

**ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE
2023-24 CANYONING
SEASON**



2024 NZCA photo comp overall winner: Whirling Water, Austin Edwards

Presidents report

It has been a big season for Canyoning in New Zealand, with major NZCA events, high court battles, plus a large number of high-quality first descents being done.

The first event was the National Canyon SAREX, organised between NZCA and Land Search and Rescue NZ. Held on 1st March, more than 50 people from 7 organisations and agencies participated. It was my privilege to be the main organiser of this event; although there were plenty of lessons learned, overall the event was very successful, with lots of relationships built.



Dan in Zig Zag Creek, Haast Pass / Toine Houtenbos

Following immediately behind the SAREX was the National Canyon Festival. Over 100 people attended the event, with workshops, canyon descents, raffles, presentations and more. A big thank you to Lee Den Haan and Rachel Jones who were the main organisers of the event.

A number of international canyoningers were in New Zealand this season. Many attended the festival, as well as chalking up a number of exciting new first descents. Whirling Water in the Waitaha valley on the West Coast probably gets the popularity prize: an Instagram reel from Andrew Humphreys clocking more than 3 million views! We are hopeful that the canyon gets a lot of visits: the Morgan Gorge on the Waitaha is again under threat from Hydro development. More visitation to the valley demonstrates the value to the region of keeping the valley in its natural state rather than flooding the gorge and the local canyons.

Griffin Creek had its day in the High Court, with Federated Mountain Clubs taking a case against DOC and Griffin Creek Hydro Ltd. The initial case was lost, but NZCA donated \$2000 towards the costs of the appeal process. We are well in debt to FMC for their ongoing advocacy for Griffin Creek, to protect this canyon and others which may face similar threats.

These are a timely reminder that even though the canyons are more powerful than us as individuals, as a collective they need our protection if we want to keep enjoying them. Thank you to everyone who became a member and supported the fundraising at the festival: your financial support helps keep us ticking over and doing our best to protect the canyons and the sport of canyoning for those who follow in our footsteps.

Dan Clearwater
NZCA President

Canyon SAR

By Oliver Polson & Daniel Clearwater

CanyonSAR activity around the country continues to slowly increase, an increase in visitor numbers and continued relationship building with local LandSAR teams helps fuel this. Aside from the Makarora SAREX (See Dan's report below) the main focus of this season has been course development.

Firstly the development of a training pathway identifying how an experienced recreational canyoneer can grow from a probational CanyonSAR member all the way through to a Canyon Rescue Controller or CanyonSAR IMT Advisor. This identifies which milestones an individual needs to meet, and which LandSAR courses complement the current CanyonSAR courses. It also helped identify the gaps in the advanced end of our training pathway.

The first course designed to help fill these gaps is Canyon Rescue Level 2. This will be focused primarily on advanced rigging techniques utilising smaller teams, less gear and heavier loads. The pilot course will be invite-only and scheduled for early November 2024

There is scope to develop further courses that focus on Specialist Team Leadership and IMT advisor roles, but we will look to develop these courses in conjunction with other Specialist teams. We are also looking to tweak the Canyon Search Methods course but this will likely happen prior to the 25/26 season.

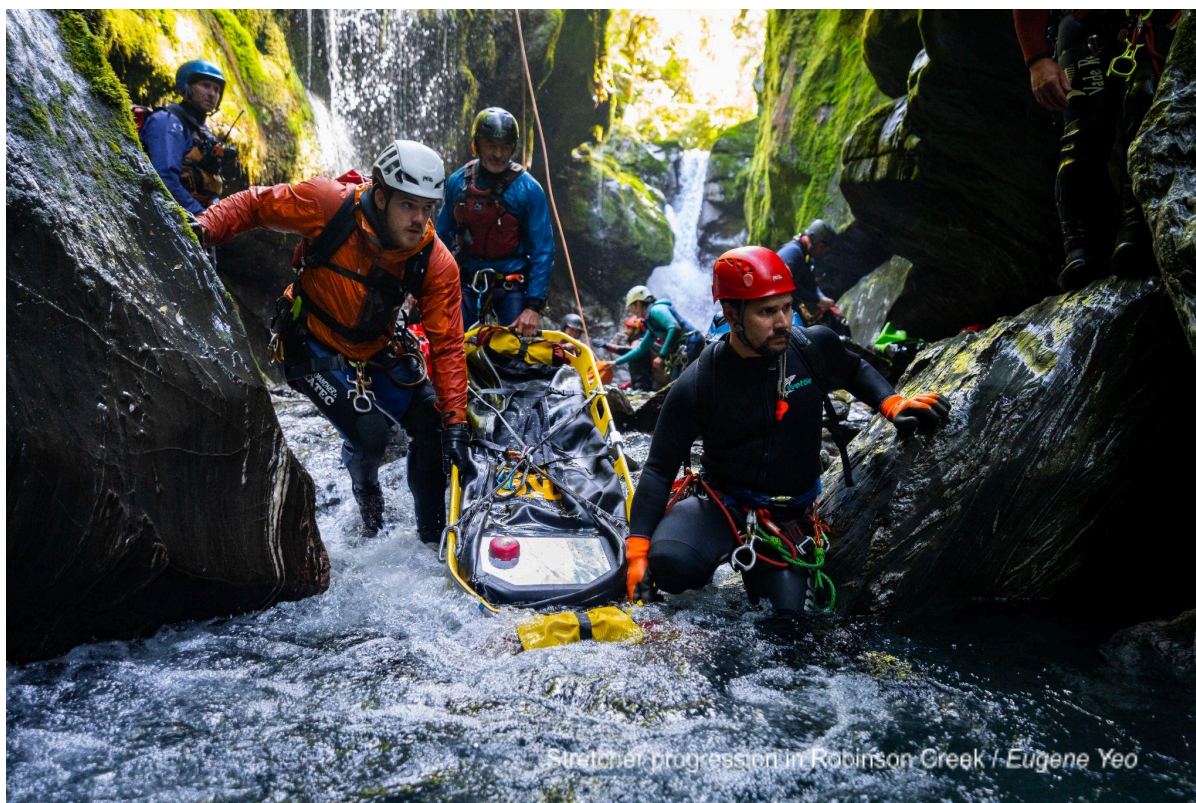
Earlier this year LandSAR undertook an in depth survey of all specialist disciplines (Cave, Canyon, Cliff, ACR, River & Dogs) to better understand the needs of these groups and how they could improve the support provided. The major outcome was the development of a new role in the Group Support team, a specialist GVS. This role is to provide administrative support to the specialist teams and to foster and facilitate interdisciplinary information sharing and networking. Nico Fournier (RARO & CanyonSAR) was appointed to this role. Initially His focus will be supporting the ACR teams, so in the meantime we continue to work closely with Alex Waterworth (Wellington CanyonSAR) as our main GVS.



Wanaka CanyonSAR team on a SAREX in the Rainbow Valley, Aspiring National Park / Dan Clearwater

As seems to be always the case, the funding we receive from LandSAR is in a constant state of flux. Traditionally our funding has come from the Outdoor Safety Commission (OSC) pool and is capped at \$25,000/year. This is an untagged funding stream, essentially meaning we (NZCA/CanyonSAR) have autonomy over how and what we spend this money on. There has been a suggestion from LandSAR to bid for (in conjunction with other specialist teams) a much larger funding source, the Fuel Excise Duty (FED) fund, if successful this would potentially increase our annual funding quite significantly. There are some drawbacks to this however; the FED funding is administered on a 3 year cycle and will also potentially increase the administrative load on the Exec. It is still unknown how much funding is available and we continue to work closely with LandSAR to develop this business case. The next round of FED funding doesn't become available until July 2025, so for the coming season we will be receiving our normal \$25,000 from the OSC fund. A prospective budget can be seen at the end of this SAR report.

The National Canyon SAREX Friday 1 March 2024, Makarora.



The magazine article reproduced in this report was for the NZ Search and Rescue “Link” magazine, and gives the main facts of the activity. Beyond the facts in that article, here are a few key points about the activity:

Inviting RCCNZ and local Police SAR squad members was extremely valuable. Police helped with permission from DOC to for helicopter landings (repeater installation) and to run the SAREX on public conservation land. The chance to have the SAR coordinating authority

view our capability and understand the canyon SAR environment was invaluable. We had a RCCNZ SAR officer and two Police officers in the canyon during the exercise, getting first-hand understanding.

Involving Wanaka SAR Incident Management Team was mutually beneficial. They assisted with the planning and coordination of the teams, and provided the morning briefing and radio link during the activity. This provided CanyonSAR volunteers with a professional example of SAROP command and control, whilst the local IMT gained experience with CanyonSAR deployments.

We build relationships with Makarora Fire station. The station provided an excellent forward staging point for briefing/debriefing and location of the Incident control point. In real life, the operation would probably be based out of Wanaka SAR, but involving the fire fighters meant that relationship could be valuable for future operations.

Media coverage of the event helps raise our profile. We invited Eugene Yeo to be the official photographer during the event, and he captured a number of very high quality images which were used by NZCA, LandSAR, NZSAR as well as in local media. We also reached out to the Wanaka Sun/Otago Daily Times, who ran a short article on the event.

<https://www.odt.co.nz/regions/wanaka/rescue-teams-enjoy-exercise> The main aim of this promotion is to make the coordinating authorities aware of our capabilities, also raising our profile helps with funding and support from Land Search and Rescue.



It was a challenge to accommodate nearly 40 canyonSAR volunteers. Having the SAREX just before a festival in a popular spot meant lots of people wanted to participate. It was very challenging to find a scenario and programme which met the needs of everyone.

The scenario involved the morning doing a deliberate clearance of 7 canyon sections, looking for deceased persons. The sections were Lower Wilson, Robinson, 2 Sections of Fish river, just above and below the bridge, Upper Cross Creek, Gangers and Lower Cross, (Makarora River Gorge) Team size was 4-6, including observers from CanyonSAR Australia and Taiwan plus RCCNZ and Police. The search tasks were of varying suitability: Fish River Canyon was the best spot for serious whitewater search taskings, with places like Makarora Gorge not really that suitable at all (too open, few locations readily searchable).



The mannequins were found in Robinson Creek, which meant all the teams got re-tasked to that location. Two Kong stretchers were used, hoping to spread out the movement of mannequins, but in reality, there were far too many rescuers.. Probably around 10-12 people would be a realistic number for moving a few pitches: with nearly 40, most people ended up just chatting with other volunteers and waiting to progress down commuter lines.

Future activities with this many participants would probably be better run with a round-robin activity, moving between 2-3 stations in a day (search, medical, stretcher movement), than attempting a single-scenario SAREX involving all participants.



SAREX Participants / All SAREX photos credit Eugene Yeo

Clearing the canyons

More than 50 people from a range of organisations and agencies participated in the bi-annual National Canyon Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX) held in the Queenstown Lakes District on 1 March 2024.

At the Makarora Fire Station, the Incident Controller explained the scenario. A pair of hitch-hiking social media influencers had told friends they intended to photograph some famous gorges near Haast Pass. The pair failed to turn up to a social gathering, sparking a comprehensive search by air and ground involving field teams and canyon teams from Land Search and Rescue.

"It's a complicated environment to operate in," says Dan Clearwater, SAREX organiser and Wānaka Canyon team coordinator. "We are managing exposure to heights, swiftwater hazards and cold temperatures, whilst needing to effectively search areas such as log jams, rock sieves and undercuts where a person could become entrapped."

There are about 100 trained Canyon SAR volunteers, who are part of teams based in the greater Auckland area, Central Plateau, Wellington, Motueka, Hokitika, Christchurch and Wānaka. "This SAREX gave us the chance to share knowledge and promote national consistency in our techniques," says Dan.

This year the SAREX had observers from Australian and Taiwanese Canyon SAR teams, plus Police SAR coordinators and staff from the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand. Relationship building was a key aim of the SAREX.

"We are trying to help the coordinating authorities understand what we can do: safely and effectively search in and around gorges, canyons and waterfalls. Then we can rescue or recover people from those environments."

After a morning of searching, mannequins simulating the two deceased influencers were found in Robinson Creek canyon. A radio repeater had been installed with the help of Wānaka Search and Rescue chairperson Bill Day and his helicopter. This repeater enabled the Wānaka-led incident management team to re-task the canyoneers to the recovery operation. At the staging area, the Makarora Volunteer Fire Brigade provided a freshwater biosecurity wash.

Two police officers donned canyoning gear, and were guided to the scene to conduct an examination. Then, after a karakia was said, the mannequins were loaded into floating canyon rescue stretchers. Rope systems were rigged to lower each stretcher down four more waterfalls within the gorge, the largest being 25-metres high.

Wānaka Police SAR coordinator Alan Lee was impressed. "Those canyons are intimidating, cold, and high-risk environments, but the team were obviously in their element. They did a fantastic job of finding and recovering the mannequins."



Canyon teams are trained in vertical rescue, using techniques that also manage swiftwater hazards. Courtesy Eugene Yeo



A team member is belayed to a ledge to search a rock sieve using an avalanche probe. Canyon SAR volunteers use wetsuits for protection against lengthy exposure to swift, cold water. Harnesses, ropes and technical gear allow them to abseil down waterfalls and progress through the canyons. They use diving masks and snorkels to search pools, and in highly turbulent water, use avalanche probes or GoPro cameras on a selfie stick. Courtesy Eugene Yeo

Coordinating authorities can reach the Canyon teams using the NZSAR Resources database: nzsar-resources.org.nz

Local team contacts are also available at: nzcanyoningassociation.org/rescue

Operations

The following is a record of deployments (and stand-by calls) for CanyonSAR teams nationally during the season.

4 Aug 2023	Mt Holdsworth	Search assist for missing persons	Overdue Day walker. Large scale LandSAR search with Wellington Canyon assisting to clear a small section of river close to the road end. Wellington and Upper NI put on standby for further taskings in the Waiohine gorge. Later stood down as search scaled back	Wellington CanyonSAR (Upper NI on standby)
21 Sep 2023	Cave Stream, Canterbury	Stretcher carry from Cave stream (injured ankle)	Injured party extracted via sked and semi inflated packraft by CHOC staff lead by Keith Riley (CanyonSAR) under police authority	West coast CanyonSAR
26 Sep 2023	Vassoconstrictor Canyon	Rescue of injured team member during CanyonSAR training activity.	Lower 3x pitches to strop point. Aspiring Heli stropped out all 9 people to valley floor then patient flown to Wanaka	Wanaka CanyonSAR
1 Nov 2023	Wentworth Falls - Coromandel	Search assist for missing party	CanyonSAR tasked to clear Wentworth Falls and 2 x tributaries to assist LandSAR in a search for a missing day walker + Dog. Nothing found, search scaled back.	Upper North Island CanyonSAR
26 Dec 2023	Wilson Creek	Standby for overdue canyoning party	SouthCanyons commercial trip overdue in Wilson Creek. Called to to on standby by Queenstown Police SAR Squad. Stood down half an hour later.	Wanaka CanyonSAR
12 Jan 2024	Mather Creek	Standby for beacon activation	Stood down. Injured party evacuated by Otago Heli	Wanaka CanyonSAR
1 Feb 2024	Mather Creek	Standby for beacon activation	Stood down. Injured party evacuated by Otago Heli	Wanaka CanyonSAR
17 Feb 2024	Sleeping God, Coromandel	Standby for beacon activation	Stood down. Injured party evacuated by Westpac Heli	Central Upper North Island & Wellington Canyon SAR
2 Mar 2024	Ore Stream	In-canyon support to Helicopter rescue	Beacon activation. Otago Heli BK117 winch rescue. CanyonSAR already at scene, assisted with extraction	Wanaka CanyonSAR
3 Mar 2024	Ore Stream	CanyonSAROP to rescue canyoner with sprained ankle	Same location and previous day. Long strop 70m under Aspiring Heli Squirrel.	Wanaka CanyonSAR
8 Apr 2024	Beebys Knob	Stretcher Haul from accident site to recovery vehicle	Technical rope assist to help recover the victims of a 4X4 accident near Beebys Knob	Tasman CanyonSAR (Assisting Nelson CaveSAR)
8 Jun 2024	Wairere Falls	Search and recovery	Search assist for despondent LP in the vicinity of Wairere Falls, LP Located deceased at the base of the falls. Canyon team utilised the following day for the recovery.	Upper North Island CanyonSAR

Proposed CanyonSAR budget

	Amount (\$NZ)	Explanation / comments
TOTAL FUNDING		
Carryover from 2023/2024	53,551	This was unspent (as at 29/7/24) from last year's budget
2023/24 LandSAR funding	25,000	Expected OSC funding
2023/24 LandSAR Admin Grant	0	Expected LandSAR funding to be used solely for administration costs - Website/postage cost etc
Contingency	1,500	Set aside for next year and in case some items run over budget
Remaining team gear allocation	10,854	Carried over from last year's team funding allocations - as of July 29 2024
Remaining Team Training Allocation	6,531	Carried over from last year's team funding allocations - as of July 29 2024
Remaining Team Helicopter Training Allocation	20,982	Carried over from last year's team funding allocations - as of July 29 2024
Total funding available	38,684	
BUDGETED EXPENSES AT NATIONAL LEVEL		
Training	3,000	Expected to be funded via GPT request. Budgeted amount intended to assist in travel costs if required
Helicopter time/Training	18,000	Allocated evenly to teams for "compulsory" training/famil with their local helicopter operator - intended to be put towards flight time to enable hover load/unload training and general familiarisation - Will attempt to get this covered by LandSAR - This equates to approx \$2500 per team
Exercises / activities	2,500	Saved towards Bi-Annual SAREX Costs
SAREX/Regional trainings	3,500	7 x \$500 training allocations to regional teams. encourages continued inhouse training.
Equipment	4,000	National Asset replacement fund - Training gear, Kong repairs etc
Total national budget	31,000	
FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR SEVEN REGIONAL TEAMS	7,684	To be split between the 7 regional teams (1097.73 each)

Technical standards developments

By Shanana Fraser

2023/24 has been a quiet year for the NZCA Technical Standards portfolio. There have been no significant developments in this space since last years update of the Bolting Code of Practice. In the coming year the intent is to look at hardwear markings in relation to corrosion resistance following a release of information from UIAA and potentially incorporate that information into a further COP update.

Community Report

By Daniel Clearwater

The highlight for the year was the highly successful Makarora Canyon Festival, 2-4 March 2024. 8 years after the first festival was held in Wanaka in 2016, the event returned to its roots in the Aspiring Region.

Almost 100 participants from around New Zealand plus international visitors from Australia, USA, Taiwan and Europe based out of Wonderland lodge at Makarora. In the week leading up to the event the conditions made a swift change from summer to autumn temperatures, and the forecast was for significant rain. The conditions turned out ok overall, despite cooler weather, there was a little drizzle on Saturday, and only moderate rain on the Monday.

A series of workshops were well attended, and lots of people made use of low water levels to get into Ore Stream. That same canyon was the scene of two incidents requiring helicopter evacuation. The injuries were lower limb sprains/fractures, which occurred almost in the same spot, 24 hours apart. There were a number of group self-rescues, including two leg injuries (which turned out to be fractures) in Wilson Creek plus a leg injury in lower Cross Creek. Fortunately, there were plenty of CanyonSAR volunteers participating in the festival, so these incidents had plenty of experienced people to deal with them.

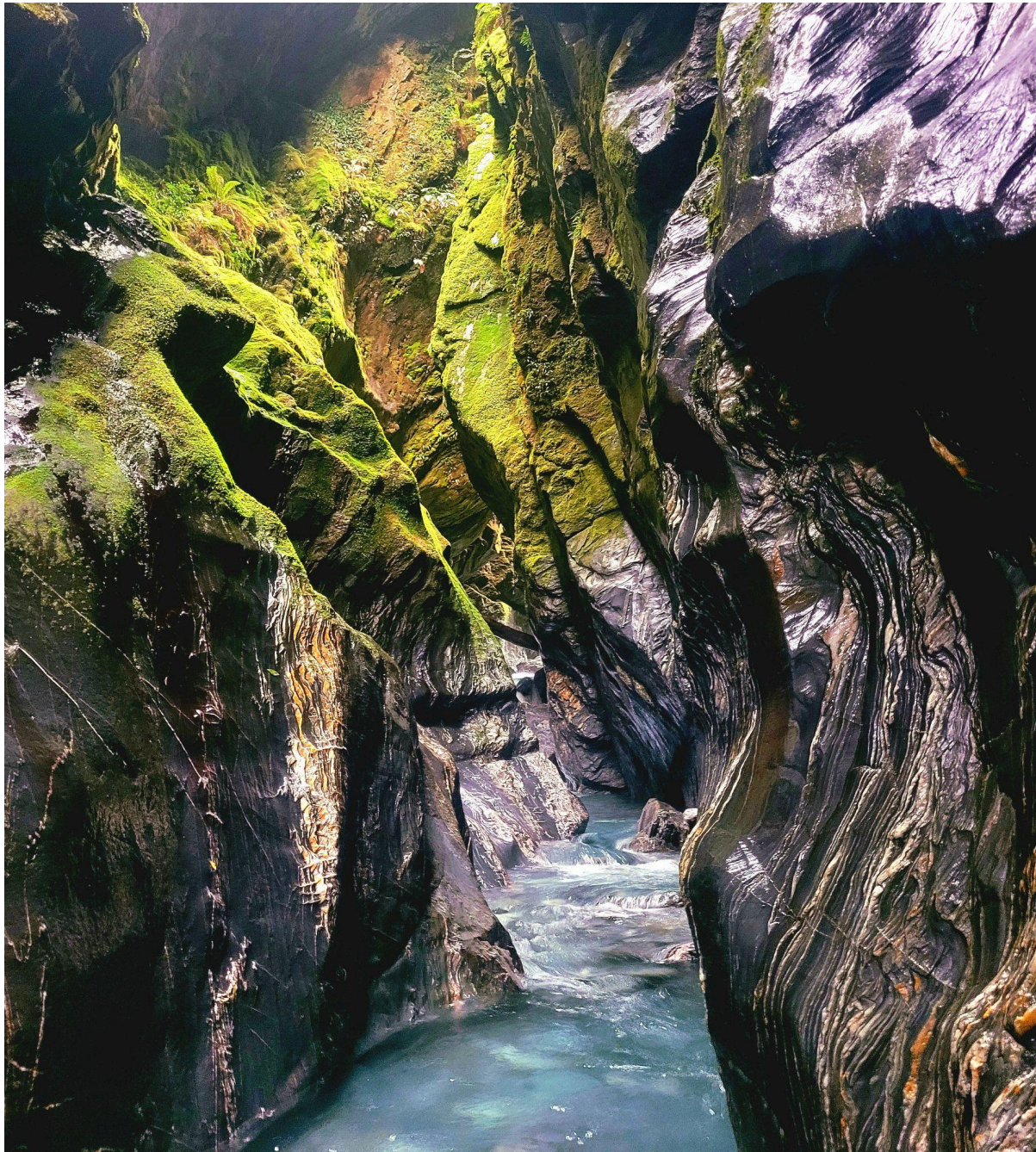
As always a highlight was the social evening, where Andrew Humphreys was a last-minute ring in presenter, who spoke on multi-day expedition canyoning techniques and mindset. A video of the first descent of the Tuke River in Westland gave a kiwi-perspective on that same mindset, which was appreciated by everyone present. Plenty of food and drinks were enjoyed, and the never-ending raffle saw the majority going home with some sort of prize.



Ore Stream / Charlotte Workman

A huge thank you to Lee Den Haan, who was the principal organiser of the festival, liaising with the venue and arranging many of the logistics. Rachel Jones did a fantastic job of designing and producing the festival T-shirts, organising sponsors and running the raffle, as well as lots of logistical support on the weekend. Dan Clearwater contributed with the website, registrations and pre-event communications work.

Later that season, the annual NZCA photo competition was run. Although attracting fewer entries than last year, the standard was still high, and we're pleased to feature the winners and runners up throughout this annual report. Congratulations to Austin Edwards who was overall winner, and thanks to Dan Clearwater for running the competition.



Wilson Creek / Alexander Waterworth

Treasurer's report

By Warren Fitzgerald

NZ Canyoning Association currently administers two different funding streams. Since the introduction of CanyonSAR, funding has been provided to improve the search and rescue capabilities within canyon-style environments throughout New Zealand. NZCA also administers the Canyon Fund, which receives membership fees and donations, to promote and enhance the canyoning opportunities throughout Aotearoa.

In September 2022 NZCA held a general meeting to amend our rules as an incorporated society. Part of this process was to change our financial year to 1 July - 30 June. This change was done to align with the LandSAR financial year, which is where the bulk of our funding comes from, and to move the end-of-year reporting period out of the canyoning season. This was also expected to ease the time constraints of executive members, many of whom have other commitments around the traditional 31 March end-of-financial-year period.

The NZ Canyoning Association financial records for 2024 (and previous years) are published on the NZCA website - <http://nzcanyoningassociation.org/about/#eaqm>

CanyonSAR Funding

CanyonSAR was accepted as a specialist discipline within LandSAR New Zealand in 2019 and is being administered within the NZCA as a separate financial stream to other NZCA expenses.

In February 2024, CanyonSAR received a \$25,000 Outdoor Safety Committee grant for the 23/24 financial year (1 July - 30 June). CanyonSAR also received a training grant of \$15,000 to help fund the national SAREX held in Makarora on the 1st March 2024.

Due to every region in New Zealand having different expertise and different requirements, the NZCA executive has attempted to give local CanyonSAR groups autonomy by pre-approving budgets for local groups to upskill and equip themselves.

This year we continued to provide local groups with a pre-approved budget for them to run their own inhouse training throughout the year. These efforts are supported by national training and SAR exercises, as well as knowledge sharing between groups. Additionally, funding was also budgeted for each local group to complete specific helicopter training specific to their region's needs.

For the financial year ending 30 June 2024:

- \$11,472.46 has been spent on purchasing equipment nationwide
- \$9,387.14 for a national CanyonSAR exercise held Makarora on the 1st March 2024
- \$10,670.92 on training nationwide
- \$460.65 has been spent on consumables and administration.

NZCA Canyon Fund

The Canyon Fund was established in late 2017 to ensure the funds raised from NZCA activities are reinvested in the canyoning community. A sunset clause exists to release money back into the contestable Canyon Fund if approved projects are not completed by the end of the following financial year.

During the 2024 financial year, the NZCA Canyon Fund has funded following projects:

- \$82 to upgrade anchors in Eager Beaver (Wellington) - Warren Fitzgerald
- \$1200 for anchors in Whirling Waters (West Coast) - Richard Bramley & Leo Tregret
- \$608 for anchors in Bartrum Creek (West Coast) - Richard Bramley & Leo Tregret

Two projects have been approved but are yet to be completed:

- Creating a training area on Gorge Rd (Queenstown) - Riki Brown
- Upgrade anchors in Eagles Nest (Otago) - Oscar Burford

Additionally, one expedition project was declined due to its location within a designated Wilderness Area.

The NZCA always welcomes more applications to the fund!

nzcanyoningassociation.org/resources/#canyonfund



Moss hedgehogs / Nola Collie

Advocacy Report

By Annette Phillips and Dan Clearwater

Wairere Falls

We continue our work in building relationships with local Iwi Ngāti Hinerangi, regarding the closure of canyoning at Wairere and Waiteariki Falls in the Kaimai Ranges near Matamata. Since 2023 we have extended the request of no canyoning at these sites due to their significant cultural importance. Establishing and fostering relationships takes time and we appreciate Iwi's pragmatic approach to recreational canyoning in this area; in that they have clearly identified no go zones with considered reasoning, and remain encouraging of canyoning activity outside of these important places. Again, we thank the canyon community in respecting Iwi's wishes for no descents of Wairere and Waiteariki Falls.

Griffin Creek

As mentioned in the Presidents Report, the fate of Griffin Creek sits with a Judge. After years of to and fro advocacy and political leg-work, Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ finally exhausted all other avenues and chose to lodge a case against DOC and Griffin Creek Hydro Ltd in the High Court. There was an initial approval for the hydro scheme, then a series of amendments which were approved after public submissions and challenges.

The case was looking for a ruling on an ambiguous clause in the original concession document. Essentially, the maximum amount of water that could be taken was not clearly defined. The Hydro Company and DOC claimed it was the 2.5 cumecs, however FMC claimed that since it wasn't clear it should be the original 0.8 cumec amount from the initial application.

The project appears not to be financially viable unless they can take the maximum amount of water to produce electricity, so if the courts ruled that the lower amount was the permitted amount, then the project would be unlikely to progress.

The other avenues of advocacy, such as public submissions to the approval process did not go in favour of preventing the project, so FMC felt its only option was court action. NZCA contributed \$2000 towards the cost of this action. Although that amount was just a drop in the bucket of the many tens of thousands it is likely to cost, we are contributing what we can afford to support the campaign.

Morgan Gorge, Whirling Water, and the Waitaha canyons

A proposal for a hydro dam, flooding the Morgan Gorge on the Waitaha River, was declined by the Government a number of years ago. However, new legislation such as the Fast Track Approvals bill and a clear intent from the National-lead Government has meant that this project has risen again like a zombie.

The project would flood the lower valley, which includes the lower sections of recently discovered canyons like Whirling Water, Bartrum Creek and Scamper Torrent. This trifecta of world-class canyons has received international attention, with several well-travelled visiting canyoneers saying that Whirling Water is in the top handful of canyons on the planet. More than 3.6million views on an instagram reel by Andrew Humphreys no doubt helped the publicity for this canyon, and we're hoping that it gets a lot of visitation next season.

Raising the profile of the canyon is important in demonstrating the intrinsic worth of the area, as well as the financial benefit of increased visitors to the west coast. Given its very high technical grade, Whirling is unlikely to become completely overcrowded, but its exceptional quality will make it a destination for many many more international and local canyoneers.

NZCA will keep a watch on the Morgan Gorge Hydro proposal, contributing canyon-specific knowledge to advocacy organisations such as FMC, who are working to prevent the project from going ahead.



Whirling Water / Richard Bramley

Upper North Island

By Brad Schiamanski

This year, the activities in the Upper North Island as usual have predominantly been focused on the Coromandel region, with several expeditions to the Ruapehu area. Notable achievements include first descents of the Slotatote, Huckatote, and upper Waihohonu canyons in Ruapehu. While an attempt at what was initially thought to be a possible first descent in the Waiwawa headwaters revealed prior bolt installations, this underscores the importance of trip reports!

Additionally, enthusiasts from the Upper North Island ventured to the South Island for their major adventures, collaborating with local canyoneers to foster a successful and enjoyable exchange of experiences.

This year has also seen a significant number of international visitors, typically starting in Auckland. It has been heartening to observe our local canyoneers warmly welcoming these guests, sharing insights into New Zealand's unique canyoning practices, and highlighting the differences in canyoning etiquette compared to their home countries.

The Sleeping God Canyon continues to experience high recreational traffic, and the guiding company's business is recovering well.

Access to Rangihau Road and the surrounding areas has been restored; however, Oteao Falls Canyon remains inaccessible due to private land restrictions. We appreciate everyone's adherence to these access limitations and encourage exploring alternative canyons such as Bulls Run or the full Rangihau trip.

We have also had several search and rescue (SAR) callouts this year, managed with exceptional professionalism. A heartfelt thanks to the Canyon SAR team for their swift and expert responses. Their efforts have been recognized positively by the police and other partners, as noted in their internal bulletin. These operations have strengthened our relationships with the police, fire services, and local Iwi, which is promising for the future of canyoning in the Coromandel area. Additional gratitude is extended to the SAR teams who have been on standby multiple times throughout the year.

I look forward to another exciting summer of canyoning across both islands. Now is the time to plan your adventures!

Lower North Island

By Gavin Barry-Morgan

The Lower North Island is not renowned for its canyoning. However, this does not stop a small cadre of stalwarts questing for crevices and niches to rappel, slide and occasionally jump down.

There have been three first descents in the region this year. The team responsible for arguably the most comically named canyons in New Zealand have hit it out the park with the hilariously named Huckatote and Slotatote canyons. This crew of utter legends have done it again and again in their masochistic quest for sendy descents off of the Ruapehu massif with some cracking names and some interesting canyon sections. Hukatote described by the author with the inspiring statement *“Zero stars, some cool waterfalls but wouldn’t go back given the effort. The waterfalls marked on topo maps are the only raps.”*. Given this description it’s only a matter of time until international teams flock to this area to try and repeat this descent.

Slotatote does sound like the more interesting of the two canyons descended by this team in the area with a quote from the topo of the canyon stating that *“This trip is an epic”*. Anything this team of stalwarts tells us is epic should have teams desperate to try and repeat this descent. It remains to be seen if following teams agree on the technical grading quality rating of this pair of canyons and we eagerly await the future trip reports to see if their judgement is upheld.

The other first descent in the region stays on from with punishing approaches, aggressively long days in the canyon and crippling walk outs. The notably named Impassable Gorge has been passed and the noble confederation of canyoneers that were responsible for the epic descent of Isabelle Creek. Impassable Gorge described by one of the authors of the canyon topo as *“Improbably scenic & constantly engaging – the grading doesn’t do justice to what is involved”* sounds absolutely enticing and is just waiting to be repeated by a team similarly motivated by the nuanced Taraua Canyoning scene. Similarly the expected debate about the technical or qualitative grading of this canyon is eagerly anticipated.

Concluding with more sombre news about the search for a missing trapper in the Tararuas that was supported by the Lower North Island Canyon SAR team. This was a search that was supported by teams from all over New Zealand and ended with the search being suspended and the missing party is stated as still missing by a family founded givealittle page as of April 2024. The Lower North Island team cleared waterways set for them by the command and control of the search in brutally cold conditions and managed to eliminate the specified areas as points of interest for the other search teams. They achieved notice from national news publications for their selfless effort and helped raise the profile of the budding Canyon SAR network across NZ.

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/search-for-michael-macgregor-missing-in-mount-holdsworth-area-enters-fifth-day>

Top of the south

By Toine Houtenbos

It has been quiet in the Top of the South. In February, a team headed down to the Upper Grey River south of Springs Junction (bit of a stretch to call that Top of the South!) to do a first descent. V4A2III-ish, named Duga-duga canyon. It hosts some nice abseils and slides but not enough to make it a noteworthy canyon. First descent team: Pepijn Hoeksema, Amelia Penfold, Beau Evans, Zeke Platt and Toine Houtenbos.

In July, Blue Creek in the Kahurangi National Park received a major anchor upgrade. All anchors are now 2 x 10mm stainless steel joined with chain. Some anchors have been moved to improve the safety and accessibility of the abseil. Old, non-removable have been ground out. An anchor has been added to a drop to replace an awkward natural anchor. Another anchor has been added in a place where most parties would downclimb a drop which was partially created by a false floor. The false floor has been collapsed (on purpose) and an anchor has been created on the True Left. The main structure of the feature is now solid but small loose rocks will continue to come down for a while. A trip report will be posted on kiwicanyons. This was a joint effort between Canyoning Aotearoa (Adrien Paris) and Abel Tasman Canyons (Toine Houtenbos).

Since Richard Bramley resigned as regional rep no-one has officially taken over yet, hence it's been quiet. We're chatting about it, we should have a designated rep soon.



Werewere Kokako / Dan Clearwater

Westland

By Dan Clearwater

The west coast saw a number of very-high quality first descents this season.

Whirling Water v5a6V****

This first descent is undoubtedly the crowning achievement of this season. After successive missions to this mega-canyon over three seasons by multiple groups, the first full descent was completed on 20 March 2024. It instantly shot to fame on social media, and with the other high-quality canyons nearby, Kiwi Flat Hut is going to be much more popular next season!

Bartrum Creek v4a4IV***

The little brother to Whirling, it cuts through similar geology, with a fair bit less water. Given the quality and more moderate grade, I'd expect Bartrum will probably be the most descended canyon in the Kiwi Flat area.

Scamper Torrent v4aIV**

The third of the Kiwi Flat Trifecta, Scamper Torrent was much shorter than the others nearby. Although 'only' 2 stars, it is a great canyon to match with one of its big brothers to make the most of a trip into the valley.



Bartrum Creek / Richard Bramley

Doughboy Creek v5a4IV**

Just to the north east of recent discoveries Muriel and Diedrichs, this canyon shows similar attributes with a rough, off-track approach. Possibly less appealing than its neighbours who have a track for some of the way, Doughboy will likely tempt canyoneers who've tried the neighbours and are looking for more of the same quality canyoning. First descent Pepijn Hoeksema & Erwan Coq Feb 2024.

Canterbury

By Grant Prattley

Arthurs Pass Area

The Edwards River (V3A4IV^{***}) was descended again. We added some additional bolt placements and created a Topo for the trip. This is a big-volume canyon trip with 7-8 hours spent in the canyon (water) outside the walk-in and walk-out. I think it is the only Canterbury canyon of this type. It is well worth the visit. Stunning.

Maintenance trips were made through AP classics, including Bridal Veil and Twin Creek. The Lower Bridal Veil slip from previous seasons has been washed away, and a new set of bolts has been placed on the pitch.

CanyonSAR Canterbury

In November, a half-day training session was held with the team in Tui—3 pitches down, then reversed 3 pitches up.

First Descents

Canyon Creek v5a5V^{*}**

This canyon in the Ahurirri Valley was finally completed after several seasons of exploration by strong teams. Its a fair way up the valley, and a technical descent, so usually requires an overnight stay, even by strong teams.

Arch-duchess Canyon v4a3IV*

A long approach in the Lewis Pass Area, but featuring one of the handful of arch rappels in Aotearoa. First descent: Conor Hadley, Amy Burney, Christian Miller, March 2024.



Twin Creek / Alex Motyka

Aspiring area

By Patrick Timm

Well, what a season it's been! Among some amazing first descents and the canyoning festival, there were so many great trips going on and it seemed like an epic year in the canyoning world down south and the rest of New Zealand!

There was a huge influx of international canyoners from all parts of the globe on combined or individual projects in mostly in the February to April period. This shows that New Zealand is quickly getting more popular internationally and will continue to see larger numbers arrive. Will our local canyoning population grow as well? We hope so!

There are many great well established canyons for people new to the sport to get into, and even more available for those looking to challenge themselves in the adventurous canyons if they have the experience.

Canyoning Festival 2024

The NZCA's bi annual canyoning festival was on again, back in the heart of New Zealand's canyoning region around Makarora. Tickets sold out almost immediately and the anticipation was high with over 100 attending. Thanks to the organisers involved who had it running like water through a smooth walled canyon, the festival saw newcomers and seasoned attendees get together for several days of canyoning. There were small workshops covering a range of topics, and plenty of groups heading into the likes of Ore stream and Cross creek, along with almost all of the classics seeing multiple descents each day. The full write up is covered in the Community Report.

And if you missed out or want to continue the fun for another season- the bi annual 'Blast in the Haast' will be on again in February 2025 at Makarora (dates TBA- jump on the [Kiwicanyons Facebook Group](#) for announcements when they pop up). The Blast in the Haast event is run as a small meetup for like minded self sufficient canyoners over a weekend as a chance for mingling and getting out together. Stay tuned for more details!

First Descents & Notable Repeats:

By Dan Clearwater

Turnbull-Thompson Falls

Another first descent by the Japanese-Taiwanese crew. Falling from a huge glacial lake beneath the Volta Glacier, this canyon rages down a handful of very large (100m+) drops in a several-hundred metre deep gorge. The first descent crew had an alpine climbing style approach, plus a bivouac within the gorge. (which seems to be about normal for this style/size of canyoning exploration)

Gloomy Gorge - third descent

Andrew Humphreys, Leo Ga, Leo Tregret and Reto Bubendorf made the 3rd full descent in late March. Andrew had been in New Zealand for much of the summer, making a number of scouting trips to the base and the entry point, as well as multi-pitch tree rappelling to scout various cruxes from above. On the successful trip, the team encountered the lowest water levels any of them had ever seen. They began on a Friday, climbing French Ridge, descending the first pitch and setting up camp in the canyon. At 7am on Saturday, they began the descent, expecting at least one more bivvy. They passed the intended bivvy spot before midday, so continued on, making the full descent in 9.5hrs of movement.

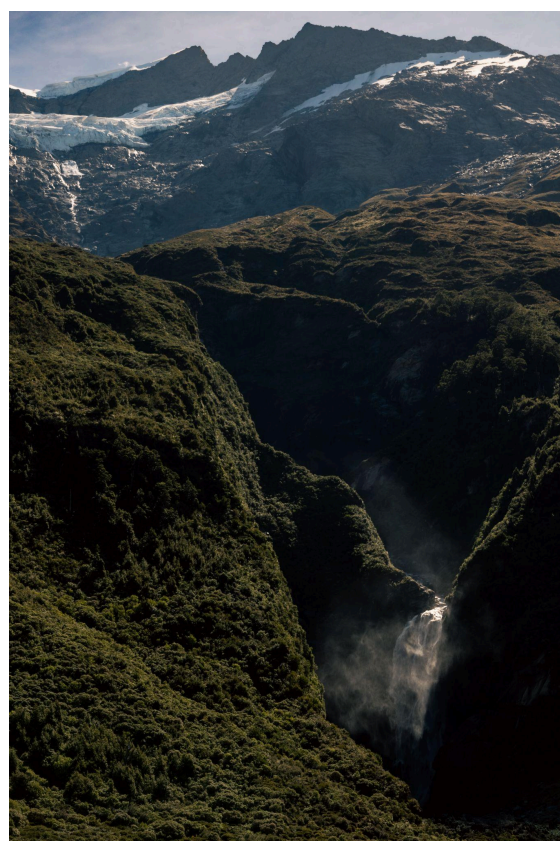
For Andrew it was the culmination of multiple attempts with many teams over several years. *“It was difficult to not feel like we cheated in a way. We estimated it was more like A5 with the water levels we had. But nonetheless, it’s nice to demystify a giant that has haunted me for years, and I plan to publish the beta so more teams can experience it in the future.”*



Gloomy Gorge team / Andrew Humphreys

Son of Gloomy - second descent

Andrew Humphreys plus Charlotte Workman, Steve Small, Madelin Huang, Austin Edwards and Dale Strang came to New Zealand for the Gloomy descent, but when they found the level far too high in early March, they looked for a ‘consolation prize’ of the nearby tributary. They completed the second descent of Son of Gloomy, which required a day and a half approach, then a long day with a second bivvy to complete the trip.



Son of Gloomy / Charlotte Workman

Margaret Burn v5a5III***

A high volume glacier-fed canyon, which is more like a cave than a canyon. The single pitch plunges into a crack in the earth, where the sky is obscured by huge boulders that have formed a roof (with a full forest growing on top!) First Descent by Reto Bubendorf, Léo Ga, Maddy Ga and Leo Tregret on 1/3/2024

Abruzzi Canyon v3a4III**

Just next door to Margaret Burn, this canyon flows off the Abruzzi Glacier, with a bunch of pitches through similar geology to Margaret Burn. This pair of canyons is far from the road, but together, they are enough to warrant an overnight trip based out of Daleys Flat hut. Same first D crew as Margaret Burn.



Margaret Burn / Leo Tregret

Fiordland

By Patrick Timm

Whio Creek Canyon v4a4III***

This canyon is a fair distance up the Tutoko Valley and is relatively short. However, lower flows plus Ticino-like polished granite slides and features will probably make this a Fiordland classic. First descent: Will Hamilton, Bailey Taylor, 28 Dec 2023

Humboldt Creek v5a5IV**

Second descent by Patrick Timm, Elias Love and Maddie Shears, March 2024. Not visited since the first descent in 2008, a bit more information plus some anchor repairs make this a canyon that should see a few more descents next season. With an easy backup option of Little Humboldt next door, these two provide a classic Fiordland adventure of a short narrow slot before large multi pitch abseils down exposed, scenic drops into Hollyford Valley.

Falls Creek Repeats

Now a solid classic in the Fiordland area, Falls creek was enjoyed by multiple teams and continues to remain a favourite for many canyoneers. Falls is quickly becoming the Wilson creek equivalent in Fiordland and will be sure to see more visitors in the next season.

Chasm Creek v6a5VII***

Another mega-canyon explored by an international team. The approach took 2 days, including about 9 pitches of fiordland rock climbing! They spent 2 days scouting the project, 2 days descending the canyon and a final day getting back to the car. Unlikely to get many repeats, but a very impressive undertaking, which shows what is possible in New Zealand. First descent, Jasmine Li Teruhito Oki Ryoji Onishi and Austin Edwards, March 2024.



Chasm Creek / Austin Edwards