC 5m
TL
"Bodengo Falls"
B
TL XX
R8 15m
TR DC 25m!
B
TL X
TR XX
3m
R9 20m
(R 25m)
2m
TR XX
X
R10 40m
TR Dev
TL XX
J13m
R10 25m
TL
C


C
DC 5m
TL
XX
R11 6m
TL
XX
R12 28m
TL
TL
X
R/DC 4m
DC's
Hydro Track
TL
D
100m
J 2m
J 2m
J2m
TR
XX
R13 18m
"Double Falls"
"The Corridor"
DC's
TL
D
TL
XX
R14 25m
DC
TR
TR
XX XX
TR
200m
E
S 3m
TL
XX
R16 6m
DC TL
J 6m
DC
R15 29m
TL
DC 8m
TL
DC 4m
E