

Guidelines for Canyon Leaders

Introduction

Canyoning is an outdoor adventure activity that typically involves bushwalking, swimming, wading, abseiling, and rock scrambling techniques in order to negotiate a diverse range of river and creek systems. Canyoning is an important component of the UBMBC activity program. As with all club activities, safety of participants is of paramount importance.

Canyons Overview

The terrain and features of Canyons vary widely and can include:

- Deep, narrow gorges with waterfalls, tunnels, passages and cave-like formations.
- Open face waterfalls, pools, boulders, escarpments and exposed cliff-line.
- River features may include dry creek beds as well as dark, deep, cold and narrow sections that require swimming and wading. Occasionally underwater swimming may be required.
- Canyon features may cause fast moving water where serious hazards can develop.
- Some canyons require abseiling and/or rock scrambling while others do not.

In NSW, Canyoning is primarily conducted in the Blue Mountains region with most canyons within areas managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service as National Parks and Wilderness areas.

Canyoning Participants

Because of the challenges involved, canyoning participants are required to apply a range of activity skills and techniques including bushwalking, abseiling, swimming, wading, rock scrambling and floatation. Canyoning often occurs in rugged terrain and requires a high level of fitness, agility, endurance and a team-oriented approach.

All participants and those considering joining the canyoning program must have previous canyoning/abseiling experience or have completed the beginner abseiling course conducted regularly by the club. The leader always has the discretion to approve or disapprove of any member joining a canyon activity if he/she has concerns about competency or suitability. In joining or renewing membership with UBMBC, participants have activated the canyon waiver and in so doing accept the risks associated with the activity.

Guidelines for Canyon Leaders

The guidelines for canyon leaders are grouped under three headings that cover what to do before, during and after the canyon. The guidelines are then separated to cover wet, dry and abseiling canyons. These guidelines are applied in conjunction with [Guidelines for Walk Leaders](#) as well as our [Guidelines for Walkers](#) and [Guidelines for Canyoners](#). Hence, some overlap may occur but repetition is preferable to omission.

Wet canyons present more challenges than dry ones, especially when wet canyons are combined with abseiling. Water can behave differently according to the characteristics of the canyon hence more planning and risk assessment is required for wet canyons. The following guidelines encompass what a leader will typically do before, during and after leading a canyon

Before leading a canyon

- Refer to [Guidelines for Walk Leaders](#) on the club website as most canyons also involve walks.

- All trips approved by the Walks Secretary are advertised through UBMBC advising grading, location, duration, potential hazards and skills/experience required.
- On the day before the activity email late-returns-ubmbc@googlegroups.com with the names of the people on your activity. If the walk is delayed, the committee is then able to answer enquiries. Make sure a contact person is aware of the route you are taking and the expected return time. An updated email is required to late returns if there are any changes to participants or if the activity is cancelled.
- Check for park/area closures through NPWS, State or local government that may have occurred since the canyon was added to the program.
- Screen the prospective participants prior to approval for the skills and competency to complete the particular canyon.
- Conduct a risk assessment as outlined in the club [Risk Management Plan](#).

When leading a canyon

For all Canyons

- Adhere to participant limits and guidelines as established by NPWS.
- On the day of the activity, brief the participants on the: the planned route, duration, possible exposure, specific landmarks and potential hazards.
- Participants should be aware of the importance of teamwork and looking out for each other, following the leader's instructions.
- Participants should maintain a suitable pace to avoid becoming lost or separated.
- Where possible appoint a suitably experienced co-leader to share responsibilities.
- Ensure that the group has a map, compass, GPS, mobile phone and a PLB, with the trip detail list updated through the AMSA website.
- Have a plan to initiate an emergency response such as activating a PLB in the event of participants being injured, lost or incapacitated.
- Identify early exit route (s) in case of an emergency.
- Continue to monitor the fitness of the group – checking for fatigue, injuries, hypothermia, hyperthermia.

For Wet Canyons

- Consider if recent rainfall may have increased the water level, altered the conditions and made the canyon more difficult. There may be waterlogged entry and exit tracks, unstable surfaces, landslides or fallen trees.
- Monitor the weather on the day, as heavy rain or thunderstorms may increase the risk of flash flooding.
- Be aware that deep, narrow canyons can flood more quickly, increasing the risk of navigation through and possible entrapment in the canyon.
- Allow for the possibility that strong currents may make swimming, abseiling and rock scrambling more hazardous.
- If possible, plan for an early exit contingency, should conditions deteriorate or prove more challenging than anticipated.

- Have a contingency plan to do an alternate canyon should the conditions cause concern (but only where the committee have been notified and PLB route details have been updated).
- Include in the activity description if participants need to be able to swim and/or wear a suitable floatation device.

For Abseiling Canyons:

- All group members must have approved helmet, harness, descender, carabiners, gloves, safety line, sufficient clothing as well as enough food and water for the trip.
- Check if any additional equipment is carried by group members that can be used if required.
- Check all anchors before setting up ropes and descending to ensure they have not been compromised by weather events such as bushfires. Have sufficient material to build a new anchor if required.
- Check all ropes and equipment to ensure they are in good condition and assign one group member to carry the rescue rope.
- Be aware that replacement anchors, in different positions, may change the length of the abseil.
- Explain the route for each abseil and any potential hazards.
- Identify the skills of individual members and anyone setting up anchors/ropes should be competent to do so.
- Safety lines should be used by all participants in exposed areas before they get on rope and should only unclip from safety line once on rope.
- When throwing rope down, if it cannot be heard hitting the ground or water, pull it back up and tie knots in both ends. This may not be practical in all situations, such as white water. Consider using a releasable anchor.
- If possible, maintain communication with the person abseiling until he/she is off rope.
- All participants should check their safety protocols (ABCDE) before descending and if possible, double check when the next person is abseiling.
- Use a bottom belay for all non-trivial abseils. Everyone should stand clear of the area below the abseil to avoid being hit by falling rocks and debris.
- The use of an auto block or prussik by the first person to descend is recommended.
- Facilitate communication between the group through the use of the club's 2-way radios (especially useful near noisy waterfalls and during long abseils) as well as whistle blasts etc.

After the Canyon

- Check that all participants have returned safely and email the names (with any temporary membership forms) to the club's walks recorder.

- If, after the activity if there were any changes to trip participants or if it was cancelled, please forward your late returns email with amendments to the WalksRecorder, [Derek Johnston](mailto:walksrecorder@ubmbc.org.au) (walksrecorder@ubmbc.org.au).
- Email a scan or photo of any temporary membership forms to the Walks Recorder, [Derek Johnston](mailto:walksrecorder@ubmbc.org.au) (walksrecorder@ubmbc.org.au).
- Conduct a short debrief where participants have opportunity to provide feedback on the activity.
- Remind participants to pay their contribution for the use of the ropes and/or travel expenses where relevant.
- Clean all ropes used and check for any damage or fraying.

Canyon Gradings

Grading canyons is challenging and often subjective as it depends on a number of varying factors, some or all of which may be present. The five key factors are listed below. Canyon leaders decide the grading of the canyon, taking into account such factors as:

- Access. Includes the distance to and from the canyon, the type of terrain and the navigational challenges.
- Duration. Is mainly determined by the number of abseils and the length of the canyon but is influenced by all the other factors.
- Technical difficulty. Relates to the abseiling component as determined by set ups, starts, sharp edges, overhangs, slippery surfaces and exposure.
- Hydrology. Refers to the amount and strength of the flow, the type of swimming or wading involved and the water temperature.
- Volatility. Weather conditions such as floods or bushfires may have caused rock falls, blockages or obstacles that may require new anchors, additional abseils or alternate routes

The Walks Secretary may change the grading of the canyon following discussion with the canyon leader.

Canyon Grading Scale

Grade 1:	Easy
Grade 2:	Easy to Moderate
Grade 3:	Moderate
Grade 4:	Moderate to Difficult
Grade 5:	Difficult
Grade 6:	Very Difficult

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