



# KAKAPO

## Canyon v5a3IV ★★★

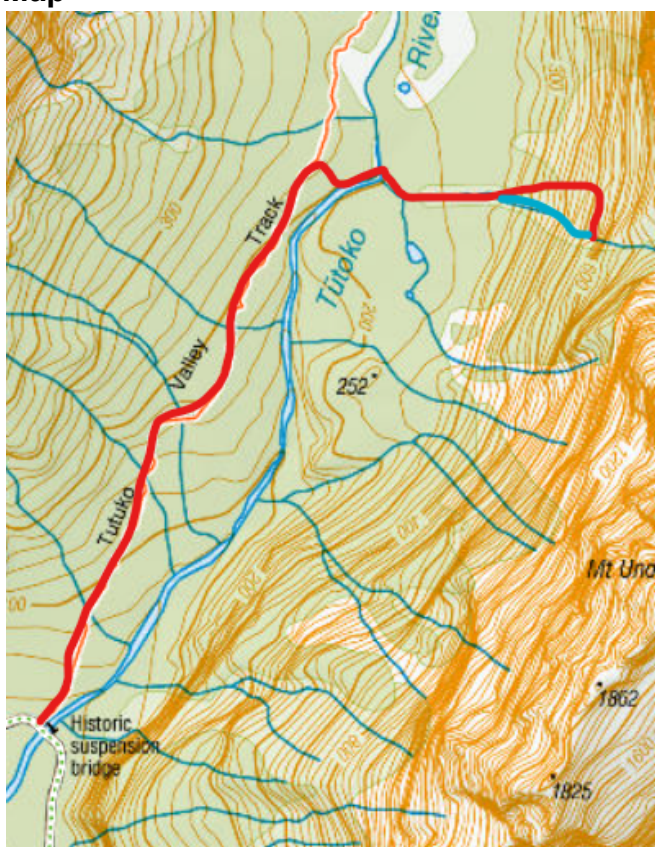
### Location

Tutoko Valley, Fiordland

### Character

Long and scenic, with some big pitches. In some places open and sunny, in others narrow and dark. Well worth the long walk in.

### Map



The Tutoko valley is about 3km East of Milford Sound. Approach marked in red, canyon in blue.

### Approach by Car

Follow the Milford road almost to Milford Sound. Stop at the Tutoko valley track after crossing the Tutoko river bridge.

### Approach on Foot

Follow the Tutoko valley track for ~1h15. When you can see the canyon through the trees continue to a creek crossing the track and follow this down to the river. It should be reasonably open travel in the creek.

Continue upriver until you can cross safely - bear in mind the Tutoko is a big river and it may take a while to find a crossing point if flows are not very low. Where the creek from the canyon meets the river, follow it upstream to the bottom of the canyon. It should take about 2 hrs to reach this point.

Enter the bush on the TR and head upstream. There are open rock slabs nearby but these can be steep and slippery - stay in the bush or on the border between bush and slabs so you have trees to hold onto. Continue following the patches of bush until you reach roughly 520m, near the band of cliffs above. Side towards the canyon, crossing the slabs at the least steep part and heading back into the bush. Aim towards the big obvious waterfall.

See the aerial photo on page 3 for a recommended route from the end of the canyon up.

Put your gear on at a flat area immediately above the big pool and abseil down into the pool to start the canyon.

### Rock

Granite, good quality.

### Water

Medium flow, alpine catchment.

### Catchment

3.4 km<sup>2</sup>

### Anchors

Single bolts, 10mm with ring hangers. Double bolts on the big pitches. Currently sparsely bolted for exploration - until it is permanently bolted it would be wise to take a drill and natural anchor materials.

### Gear

At least 2x 60m ropes. Anchor equipment recommended.

### Route Description

The canyon begins immediately after the big pool, and there are few escapes until the end.

The upper section, R1 to R7, is open enough to get plenty of sunlight and has views out across the valley. There are two big 50m+ pitches, the first of which is the crux of the canyon. It's impossible to avoid the powerful vertical flow, but use a redirect 25m down to help slightly. Ensure the rope length is well set before

the first person commits to the water further down the pitch. There are some difficult downclimbs in the upper section (including right at the start) which may require meat anchoring for the first person, or using a natural anchor.

Below R7 the canyon gets narrower, with plenty of interesting pitches. After R15 the slot opens and there are some final features in intermittent gorge.

Some jumps and slides are possible, but most pools are not very deep, so check them carefully first.

### Time

Vehicle park to end of canyon	2hr
End of canyon to start of canyon	1h15m
Canyon descent	~4-5hr
Return to vehicle	2hr
<b>Total</b>	<b>~9-10h</b>

### Flash Flood Danger

High

### Escapes

Above R3 and R7 it might be possible to climb out of the canyon. Otherwise no escapes until above R16.

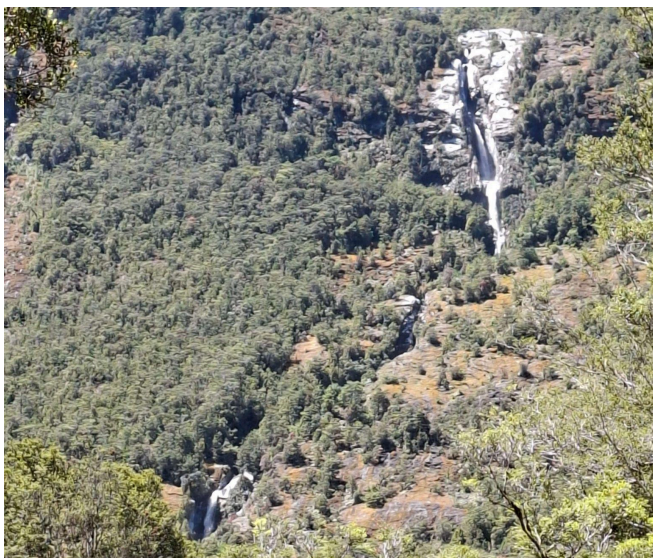
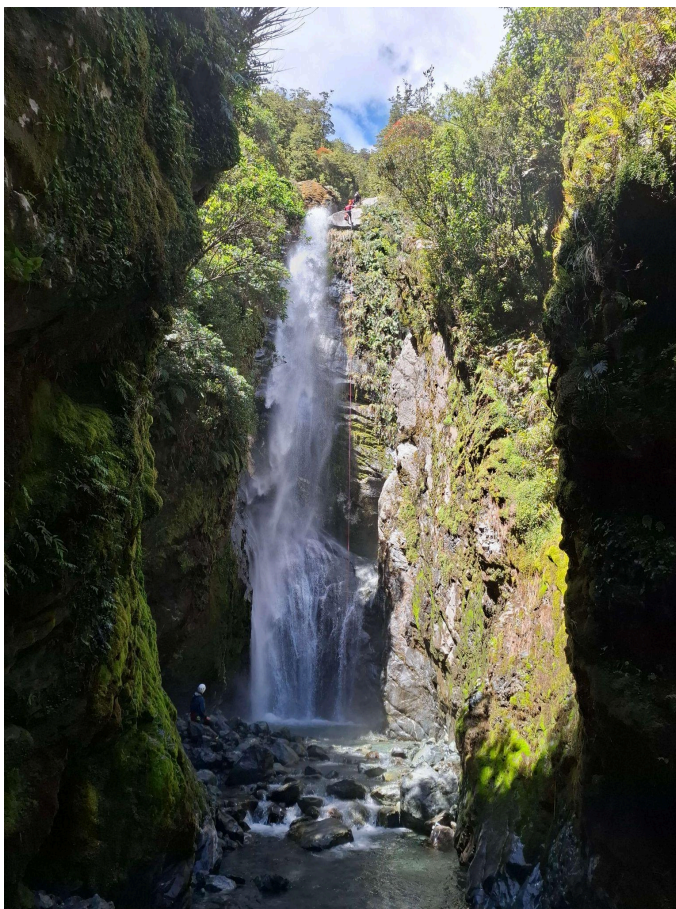
### Notes

The hanging valley above is rumoured to be the last place that kakapo were found in the wild in mainland NZ.

First descent (lower section): Will Hamilton and Jona Schmutzer.

First descent (upper and lower sections): Patrick Timm, Alex Motyka, Conor Handley, Sach Knight, and Christian Miller, Jan 2025.

The 3-4 big pitches above the starting pool are still undescended...



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*Topo by Christian Miller*  
[www.kiwicanyons.org](http://www.kiwicanyons.org)



Approach route from the base of the canyon.

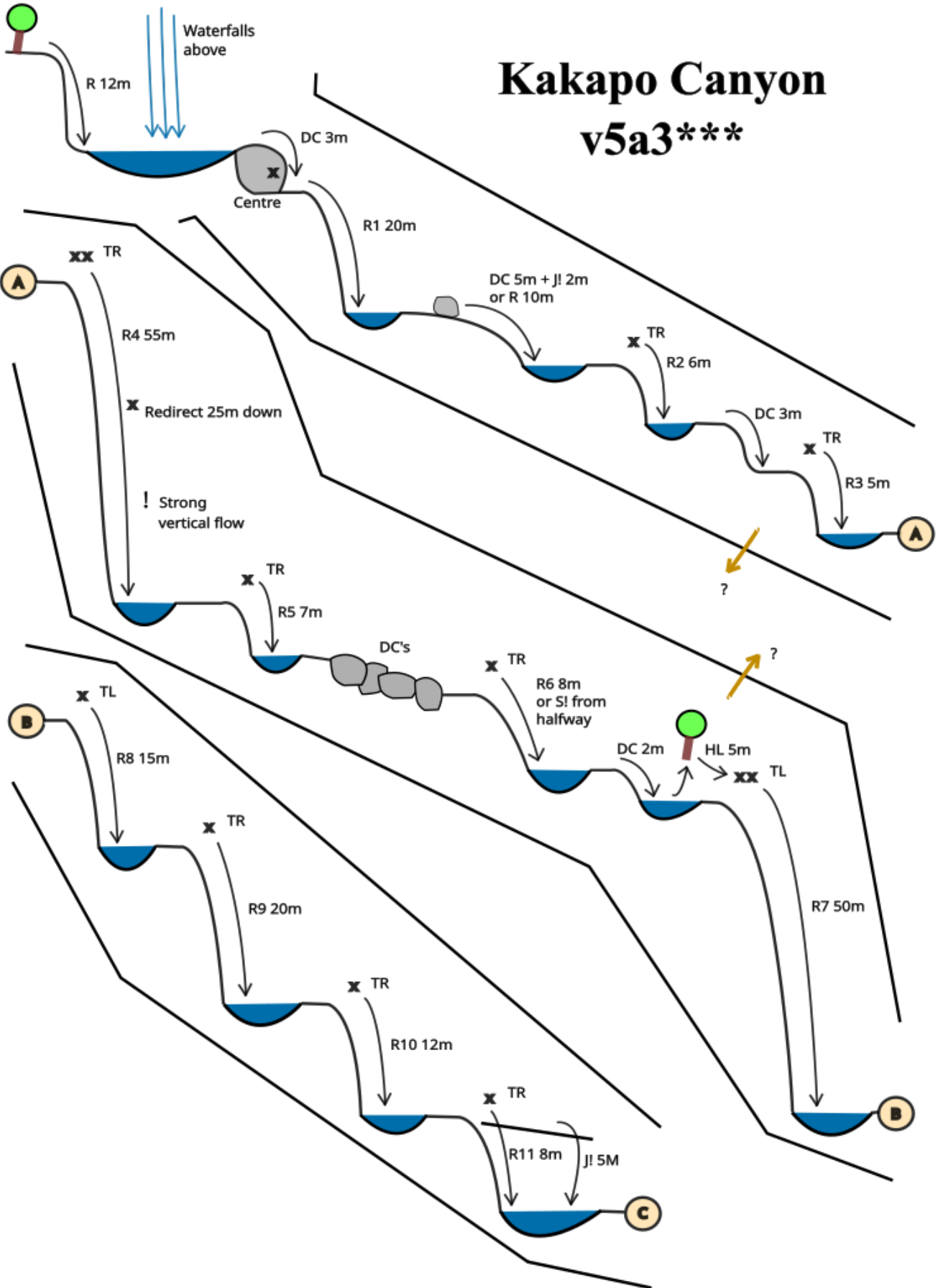


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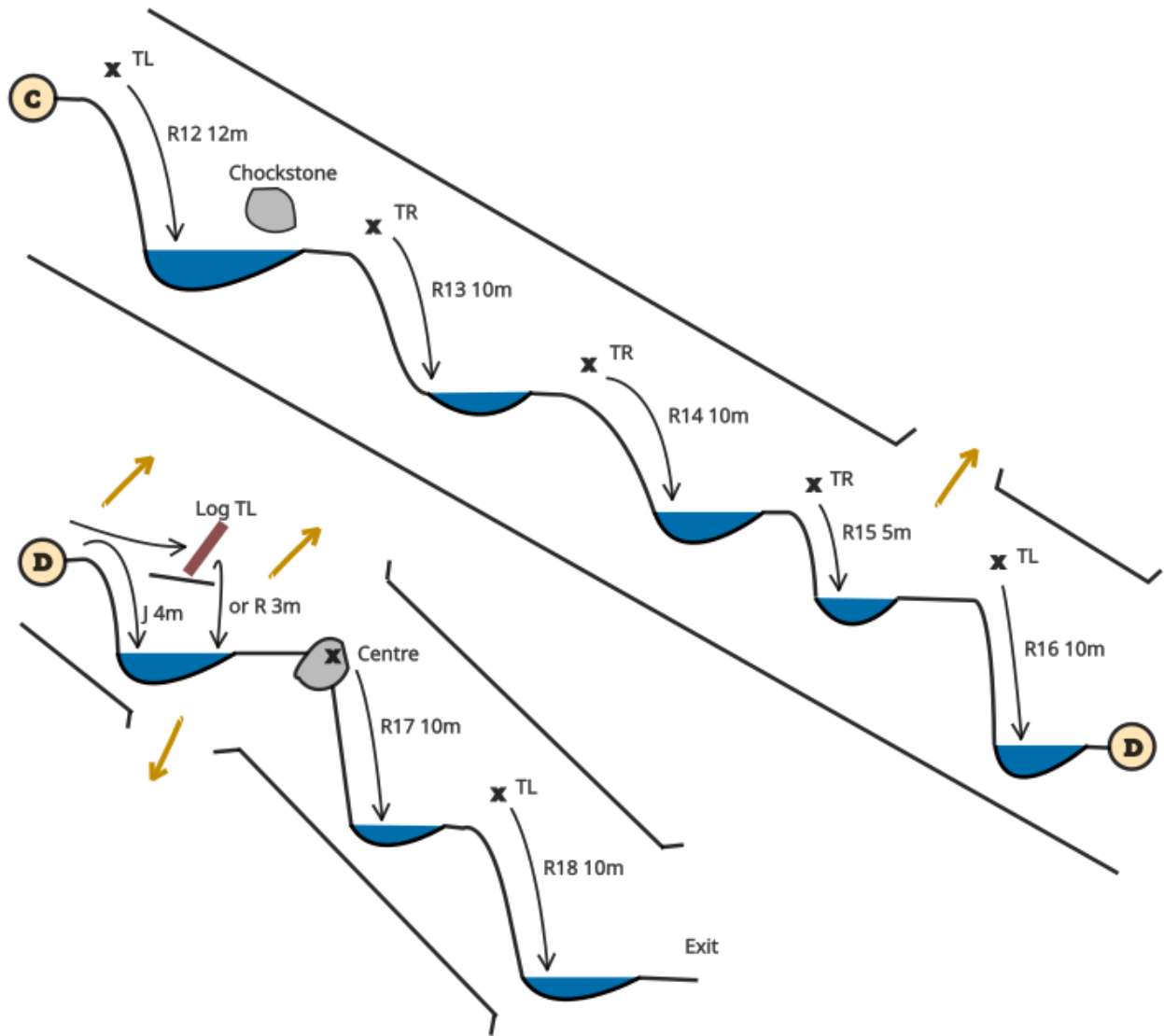
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All heights approximate.  
Pool depths and anchors may change between floods.