



HELLS GATES CANYON

canyon v4a4III ★★

Location

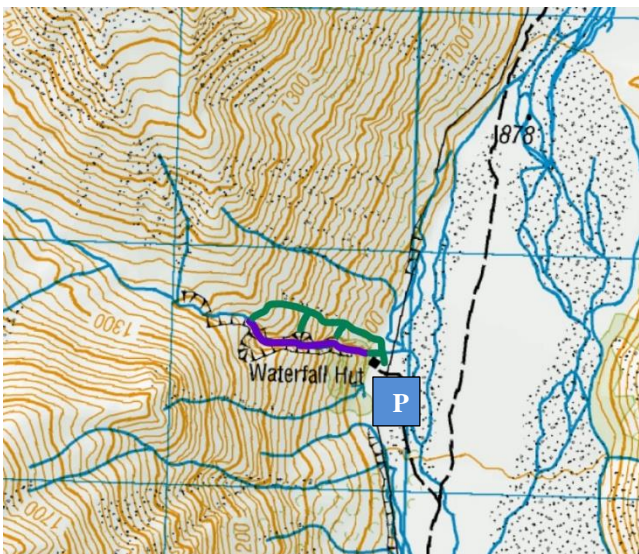
Cass Valley; above Waterfall Hut and fed by Hells Gates.

Character

Spectacular in nature; many features encountered during descent are at the nominated overall grade and would be harder if the flow was even slightly higher than low summer flow.

Map

BY16 Mt Stevenson.



Approach by Car

From Tekapo, drive South and soon take the right turn off for St John Observatory. Go past the observatory onto the gravel road and after a while turn left into Glenmore Station. **Note Glenmore Station, the huts and canyons are on private property; phone Emily & Will on 03 680 6752 early for access permission. From the station farmhouse access by vehicle is achievable by a slightly higher clearance AWD vehicle: Subaru Outback or similar.** From the station drive approximately 10km up the Cass valley parking by Waterfall Hut. Tekapo to Waterfall Hut 1 hour.

Approach on Foot

From Waterfall hut, cross the canyon stream and head up the slopes overlooking the canyon on its TL.

Rock

Greywacke, generally good quality with a few exceptions.

Water

Moderate to high flow in late summer conditions. During exploration it was noted that the flow was highest 24 to 48 hours after rainfall; possibly due to the catchment length and size holding and slowly releasing water.

A good 'summer flow' visual currently exists close to the hut. Between the hut and plank bridge across the canyon stream exit is a small grassy overflow channel – this should be dry or have only standing water.

Catchment

11 km²

Anchors

Double Bolt Anchors as well as slings with rings from boulder pinches and trees.

Gear

Longest drop 40m. Minimum 3 x 40m rope to avoid being stranded should the rope stick at the R1 or R7 pull downs.

Route Description

R1 (35m) DBA TR, the canyon starts abruptly – a large aquatic drop into a boiling pool with a pour over. In low flow stay on the rope for a beating, the first person must make the swim and exit climb at the pour over into R2, use the eddy on the TR. In higher than low summer flow, a tree on the TR 10m below the top anchor can be used as a redirect keeping you out of the worst of the flow; however this is only of use on R1 and at the very least you still have to navigate R2 before having escape options.

R2 (15m) DBA TR, drop into the boil avoiding the eddy on the TL, in summer flow this ejects you from the pool into the stream way.

Scramble cautiously down the steep streamway for 15 minutes until a HL (6m) sling round tree TR accesses R3.

R3 (10m) DBA TR, avoiding the sieve risk caused by a giant chockstone near the top.

R4 (15m) DBA TL, ducking under a spectacular rooster tail.

Scramble cautiously down the steep streamway for 5 minutes where the canyon closes in abruptly.

R5 (10m) rock pinch in streamway TL, the pool can be navigated in the water on the TL climbing out at the pour over.

R6 (6m) DBA TL into the Olympic Pool. Rappel into the boiling pool on the TL and face the curtain formed by the falling water. Behind the curtain the pool is shallow and relatively calm – dive through the curtain and follow the shallow edge to the R7 pour over – cross the pour over climbing up to R7's anchor on the TL. The first person can set up a guideline for the rest of the group.

R7 (35m) DBA TL, a spectacular rappel beside or under a 30m high rooster tail.

R8 (35m) tree anchor TL, scramble up to the large tree on the TL to find a ring and sling anchor. This anchor is used to descend the next 2 drops in 1 rappel. Beware of loose rock.

From the bottom pool a rock pinch provides an anchor for an 8m down climb over slippery rocks and to cross the flow.

From here the streamway descends steeply over boulders and recently felled trees to exit beside the hut. The risk of foot entrapments and sieves is very high even in the lowest of flows and it is recommended you exit the canyon here via a grassy slope on the TL and walk back to the hut; 10 minutes.

Time

Vehicle park to start of canyon	50min
Canyon descent	3hr
Return to vehicle	10min
Total	4hr

Flash Flood Danger

Moderate

Escapes

Verified escapes exist on the TL as follows: Vegetated gully between R2 & R3, scree slope between R4 & R5, grassy slope after R8.

Notes

First descent: The lower canyon was explored and descended in part 5 & 6 February 2020 (Justin Hall, Gabriella Scheufele, Steve Bruerton). When the upper

canyon was explored an existing DBA was found at the top of R1 and a handline anchor found back from the top of R3. It is unclear what had been explored and what may have been descended previously in the upper canyon as further anchors were required and installed in the upper canyon. The first full descent took place on 15 February 2020 (Justin Hall, Jonathan Carr, Steve Bruerton, Hamish Castle, Koryn Gould).

Fun to effort ratio: High, especially when combined with the other Cass Valley canyons making the drive in worthwhile. An atmospheric, alpine, aquatic canyon full of character pushing its grade with a 10-minute stroll back to a hut filled with everything you have driven in.

Access: Private land, Glenmore Station is run by Emily & Will who welcome adventurers and have established huts and maintain 4wd access in the Cass Valley. **Show your appreciation of their hospitality by ensuring you have their access permission & use the hut at the base of the canyon (\$30 per person per night; 2020).**

For a video of the Cass valley canyoning trilogy first descents:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MPllqWSracLOWiZAv8vKdteqBQfOmlKi/view>

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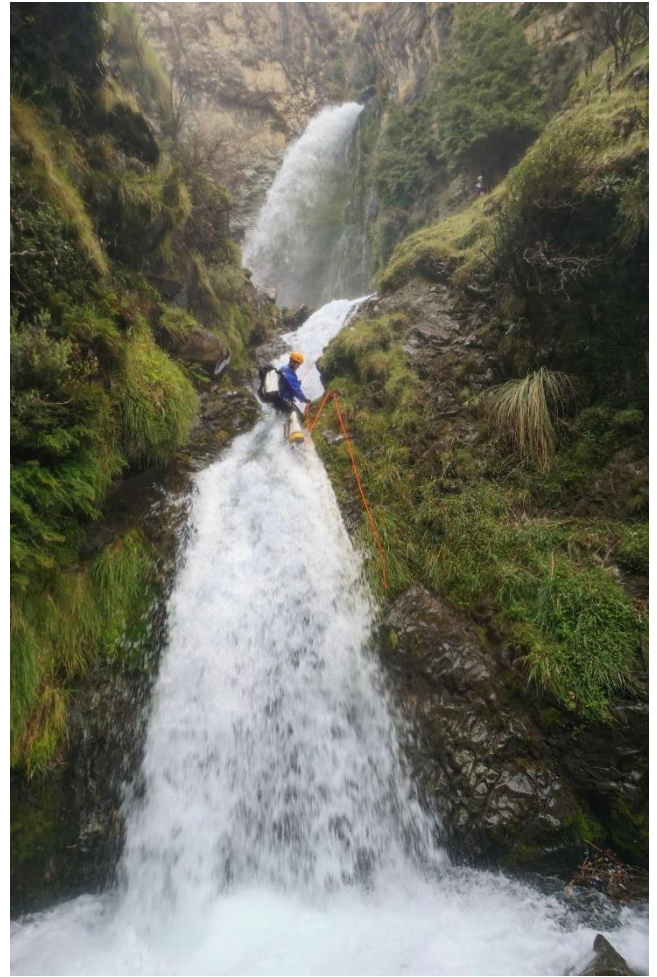
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www.kiwicanyons.org

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R1 in the background seen, R2 hidden.



R7 in the background, canyoneer on R8.



Must make climb out of the R5 pool pour over to R6.



R4's pushy rooster tail.

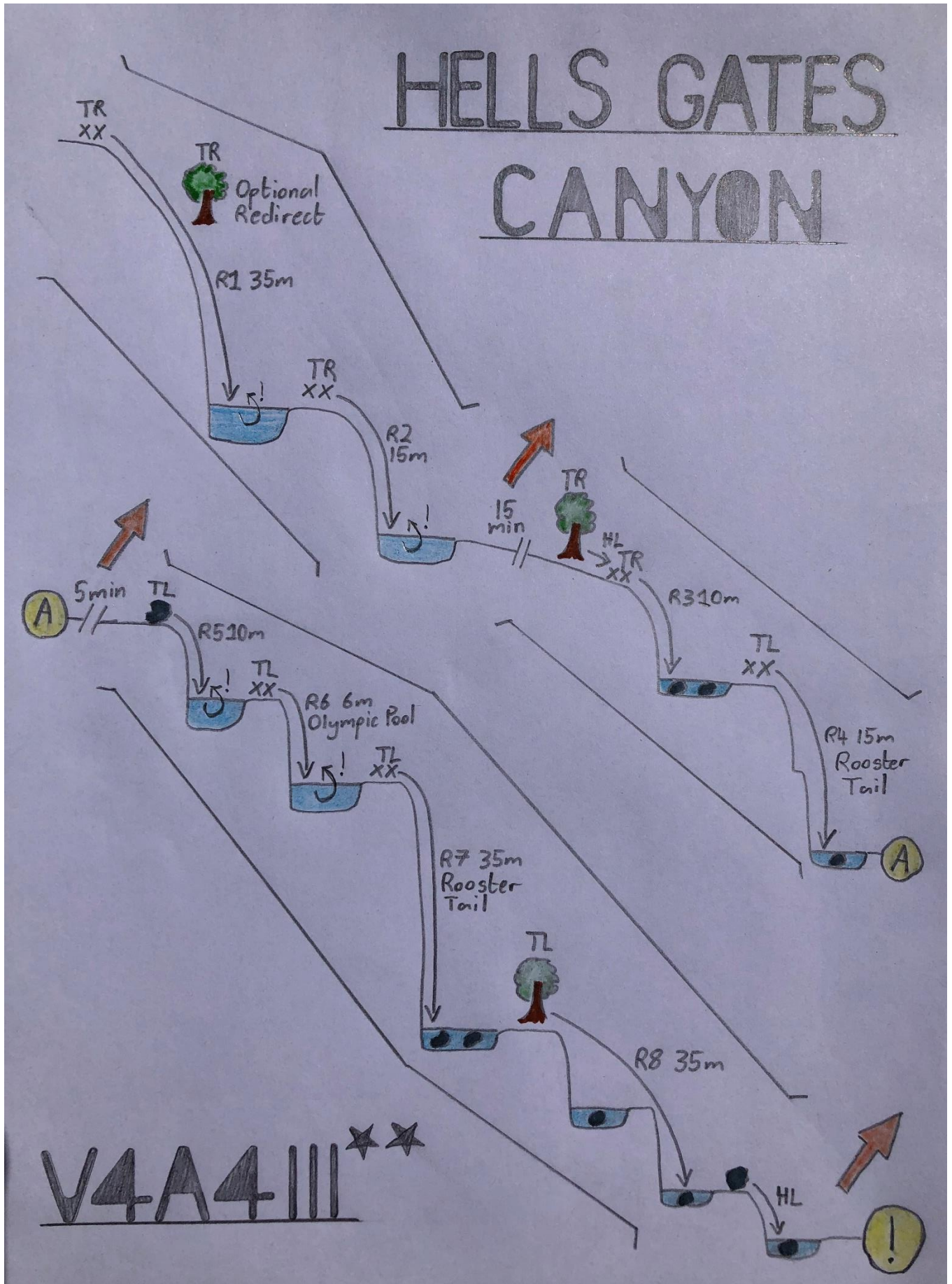
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