

Canyon Creek – v5a5IV***

A steep series of stacked waterfalls in an enclosed slot, with plenty of flow. High up in the cirque beneath Mt Barth's glacier the canyon is now fully descended. It is a decent-sized canyon, a long way from the road, so there will normally be an advanced base camp needed.

Thanks to Toine Houtenbos, Mark Norman and Erwan Coq for the photos, information and topos.

Map:

BZ14 Mount Barth

Approach by car:

From Omarama drive in the direction of Cromwell heading towards the Lindis Pass. At Dunstan Downs turn off into the Ahuriri Valley on Birchwood Road. Birchwood Rd is prone to rocky washouts. Follow this gravel road for 26km to the car park at the very end. 4x4 recommended for the last few km, otherwise park in the 2WD carpark (there's a DOC sign just before the first rough gravel ford).

Approach on foot:

From the carpark, follow the track north for 2km. At the sign turn left and follow the Canyon Creek route around the lower gorge. There are several great camping spots between the upper and lower gorges. [A nice and well-established bivvy spot with great fire is here](#). From the end of the canyon, the route to the top zigzags through the bluffs on the TR, and then traverses above the bluffs of the amphitheatre that holds the canyon. The entrance is at 1230m. It is worth taking extra time to get to the rim of the canyon to get an idea of the level of the canyon around the lower section. Two spit inserts are positioned on the TR, just upstream of the chockstone 'bridge' which could be used to pre-rig an escape before the crux of the canyon.

Rock:

Greywacke

Water:

Medium to high flow. The canyon is fed by a sizable glacier so care should be taken with rising levels due to snow and glacial melt. There is a tarn surrounded by steep cliffs and a small hanging glacier just above the canyon on the TR. Rocks or chunks of ice could fall into the tarn which could hypothetically send a pulse of water down the cliff and into the canyon.

However, it is likely that the water will be dispersed across the flats above the canyon rather than sending a wave down but it is something to take into account.

Catchment:

10 km²

Anchors:

Expedition style bolting, mostly 8mm expansion bolts which were all in good condition in March '24. The majority of the abseils have 2 bolts.

Gear:

Minimum of 2 x 50m rope, consider taking an extra 30m rope to pre-rig an escape.

Route description:

Upper section, notes from Mark Norman (amended by Toine Houtenbos after the first full descent)

Quite an easy descent to start with, that closes in towards the end, gets more vertical and committing. Look for hidden rocks in the jump pools. R2 and R3 anchors were placed high up on the TL and largely keep you out of the main flow as you abseil. For R3, stay attached to the rope while rigging R4 as there's potential to get flushed over here. The bolts for R4 are around the corner to the right in a protected position. There wasn't any tricky hydraulics to deal with in this top section from memory so it's not overly technical.

Middle and lower section, notes from Toine Houtenbos

The R4 abseil leads straight into the slot. Care should be taken between J6m and J3m as the pool flushes with not much room to get out, it would be easy to lose a bag here. Take care on DC3m!, it is hard to protect with a human anchor and spotting, and a fall could land you in a potentially dangerous siphon, consider placing a bolt here, especially if the flow is up. The anchor for R6 is placed right out beyond the lip of the waterfall to avoid a recirculating pool at the bottom, it requires a belay to reach.

The section named "The pinball machine" is the crux of the canyon. On R9, the first person has to cross the flow from TR to TL whilst on abseil. Carefully consider the consequences of not making this move and rig accordingly. R10 reaches R11 via a delicate deviation. R11 looks intimidating from the top, but as soon as you abseil through the flow at the top you're under the waterfall

and out of the main force. The pool at the bottom of R12 recirculates, it is possible to swim out. A more careful approach would be a floating anchor guided rappel for the first person, and a human anchor guide rappel for the rest of the team.

Flash Flood Danger:
High

Escapes:

Plenty of escapes on TR in the upper section. Easy escape between R5 and R6 on TL, however you end up in steep terrain. It would require ropework to get down to the 'chockstone bridge' to cross the canyon and walk out on TR. After R7 there is a ramp on the TR which would make for a relatively easy bolt climb to escape, it would require about 3-4 bolts (these have not been placed). The rest of the canyon is fairly inescapable and narrow.

Notes:

First descent R4 to R9: Alain Rohr, Pete Choate, Kaden Anderson and Toine Houtenbos. 4 March '19.

First descent top to R40m: Alain Rohr, Mark Norman, David-Stephen Miles and Ben Thomas. April 2019

First descent R10 to end: Alain Rohr, Erwan Coq and Toine Houtenbos. 6 March '24

First full descent: Alain Rohr, Erwan Coq and Toine Houtenbos. 7 March '24

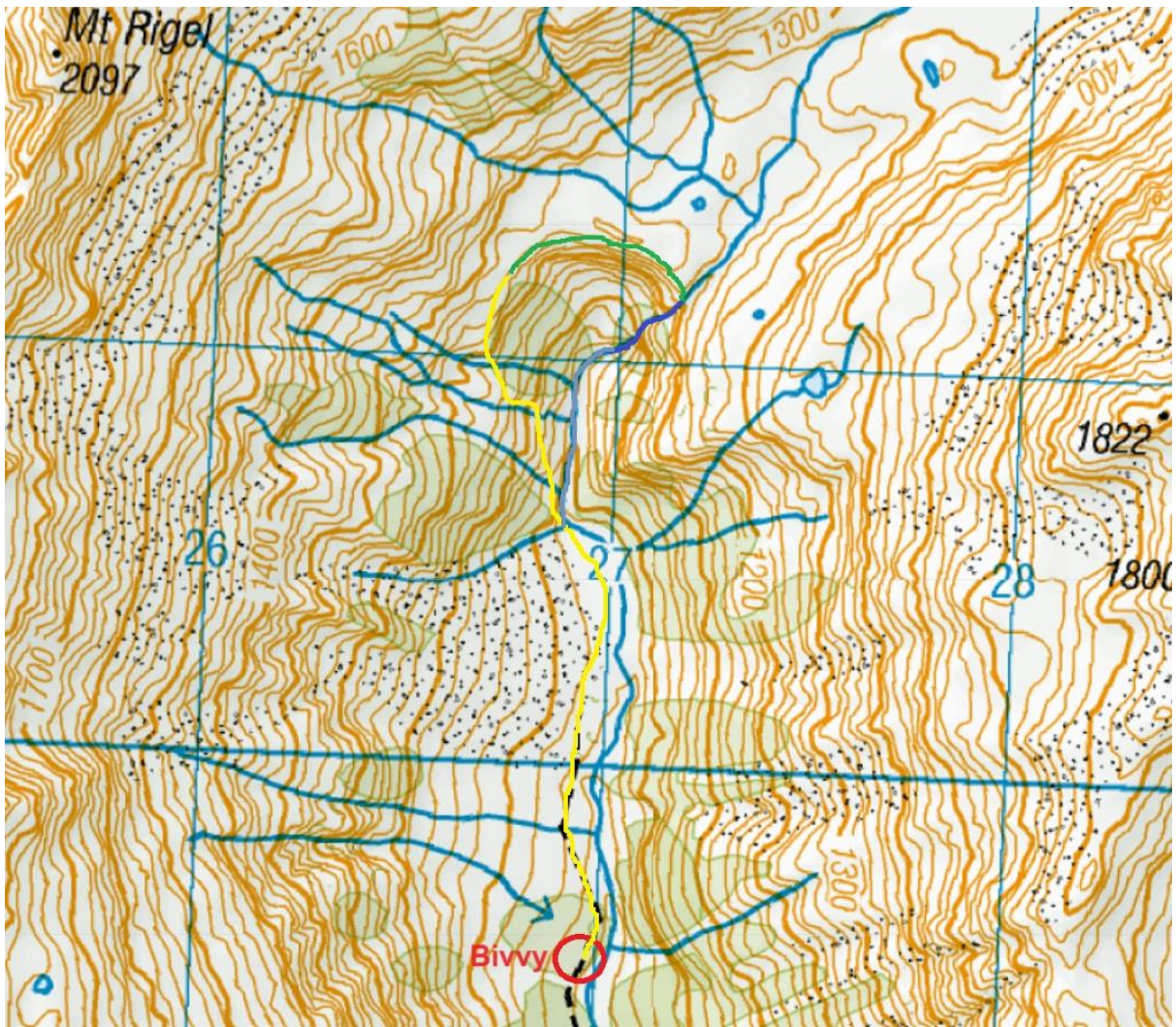
Times:

Rock bivvy to top of canyon: 1hr20min

Canyon: 5 - 7hrs

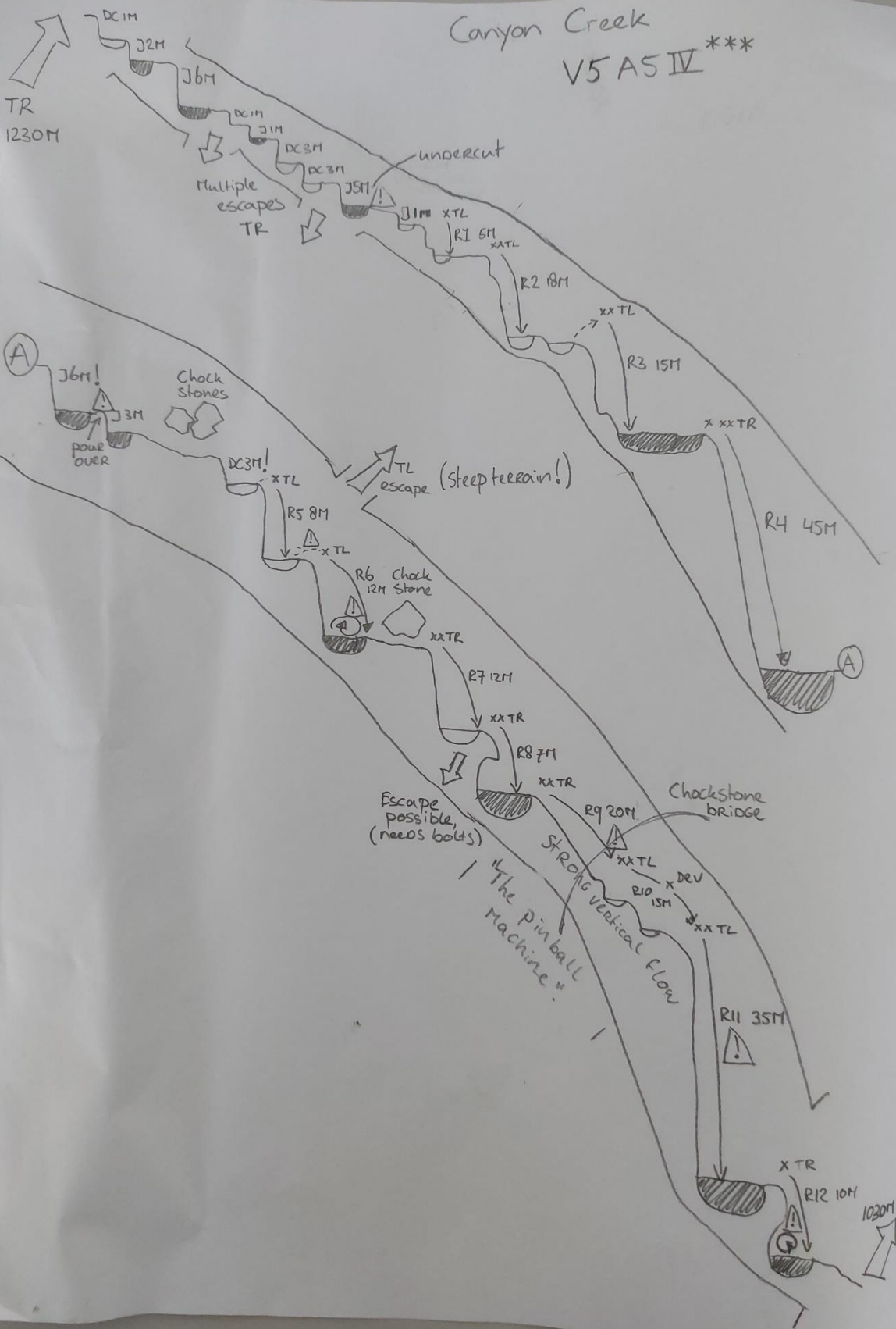
End of canyon to bivvy: 30min

Total round trip from bivvy: 7 - 9 hours



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TR
1230M



1030M