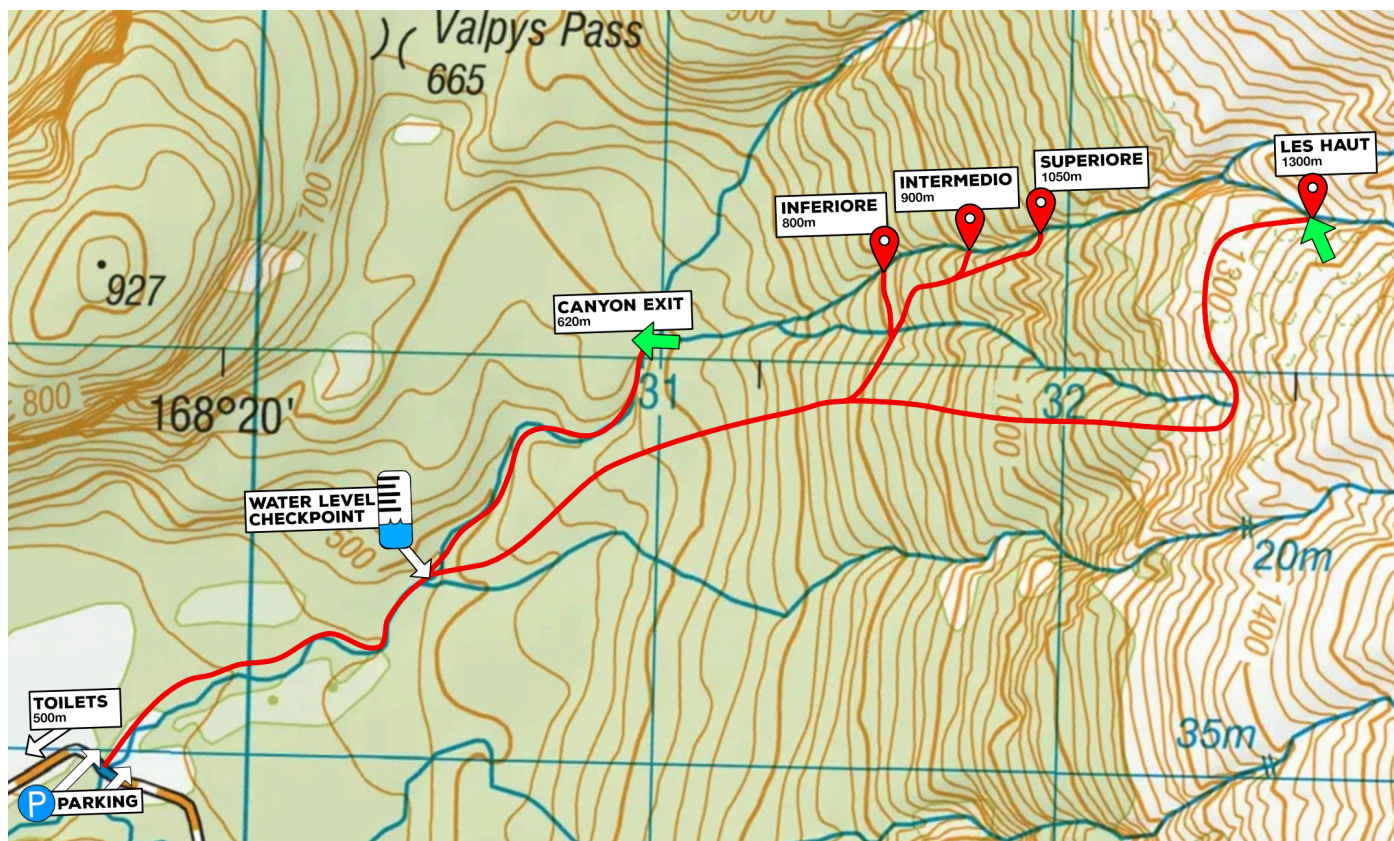




THE GENERAL

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Location

Dart Valley

Character

Deep, steep, continuous, slotted alpine canyon. A potential classic of NZ.

Map

CA10 - Lake Williamson

Approach by Car

Drive to the last ford before the end of the Dart Valley road (see map above). Park in grassy flats off to the side of the road, either side of the creek. ~30mins from Glenorchy. From Paradise onwards the road is gravel and you must cross several fords. The road and fords are suitable for a 2WD car in normal weather conditions. There is a DOC toilet at the end of the Dart Valley road (5mins beyond Canyon Car Park).

Approach on Foot

From the car park, follow the creek, initially on the left (walking upstream), crossing over to the right bank after about 15/ 20mins. Follow the right bank to the junction with Captain Chaos. The water level checkpoint is just upstream of the junction.

Les Haut: (the top):

Climb the hill between the Captain and the General. Follow the ridge line close to the Captain. Stick to the ridge that divides the Captain and General catchments and keep climbing. Once above the tree line make your way over a scree slope/ creek and up through tussock grass to the south branch of The General.

Inferiore, Intermedio or Superiore:

If you plan on entering the Canyon at one of the lower entry points, climb the hill between the Captain and the General. Follow the ridge line close to the Captain. Make your way over towards the General creek somewhere around the 600m contour. There are two tributary creeks to cross (only one shown on topo). It is best to cross both these at the 800m contour.

Rock

Extremely solid and compact Schist.

Water

Medium flow. In normal conditions there are no significant water hazards. Due to the narrow and

inescapable nature of the canyon, high water would pose a serious problem.

Catchment

3.0 sq km

Anchors

Double bolted anchors, upgraded in 2026. High risk of flood and rockfall damage. Think carefully about what you bring; don't be the person without a drill who discovers that one anchor is gone.....

Gear

2x 60m ropes would get you through. However, consideration should be given to the hanging belays in the 'slot of doom' sequence. Also potential for cut ropes on some pitches.

Route Description

The canyon can be split into four sections. The only section you can walk into is Les Haut. The other sections all require abseil entry. Therefore, exiting is not possible at any of the 'section junctions' unless an escape rope is placed prior to entry.

Les Haut (the top):

Enter the creek at the 1300m contour. After a short boulder scramble the canyon proper begins. This section of canyon is fairly open with wide boulder filled corridors and towering canyon walls. After the R4 waterfall the North and South Branches of the creek merge, significantly increasing flow. At R5 be aware of sharp edges that may cause rope damage. A deviation anchor may be required at some stage to mitigate this hazard. Note: Once you're above the bush line, the approach is difficult due to the alpine plants, follow the the ridges to reduce the difficulty.

Superiore:

Between the R10 and R11 waterfalls it is possible to enter the canyon from a natural anchor (tree) on a bench on canyon left (CL) 30m above the canyon floor (at the 1050m contour). Be aware of a high potential for rockfall in this area. Here, the canyon begins to narrow with the waterfalls coming in quick succession. R18 is a double drop with tricky overhangs on both waterfalls. The down-climb (DC) after R21 is very narrow and may pose a hazard in high water conditions.

Intermedio:

After the R22 down-climbs (before R23) it is possible to enter the canyon via a double bolted anchor on the rim, 40m above the canyon floor. The anchor (at the 900m-920m contour) is not easy to locate, follow the red markers that lead you to the bolts. There is a "Grass Cliff" after R23 that was used as an emergency escape point during the first descent, but it is very sketchy, with high consequence's in the event of a fall, it is not recommended. The 'Slot of Doom' is the crux of the canyon, the deviation half way down the first pitch is not needed in low and moderate flow. The R26 anchor is

located just over the small ledge on CL, be aware of loose rock getting knocked down from above and loose rock on the ledge above R26. Both R25 and R26 are hanging belays with limited space (two people max!). Teams should take this into account prior to entering the Slot of Doom to ensure smooth transition through this sequence. From the bottom of the Slot of Doom waterfall through to R29 the canyon is very narrow and would pose a significant hazard in high water conditions.

Inferiore:

Between the R30 and R31 waterfalls it is possible to enter the canyon from a natural anchor (tree) on the rim on canyon left (CL) 40m above the canyon floor (at the 800m contour). R32 is a double drop with a high potential for rope jam in a pinch after the first pool. It is the authors opinion that an additional anchor should be installed sometime in the future to split this into two abseils. After the R35 downclimbs the canyon opens out and escape is possible at several locations prior to entering the 'V Slot' (after R40). R38 has a nasty overhang and probably deserves a deviation to avoid this. R41 also has a nasty over hang but has a deviation on Canyon Left (CL) ~5m below the anchor. After R43 the canyon again widens out offering potential escapes. R44 and R45 both have undercut walls at the base of the falls that could pose a hazard in high water conditions.

Once you reach the end of the Canyon at 620m the choice is yours. bashing through the bush back to the entry trail is a bit shit. Boulder bashing down the creek is also a bit shit.

Time(s)

For a team of 4.

Les Haut:

Vehicle park to start of canyon	4hrs
Canyon descent	10hrs
Return to vehicle	1.5hrs
Total	15.5hrs

Superiore:

Vehicle park to start of canyon	3hrs
Canyon descent	8hrs
Return to vehicle	1.5hrs
Total	12.5hrs

Intermedio:

Vehicle park to start of canyon	2.5hrs
Canyon descent	7hrs
Return to vehicle	1.5hrs
Total	10.5hrs

Inferiore:

Vehicle park to start of canyon	2hrs
Canyon descent	4hrs
Return to vehicle	1.5hrs
Total	7.5hrs

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Flash Flood Danger

Very, very narrow in places, long stretches of no escape. Not somewhere I'd want to be in a storm.

Escapes

This canyon is graded VI for commitment for a reason! No escape in the upper sections, like... nothing. The 'grass cliff' offers an emergency escape (not recommended). First 'easy' escape is the 'escape crack'. After the 'v slot' there are multiple options for escape.

Notes

If planning to fix escape ropes in the middle sections, you can continue following the spur to the Les Haut entry however alpine plants above bush line are particularly bad if walking directly.

First descent(s):

Les Haut section: Greg Tilden, Canyoning Bob, Matt Belcher and Joe Bugden (Feb 2018)

Superiore section: Greg Tilden, Luis Goncalves and Joe Bugden (Mar 2016)

Intermedio section: Greg Tilden, Joe Bugden (Jan 2016)

Intermedio section (including Slot of Doom): Greg Tilden, Daniel Clearwater, Riki Brown, Toine Houtenbos and Joe Bugden (Jan 2016)

Inferiore section: Greg Tilden, Kaden Anderson, Joe Bugden (Jan 2016)

Rebolted in 2026: Lorna Button, Charlie Barton, Tom Rispin, Tim Anderson, Oscar Burford

Fun to effort ratio: Lots of effort, but lots of fun too

Access issues: Big hill to climb

Commercial Canyon: N/A

Remarks: N/A



The view looking down to the Slot of Doom
(Photo credit Greg Tilden 2016)

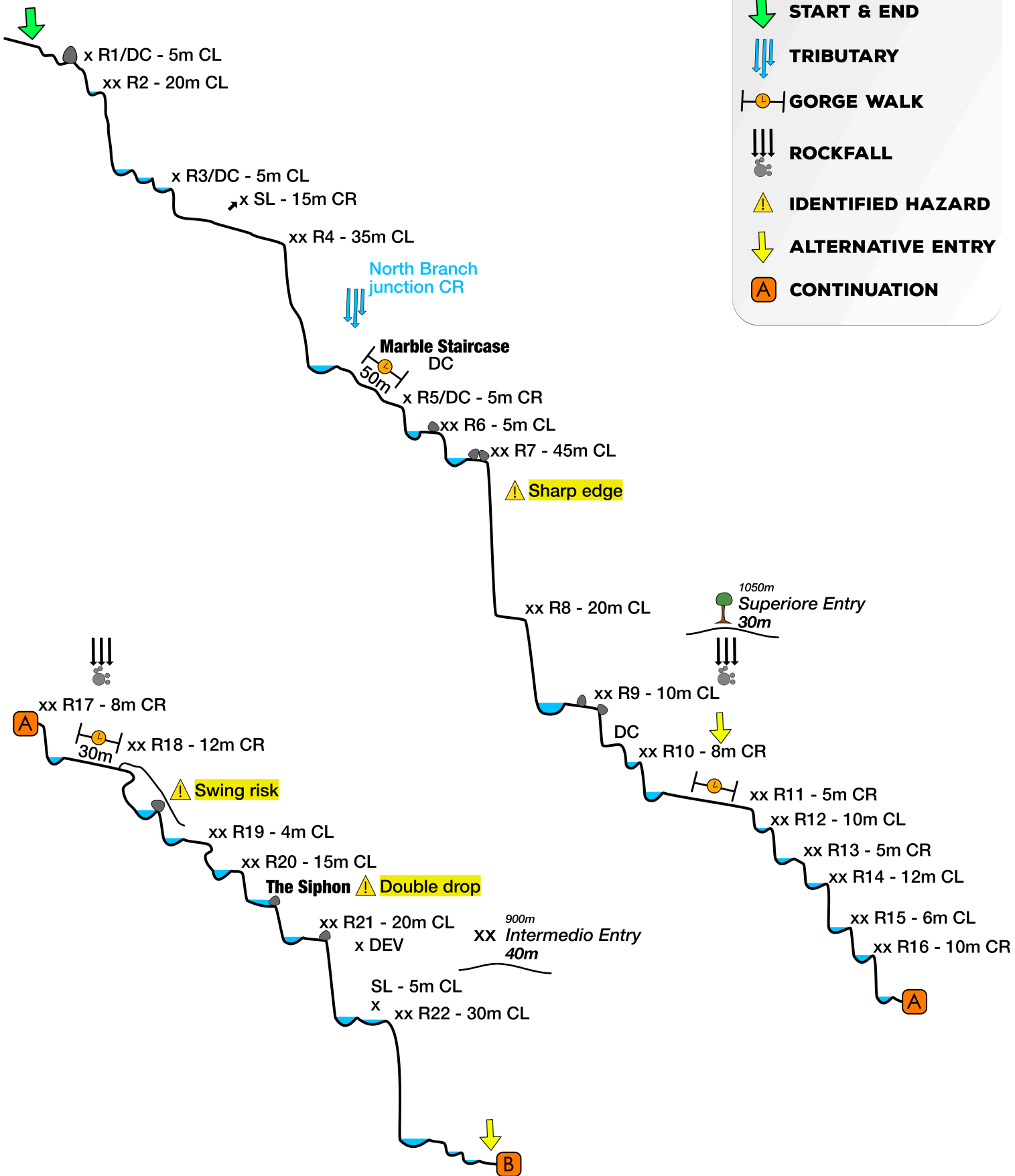
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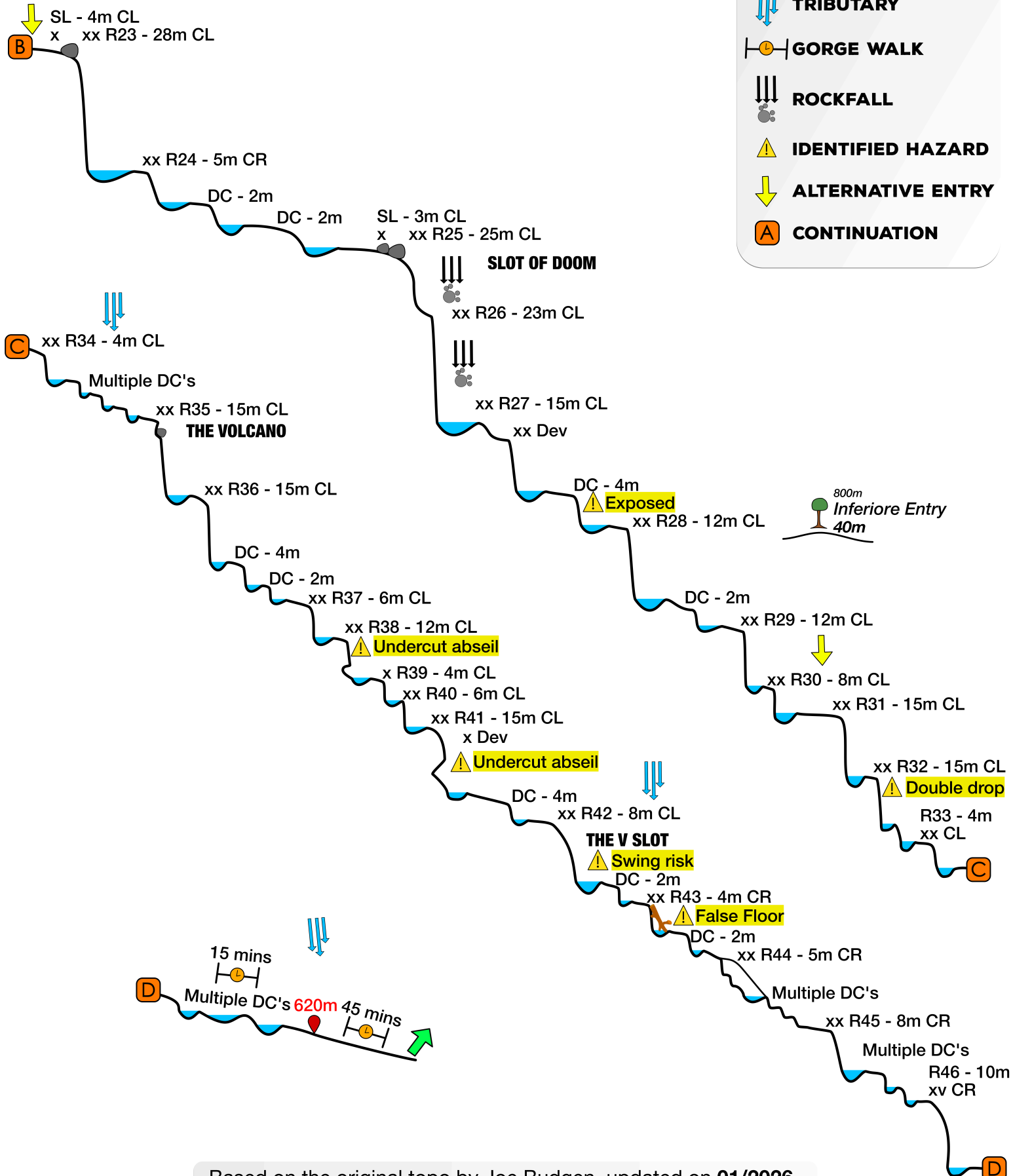
Based on the original topo by Joe Budgen, updated on 01/2026

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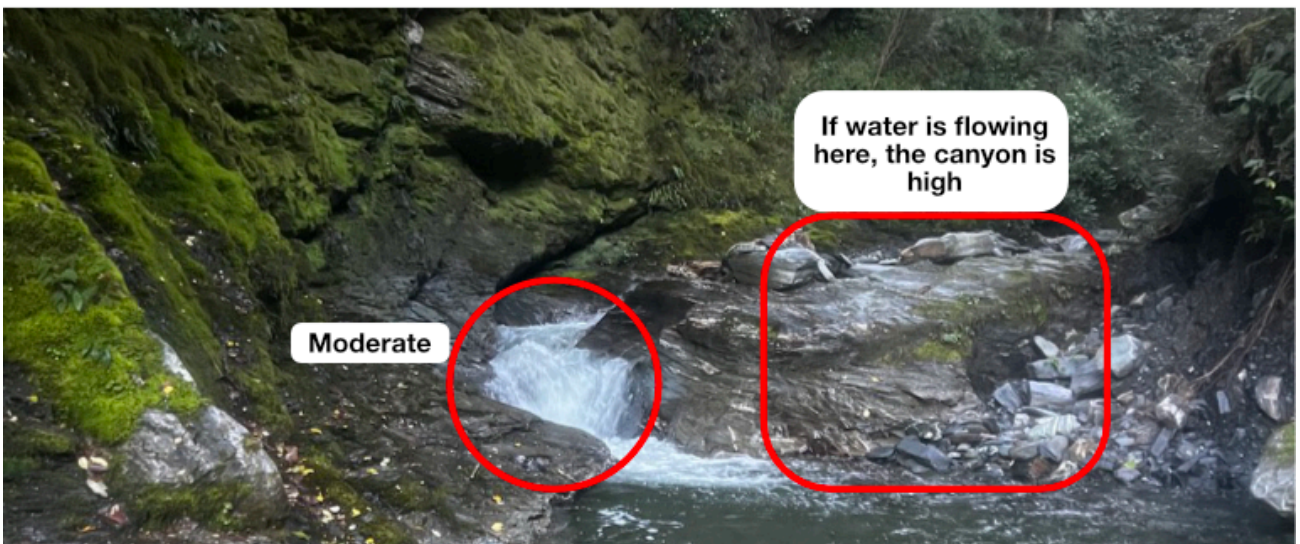
900m
XX Intermedio Entry
40m

-  **START & END**
-  **TRIBUTARY**
-  **GORGE WALK**
-  **ROCKFALL**
-  **IDENTIFIED HAZARD**
-  **ALTERNATIVE ENTRY**
-  **CONTINUATION**



Based on the original topo by Joe Budgen, updated on 01/2026

Water Levels



Fords

On the approach to the canyon you will cross several small fords, these are useful indicators to help predict the flow.

Low water - If most fords are dry or very still / shallow then the canyon is likely running low.

Moderate - If almost all the fords are flowing then the canyon will likely be running moderate.

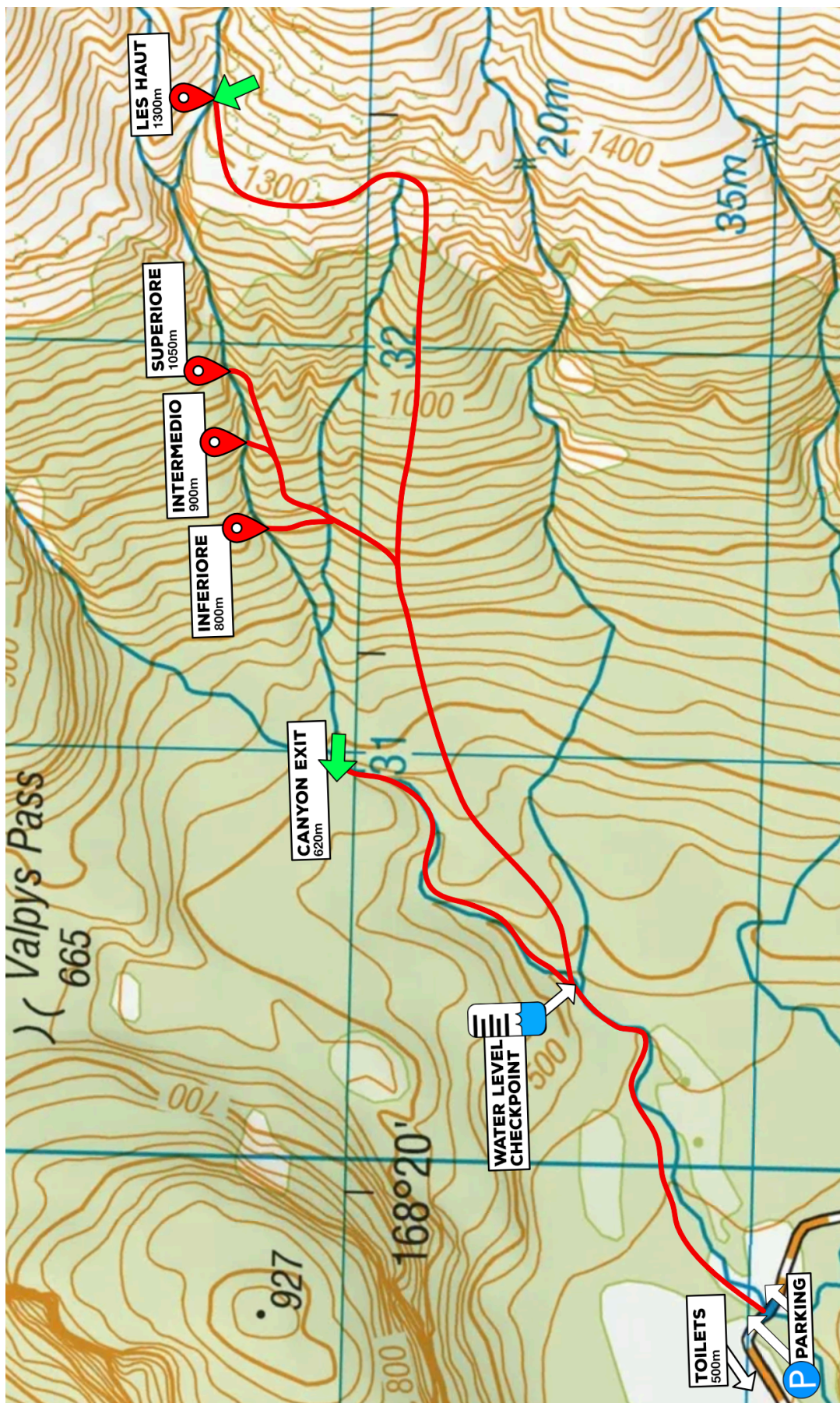
High - If all fords are flowing then the canyon will likely be running high.

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Page information - Joe Budgen, Minor updates on 04/2026 by Oscar Burford

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