

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE 2025-26 CANYONING SEASON



2026 NZCA photo comp overall winner: Fish River / Zen Marcos

Presidents report

It's hard to look past the success of the Hokitika Canyon Festival, so I guess we'll start there.

For a while now, the canyons of central West Coast have a reputation for being beautiful, but also wild, watery and challenging to access. This fearsome reputation might have put off a few people from making the visit, so it was fantastic to get 100 keen canyoners to Hokitika to break that ice.

After a wet summer, the weather-gods smiled upon us, with sunny skies and moderate water levels. As has been the case in past festivals, a handful of classics (Griffin and Red Granite) received the majority of attention, but I was pleased to see trips into a decent number of lesser-known canyons too. The SAREX and evening social events were a hit too - all round a fantastic event that we can be proud of.



Dan entering Diedrich Creek, Hoki Festival /
Koryn Gould

Huge thank you to Warren Fitzgerald for leading the organising team, and Alex Waterworth who gave his time to keep watch over festival HQ and the intentions system. Also a big thanks to the locals from the coast and also over the hill in Canterbury who put in some great mahi with upgrades and explorations in the lead up to the event.

The news that the Fast Track approval for the Waitaha Hydro Scheme is going ahead is a real blow to canyoning, recreational access and conservation. As the process and build goes on, we'll be monitoring closely, along with FMC and other recreational organisations, to try our best to secure access to Kiwi Flat, and the nearby world-class canyons like Whirling Water. This is a huge reminder of the importance of having your say - vote in local & general elections, plus the vital role that advocacy groups like NZCA and FMC have in trying to protect our environment and our canyoning opportunities. You being a part of the NZCA is a helpful contribution, but there's always more that can be done.

On a more positive note, it's been amazing to see all the first descents this year, as well as re-explorations of the pioneering routes of 15-20 years ago. In particular, there were 7 first D's in Fiordland, which is seeing a bit of a renaissance in canyoning - watch this space for exciting developments to come.

A big thanks to Patrick Timm and Brad Schimanski, who are both stepping down from the committee after 5 years of service - thank you so much for your contribution. Finally, thanks again to all the volunteers of the NZCA committee, and to everyone who put in effort to strengthen canyoning in New Zealand - we're all better off for your mahi.

Dan Clearwater, NZCA President

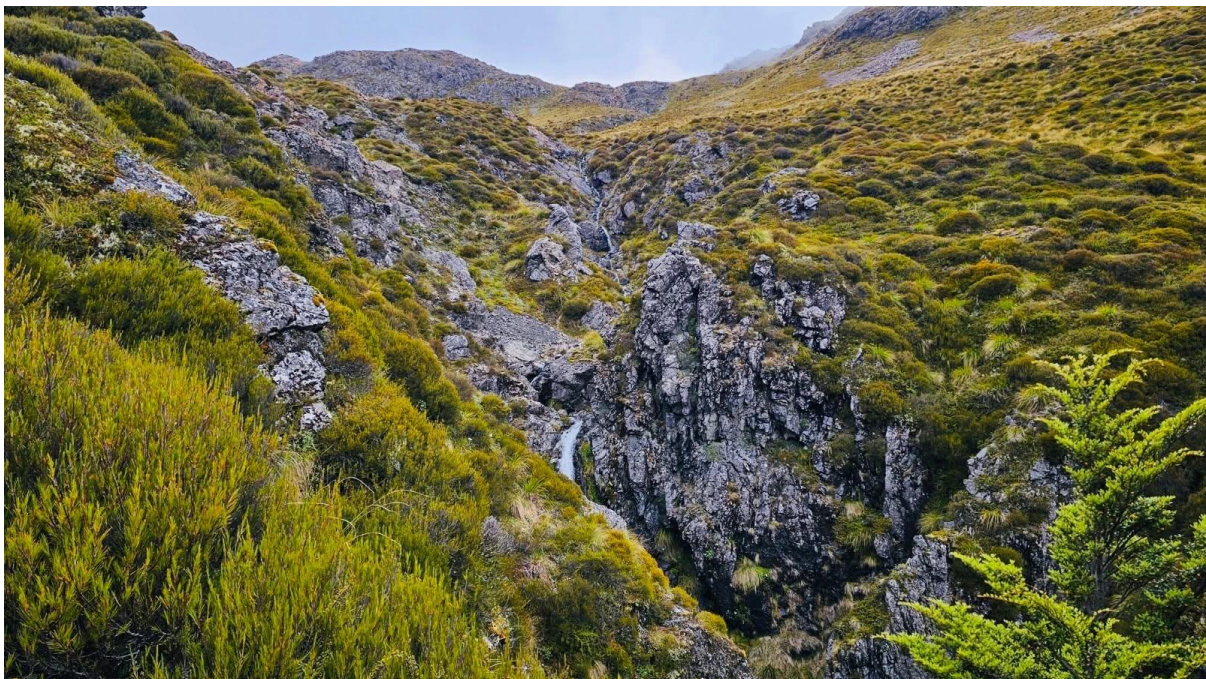
Canyon Search and Rescue

By Oliver Polson

CanyonSAR continues to tick away quietly in the background. Teams are all being well utilised by Police for both assisting search operations and technical callouts (not always in traditional canyoning terrain, Wellington!)

National courses (CR1, CR2 and CSM) all continue to be reviewed and tweaked, with the next major review to be of the CSM course due over winter this year.

The start of 2026 saw our first national deployment to the Tasman region. A very large search effort for a solo male tramper was launched just prior to NY. Early discussions with local CanyonSAR experts identified some steep (and long) waterways in the massive search area. Local teams (combined with swiftwater folk) undertook 3 days of taskings, including a massive 42km day (don't rely on the NH90!!) and were suitably exhausted. Following this, a Canterbury team was flown in for a day's tasking, then, 2 days later (nearing day 16-17 overall), teams from Wanaka, Canterbury and the Upper NI were all flown to Motueka to join a local team for a final push across several catchments. A feat made possible by a new funding initiative from RCC to assist Police with "Air Logistics" for large-scale operations. Unfortunately, the search was scaled back the following day, but miracles do occur, and on day 19, a DOC contractor found the missing tramper (alive, just) at a hut approx 20km from his last known location, well outside the wider search area. Post-operational debriefing identified that canyon teams had intersected the MP's travel route, but were a good week behind him!



Graham Creek, Arthur's Pass / Jonathan Carr

This operation provided an opportunity to put the new LandSAR formal debriefing process into play. This is used after major operations as a “cold debrief” to identify learning opportunities and celebrate what works well. We currently only have one person trained to lead this process (Annette Phillips), but by the time this report goes to print, there will be 3 more folks undergoing this training. The eventual aim for CanyonSAR will be to have 1-2 people per region who can lead these discussions and collate the generated data.

On this topic, Annette Phillips has been undertaking the LeadSAR program for the 25/26 round, and as part of her special topic study, is looking into systems we could use to better collate and distribute learnings from Ops and Exercises. Watch this space!

On the SAREX front, this comment from Alex Waterworth, Organiser extraordinaire of the Hokitika SAREX prior to the festival:

January 2026 saw a gathering of canyoners for the national biannual Canyon SAREX, held this year at Dorothy Falls on the West Coast. The exercise brought together 40-plus members from CanyonSAR, Land Search and Rescue’s ICT/Comms group, Police, as well as Land Search and Rescue tutors and staff. Also present were international observers from America and Canada. The aim of the day was to challenge members in a small team rescue scenario focused on managing a critically injured patient and guiding their inexperienced companion out of the canyon.

While teams weren’t in the Canyon, there were several workshops run to develop and encourage conversation around some key areas: Canyon incident management advisory, CanyonSAR communications, and debrief/lessons management.

There were many valuable lessons identified from the day’s activities that will hopefully benefit our teams and improve the outcomes of future CanyonSAR operations.

SAR frothers have also been excited to receive sweet new CE4Y canyon jackets (in LandSAR orange!) to keep us warm and make us look a whole lot more professional ;), the footwear allowance has also just been announced, so expect us all to be looking identical in years to come!

Expect the competency project to get its final sign-off in the coming months.

Technical standards developments

By Shanan Fraser

Nothing significant has occurred in the technical standards portfolio in the last 12 months. We continue to monitor current trends and practices around the canyoning communities with a mind to updating the code of practice as and when necessary.

Community Report

By Daniel Clearwater

With support from the community, I ran the NZCA Photo Competition again this year. The top shots are featured in this annual report, alongside other images from the community. Congratulations to Zen Marcos who was overall winner with his shot of Fish River.

Another notable event was a vigorous discussion about what makes a 4-Star Canyon, and which ones ought to be elevated to that status. It began specifically with a call to upgrade Falls Creek in Fiordland to 4-star, but grew into a general discussion.

The general consensus matched what the grading system already said - that a 4-star canyon is one that would inspire canyoners to travel internationally. Understandably, where the opinions differed was which canyons inspired which international visitors to travel to New Zealand.



Falls Creek / Nat Powell

Canyoners with extensive international experience gave the sort of perspective needed, which suggested that Falls Creek was a fine candidate for 4-star status. The addition of 'pending' grades on [Kiwicanyons.org](https://www.kiwicanyons.org) plus the option to vote for a canyon's status were also implemented.

Treasurer's report

By Warren Fitzgerald

The 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.

The NZCA's financial year runs from 1 July - 30 June. This is 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 all previous years are published on the NZCA website - <http://nzcanyoningassociation.org/about/#eagm>

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 December 2025, CanyonSAR received a \$25,300 operating grant for the 25/26 financial year. There is a possibility that this funding arrangement may change in the future as LandSAR funding mechanisms are restructured. We also received a one-off \$500 'fuel pressure' grant in June 2026.

Because each region in New Zealand has distinct expertise and requirements, the NZCA executive has sought to give local CanyonSAR groups autonomy by pre-approving budgets for them to upskill and equip themselves. This pre-approved funding was supported by national training and SAR exercises, as well as knowledge sharing between groups. This year, funding was specifically budgeted for each local group to complete helicopter training specific to their region's needs. Additionally, CanyonSAR teams also received some equipment directly from LandSAR through their GPT process.



Eagles Nest, Otago / Nat Powell

For the financial year ending 30 June 2026:

- \$2,255.95 has been spent on purchasing equipment nationwide
- \$15,872.13 on training nationwide

NZCA Canyon Fund

The Canyon Fund was established in late 2017 to ensure the funds raised from NZCA activities, membership fees, and donations 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 2026 financial year, the NZCA Canyon Fund has received funding from the following sources:

- \$1,100 in direct donations (thank you!)
- \$9,622.20 from member payments (membership fees, festival expenses, donations)
- \$1,019.46 from the festival raffle
- \$163.11 from merchandise sales

During the same period, the following projects were funded:

- \$403.40 for various South Island first descents (Check them out on [KiwiCanyons](#) - Klondyke, Rahu Left, Dore Pass, Tuhua, Sylvia Stream) - Christian Miller
- \$354.90 towards bolting the new Mackay Creek - Alex Motyka
- \$1,613.85 to upgrade anchors in The General - Oscar Burford
- \$264.32 towards bolting the new Crane Creek - Christian Miller

The following projects have been approved but are yet to be completed:

- Bolting the Valley of Darkness canyon (West Coast) - Christian Miller
- Upgrade anchors in Eagles Nest (Otago) - Oscar Burford
- Upgrading anchors in Falls Creek - Patrick Timm

Additionally, the following general expenses were incurred by the NZCA:

- \$4,934.54 on expenses related to the 2026 Canyon Festival held in Hokitika
- \$600 FMC membership
- \$488.26 for website hosting and general administrative costs

The NZCA always welcomes more applications to the fund!

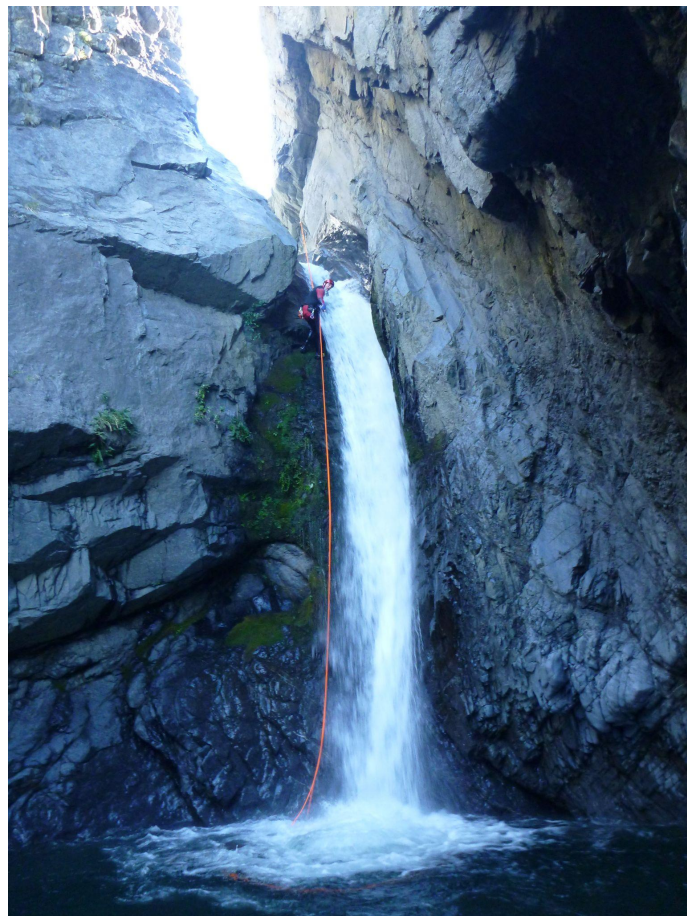
nzcanyoningassociation.org/resources/#canyonfund

Advocacy Report

Stonewall Stream

By Dave Vass

In August 2025, we heard about a proposal to deny access to the beach approach route to Stonewall Canyon, near Wellington. Stonewall is one of the best in the region, with a short and sharp enclosed technical section, reminiscent of some of the high-quality canyons down south. The approach goes along an unformed legal road across the beach. Unfortunately, disrespect by some visitors meant the locals went to the council to get a total access ban in place.



Stonewall Canyon / Chris Tuffley

Dave Vass led the creation of our NZCA submission. It echoed the sentiment of many of the other 3,000 or so received in opposition of the ban: that whatever the outcome of powered vehicles, walking and cycling access must be retained.

The South Wairarapa District Council resolved to allow pedestrians, bicycles and e-bikes for 24 months while the exact location of the unformed legal road was surveyed. Beyond that period, a stakeholder access group of Iwi, locals, Walking Access Commission and others will be involved in determining the permanent solution. We'll be keeping our eyes and ears open when that process begins.

Waitaha Hydro Scheme - Morgan Gorge, Whirling Water, and the Waitaha canyons

By Dan Clearwater

On 13 March 2026, the Fast-Track expert panel made a draft decision to approve the Morgan Gorge Hydro scheme. This decision was unwelcome news, but not unexpected, given the opaque nature of the process, and panel's failure to allow any views of the public or interested parties to be considered.

The impact to canyoning is two-fold.

Firstly, if the project goes ahead, then walking access to Kiwi Flat (the base for all the Waitaha valley canyoning) will almost certainly be impacted during the construction phase. Depending on the project, there's a significant risk that walking access could be permanently closed.

Secondly, it solidifies the social precedent of small groups of 'experts' and politicians being able to systematically denigrate New Zealand's environment and recreational opportunities. If they can do it with Waitaha, what stops them doing it anywhere else?

What can we do about this?

The most important power that we can exercise is our right to vote during local and general elections. The government serves the people, not the other way around. If we want to be able to explore and enjoy these canyons that we love, we need to vote for a government that will protect them.

In the meantime, support for organisations such as Federated Mountain Clubs, Forest & Bird and the New Zealand Canyoning Association helps amplify their voices in opposition to these proposals. Make sure you're a member, donate where you can, and get involved when invited.

Thank you to FMC President Megan Dimozantos and all those who have worked hard to try to save the Waitaha from this unwise proposal.

Upper North Island

By Brad Schiamanski

Kia ora everyone,

It's that time of year again for annual reports, and for me this will be the last one as Upper North Island Representative as I step down from the role.

Reflecting on the time in this position, the biggest thing I'll take away is a real appreciation for how much work goes into the advocacy side of the Canyoning Association. Most of us just get excited about going canyoning, but there are some absolute legends working in the background — keeping canyons open, opening new ones, maintaining relationships, and creating or updating topo maps as new routes are established. That work is significant, ongoing, and often unseen. A massive thank you to all of you.

Through this role and probably just my general enthusiasm for canyoning, I've had a lot of conversations over the last few years about new canyons, new access, and exciting developments across the Upper North Island and unfortunately closures. Here's a brief rundown of the current state:

Far North & Auckland Region:

Due to the natural terrain, there aren't a large number of canyons in this region. However, the few that do exist are short, spectacular, and some of my personal favourites in the country. Unfortunately, several of these remain closed due to kauri dieback in the surrounding forest.

We are very fortunate to still have commercial canyoning operations running out of Piha, Thames and Raglan; these companies do an excellent job of introducing new members, tourists, and once-only canyoneers to the sport. In a world of social media the feedback I hear is mostly word of mouth about how great these experiences and the natural environments they operate in are.

They continue to provide a place If you're new to canyoning and looking to improve your skills, More importantly, they're places where people meet and begin their journey deeper into possibly the greatest sport ever.



Bush Life / Dave Cassaidy

The Coromandel:

Does not currently face the same scale of closures as Auckland and further north, but kauri dieback is still a very real risk. We all need to be conscious of how we move through these forests.

This remains the hub of canyoning for the Upper North, There continues to be a lot of activity in Sleeping God and the surrounding canyons in the Kauranga Valley and also across the range in the Rangihau Valley.

The continued respect shown for closed and private areas within these forests is appreciated and essential for maintaining access. **Otea Falls** - access remains closed. The **Rangihau canyons** are open to access — please continue to be respectful in this area and the land owners

Bay of Plenty:

Wairere Falls - closed for canyoning, walking access only, please stay out of the river. Kaite falls - due to major flooding in the region, the access tracks around this area are significantly damaged and all access to this area is currently closed.

Ruapehu Area:

Some of the newer canyons on the mountain have been seeing a bit of activity. There is still a significant number of unexplored streams and surrounding forest here, with plenty of potential being discussed. Exploration in this region takes a bit more grit than the Coromandel due to colder conditions. That said, after experiencing some South Island canyons, you quickly realise this area is still relatively balmy by comparison. I look forward to hearing more exploration stories from this region.

Kaweka range:

Olly Dow and friends scouted and partially descended **Chauffeur Canyon v4a2V*** in July 2025, which shows promise for some quality canyoning for those willing to walk for it.

Community & Information Sharing:

Over the last few years, there has been a noticeable rise in the popularity of canyoning. It's been great to see how the sport is evolving and how new members engage with the community.

Social media is now clearly the primary way people gather information about canyoning areas and the sport in general, and that's an important space for our community to be active in, so a big shout-out to those who contribute to discussions on social media — sharing information, asking questions (even the ones that might seem simple), and creating open discourse. These conversations are helping shape the kaupapa of our sport and supporting the growth of a well-informed community. Keep it up. Climbing and caving have made it into mainstream media platforms; it's only a matter of time till canyoning is no longer the underdog.

Lower North Island

By Gavin Barry-Morgan

Canyoning in the Lower North Island continues to occupy its usual niche somewhere between adventurous exploration and recreation. Activity remained low-key throughout the 2025/26 season, driven primarily by small informal groups, persistent rumours, and the occasional mission motivated more by curiosity than good judgement.

While no confirmed first descents have been documented this season, there have been repeated rumours of exploratory activity in several remote drainages, particularly within the Hawke's Bay region. Reports suggest possible descents of several mudstone canyons surrounding rafting access areas, though no detailed route information or verified trip reports have emerged publicly. Descriptions from those familiar with the terrain indicate the usual mix of slippery soft rock, unstable walls, overgrown approaches, and long sections of thoroughly uninspiring canyon, interrupted only occasionally by one or two genuinely worthwhile pools or features. As always, the ratio of effort to reward appears highly variable.

A recurring theme this season has been the continued lack of verified information. Much of the regional knowledge base still relies heavily on word-of-mouth reports, informal conversations, and partial recollections passed between small groups of enthusiasts. Other reports published through regional and NZCA channels reinforce the impression that very few genuinely unexplored technical descents remain readily accessible, although there is ongoing speculation that isolated undocumented systems may still exist in remote pockets of the Tararuas and eastern hill country.

One persistent rumour throughout the season has been that Matthew's Stream has undergone partial rebolting. While this has not been confirmed, several sources suggest that several previously awkward or difficult anchor positions have been replaced or repositioned to provide significantly easier access and improved rigging options. If accurate, this would likely improve repeatability and reduce some of the more awkward starts historically associated with the canyon.

Regionally, Isabelle Creek and Eager Beaver continued to see occasional descents, with no significant changes reported and anchors generally remaining in good condition. Both remain reliable options for local teams seeking accessible technical canyoning without committing to major expedition-style approaches.

The Lower North Island CanyonSAR community remained active throughout the season, continuing to build capability through local skills development, rigging practice, and swiftwater training.



Canyoning Weka / Zen Marcos

The team was deployed numerous times to support search operations for missing parties, several of which did not have happy endings. These deployments highlight the difficult and often serious nature of the environments in which CanyonSAR teams are asked to operate.

Alongside this operational work, the CanyonSAR team has continued to play an important role in maintaining the safety and resilience of the wider canyoning, rescue, and outdoor community. Their ongoing training, readiness, and connection with the wider LandSAR network remain a significant asset for the region.

Community activity remained modest but positive. No formal regional events or public introduction days were held this season, though small private trips and social gatherings helped maintain connections within the local scene. The community remains small, scattered, and slightly feral—but enthusiastic nonetheless.

Looking ahead, the outlook for the region remains much the same: slow exploration, occasional rumours of hidden gems, and a stubborn core of people willing to thrash through dense bush in search of something interesting at the bottom of a creek.

Whether any truly worthwhile undocumented descents remain is still open for debate. Most evidence suggests that many of the obvious lines have now at least been investigated. Still, in a region where information travels poorly and access often discourages repeat visits, there is always the possibility that something genuinely good remains hidden away behind several hours of mud, windfall, and regret.

Top of the South

By Lee den Haan

The Top of the South Region has seen some activity this season with an influx of keen canyoners enjoying some of the classics, particularly in Nelson Lakes and Abel Tasman National Parks, largely off the back of the successful West Coast Canyon Festival.

There are no new first descents in our region for the 2025/2026 season, however the region actively continues to operate with a high volume of tourists this season through Torrent River in the Abel Tasman and Chandler Stream in Nelson lakes with Abel Tasman Canyons and Canyoning Aotearoa, respectively. Adjacent to this, the NZ Canyoning school has continued to hold training programmes in a handful of canyons in the Tasman region, and a contingent of canyoning instructors have continued to hold canyoning modules for the NMIT polytech adventure tourism programme, culminating in 13 days of NMIT adventure tourism instruction for the canyoning module and 5 courses through the NZ Canyoning school.

It was amazing to see Canyon SAR mobilise nation wide to our region for Operation Garnett and glad that it had a good outcome.

Westland

By Christian Miller

This year the Hokitika Canyoning Festival brought everyone's attention to the West Coast. It's been great to see more of the West Coast canyons getting some traffic; this really is a destination for unique, high-quality canyoning.

Unsurprisingly, Griffin Creek was a favourite at the festival, seeing descents from both the start and from the lower Hydro track entry. Queuing 3rd in line for the Bodengo Falls sequence was certainly not normal! Red Granite was also extremely popular. Both remain excellent options for those wanting the classic West Coast experience. Among the other canyons visited at the festival were: Ford, Carew, California Dreaming, Tūhua, Dorothy, Doughboy, Deidrich, and Solitude; and Dorothy saw a lot of traffic as the site of the SAREX before the festival.

First descents

Alf Creek v4a2IV***, Fox Glacier, was explored by Jeroen Verhees and others early in the season. There's no topo yet, but it has some steep and open waterfalls, one sequence over 100m tall, with hanging pools looking out across the glacier. Access by helicopter. The only canyon in NZ (so far) that's above a glacier.

For a while, I'd wondered if Victoria Forest Park (between Reefton and Springs Junction) held any canyons, and finally this season the question was answered.

Klondyke Canyon v3a3II** and **Rahu Left Canyon v3a3II*** were discovered in November 2025 by Amy Burney, Ben Fletcher, Christian Miller, and Conor Handley. Both canyons are excellent, and each would have been given an extra star if only they were slightly longer... I've visited Klondyke 3 times this season already! A couple of other creeks have been explored in the area between Reefton and the Lewis Pass, but there are no other significant finds nearby yet.



Alf Creek / Jeroen Verhees

Tūhua Canyon v4a2III*, next to Dorothy Falls, was discovered in January by Amy Burney, Ben Fletcher, Christian Miller, Conor Handley, and Josh Fletcher. Hard to say how this escaped attention for so long when canyoners travelling to Dorothy Falls drive straight past it. This is a great addition to the easier routes around Hokitika, being the lowest aquatic difficulty canyon in the area. It has lots of abseils, in both open and enclosed sections, and views out to Lake Kaniere.

Notable repeats

Solitude Creek v3a3III** was bolted during the festival by Alex Motyka, Alex Thexton, Christian Miller, Harry Day, Hereward Cooper, Joseph Cruikshank, Michael Banyl, and Sarah-Jane Petts. It's a fun canyon with long swims across huge tannin brown pools, and plenty of jumps in the 5-10m range. There are some good pitches as well, and an unusual siphon to climb over where all the water goes through a submerged natural arch. It's already seen 3+ descents since!

Crane Creek v4a4IV** had a second descent and bolting trip by Amy Burney, Ben Fletcher, Christian Miller, and Conor Handley, and the anchors are now double bolted. This is a chance to do one of the longer and more aquatic West Coast canyons without doing too serious of an approach, with access by a marked walking track and only ~300m elevation gain.

Deidrich Creek v5a5IV** was visited during the festival, probably only the third descent. Two teams attempted it but one team decided to turn around after seeing the unexpectedly high flows, (likely more normal conditions than during the first descent) instead facing a pretty rough ~4hr bushbash to return to the car. The team that continued had a long and engaging day, leading to the canyon being regraded from v4a4IV*** to v5a5IV**.

Doughboy Creek v5a4IV** and **Kiwi Jacks Creek v3a3II**** are becoming popular. Both have been descended multiple times this season and have had good reviews. Kiwi Jacks Creek has had a new exit route marked that avoids walking out via Smithy Creek.

Despite the attention last year, there have been no reports of Whirling Water being descended this year, probably because of its reputation for being challenging. There are also plenty of other large canyons in the region that continue to see very few descents...

It's awesome to see the area getting the appreciation it deserves, so let's keep it going next season. There are a selection of amazing canyons here that you, and most other canyoners, haven't done yet!

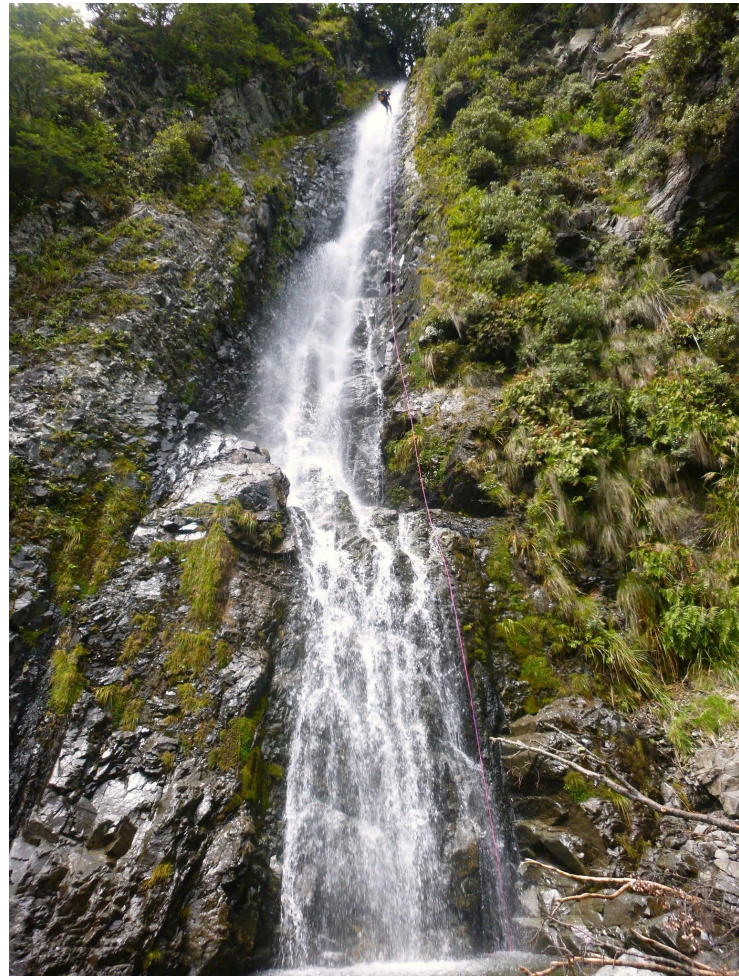
Canterbury

By Grant Prattley

Arthurs Pass

Many of the classic canyons were descended again e.g. Twin Creek and Bridal Veil. In every canyon - a few of the bolt anchor hangers were completely gone post a flood. We had replacements with us but it's a good reminder to take spare hangers/nuts even for canyons close to the road that are bolted. You could be the first one through post flooding.

The Edwards River (v3a4IV*)** - another trip through the Edwards late season. All anchors in good condition. There were some additional nylon cord rigging backups added to dyneema rigging which made for messy anchor stations. A higher volume trip. Again a stunning trip and faster with flow. Some pools have changed after high water. Many of the jumps were filled with gravel after a recent flood.



Lagoon Saddle Canyon / Nola Collie

CanyonSAR Canterbury

November 2025 Refresher helo training with GCH again at Orton Bradley Park with emphasis on entry and exit whilst hoverloading. Great turnout and good reps with much smoother handling techniques.

December 2025 – Kaumira Multipitch Rescue Exercise. A joint exercise conducted with South Canterbury LandSAR and Police, focusing on canyon rescue skills and inter-agency familiarisation. Police provided vehicle support (side-by-side) to access the canyon, where three LandSAR team members were taken through a canyon rescue scenario using a canyon rescue stretcher. The exercise concluded with a stretcher wheel from the canyon base back to the car park.

June 2026 Winch Training with Garden City Helicopters, additionally training same night on Primary/ Secondary surveys on casualties.

First Descents

There have been several additions in the Lewis Pass this season, an area that has grown significantly in the last few years and now has some quality routes.

Upper Sylvia Stream v4a3IV* - Rumoured to have been explored in the 90's, re-explored by Amy Burney, Ben Fletcher, Christian Miller, Conor Handley, in February 2026. Reasonably straightforward access, and with lots of small jumps. Likely to be popular among Canterbury canyoneers.

Basin Creek v4a3II* - First descent by Amy Burney, Ben Fletcher, Christian Miller, and Lulu Jordan, in November 2025. The slightly smaller sibling to Fawn Falls, with a couple of enjoyable pitches.

Riordans Creek v3a1III* - First descent by Amy Burney and Christian Miller, in April 2026. A surprisingly enclosed canyon for the area, with 9 low flow pitches, very close to the road.

Aspiring area

By Dan Clearwater

Big floods in November

Some of the Haast Pass classics got a hammering in the big floods of November, with anchors damaged, pools filled with gravel, and some large rocks moved around.

The most notable was Wilson Creek, where the last few drops of the canyon were completely changed. The house sized boulder (that is featured on the guidebook cover) has been chucked about 10m downstream.... The pools just above and everything below is almost unrecognizable from the season before. The 'old faithful' flow gauge was also destroyed, which has been working great for more than 10 years of storms and floods. Just goes to show the power of water when it drops in the right spot!



Ore Stream / Cat Shand

First descents

The addition of a new 4-star canyon got a lot of attention online. **Upper Margaret Burn v6a6VI****** in the Dart Valley was explored in stages by Leo Garnache, Madie Garnache, Jason Brand in March 2026. Multiple days are required to approach the base camp, scout, descend and then return.

More like a cave than a canyon, Margaret Burn is one of the most spectacular, narrow, deep, committing and high-flow canyons in New Zealand. Margaret sits alongside Gloomy Gorge as probably the only two true 'glacier canyons' that have been descended here so far.

Kowhai Creek v4a4III* (Dart valley) - First recorded descent by Amy Burney and Christian Miller, Jan 2026. As the team was surprised to find bolts already there, it has clearly been explored previously, but maybe disregarded because of the number of better canyons not far away.



The Arch / Maria Cejudo Abril

Notable repeats & upgrades

Homestead Creek v4a2III* was extended upstream by a few extra pitches by Dan Clearwater, Ben Robson and Sebastien Grewe in April 2026

Lennox Creek v5a5IV*** had another visit by the Margaret Burn crew.

Big Hopwood Burn v2a7IV** Second descent: Scotty Robson, Zack Stones, Sam Walton, Shanon Mast, Rata Lovell-Smith, Phil Palzer

The Neck Creek v4a2IV* First descent: Dave Vass, solo, circa 2000. Re-explored by Terra Dumont & Alistair Hammond 2026.



Historic - the final leap in Leaping Burn / Mathew Clark

First Ascents

Tomoaki Maruyama and Mai Maruyama, a pair of Japanese Sawanoboori ('shower climbers') came to the Haast pass, to *ascend* some of the classics. The most impressive trips involved starting at the highway, and climbing Pyke Creek all the way to the terminal lakes beneath the Brewster Glacier!



Falls Creek / Elias Love

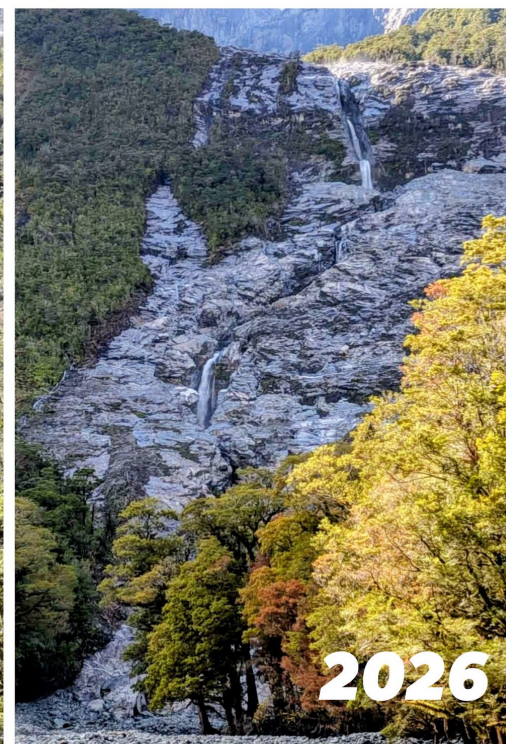
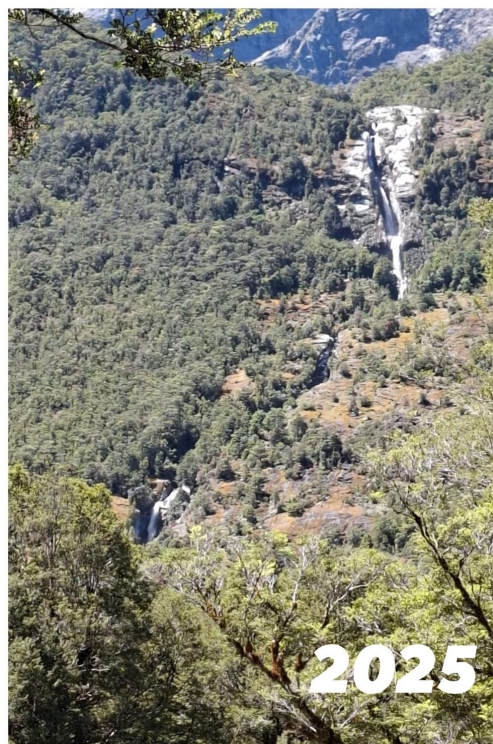
Fiordland

By Dan Clearwater

Fiordland is really getting an upswell in attention recently. Patrick Timm's concerted effort to revisit and demystify **Falls Creek** has certainly inspired a lot of folks down into the Hollyford Valley - no doubt lured by its upgrade to 4-star status by popular demand.

Several other teams of visitors and locals have been exploring new canyons, as well as revisiting canyons that haven't seen any traffic since the first D, up to 20 years prior. This is really opening the doors to a lot more activity in the region - and reminding us that although Fiordland is a serious place, there are plenty of options for moderate routes (and even some easy ones) in the region.

Kakapo Canyon in the Tutoko Valley had an incident that reminds us that canyons change.. Hereward Cooper and friends discovered a huge event had ripped off all the vegetation, and sheared off many of the bolts. Most likely a huge avalanche, it just goes to show that canyons are very dynamic environments.



First descents

Pembroke Creek v4a4IV*** a sculpted slide fest in the Pembroke Wilderness Area, accessed by sea kayak. First descent upper: Jona, Nazomi, Will. Feb 2024, First descent lower: Jona, Mike, Will. March 2026

Mackay Creek v4a2III** (Eglinton valley) in December 2025 and **Dore Pass v4a2IV*** (Lake Te Anau) in January 2026 were explored by Alex Motyka, Amy Burney, Ben Fletcher, Christian Miller, Conor Handley, and Patrick Timm. Both are deeply slotted and impressive, with low aquatic difficulty. Mackay Creek shines with its respectable 10 pitches and reasonably easy access, while Dore Pass canyon is perhaps unlikely to see repeats due to the \$230 per person water taxi required to reach it.

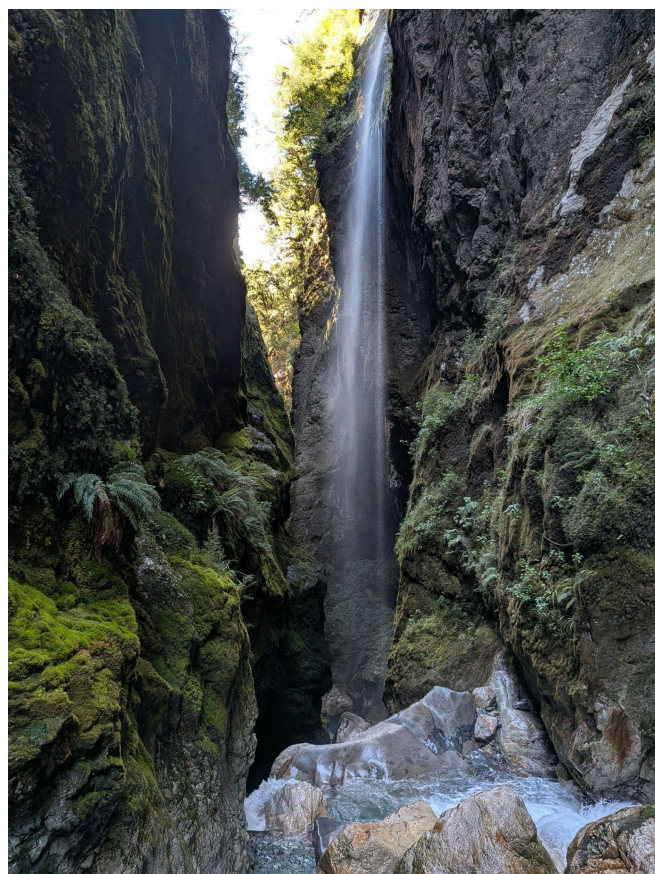
Tim Illes and friends have been busy in the Eglinton Valley, exploring around the edges and filling in the gaps of the obvious (and not so obvious) canyons.

Murcott Burn v4a4III** First Descent Tim illes, Hans-peter Anderson, Will Hamilton

Black Mirror Canyon v4a2II** A great new 'beginners' canyon in the Eglinton. First Descent Tim Illes, Dani Schiavinato, Andy Magness

Hutt Creek v3a5 - very brief with a horrendous pourover and 2 easy raps. First Descent Tim illes, Hans-Peter Anderson,

Divide Creek v2a2I* another low flow 'easy' Fiordland canyon. First Descent Tim illes, Dani Schiavinato



Falls Creek / Nat Powell



Tutoko Valley / Nat Powell

Operations

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

07/09/2025	Batty Creek	Three West Coast Canyon SAR team members conducted a search of Batty Creek from its source at Paparoa Peak to Coal creek. 10 km over 800 meters. Search was for any sign of a 70 year old male missing for 3 weeks.	Tramping	Full notes from Keith R have been added to the operational debrief notes folder
28/09/2025	Little Akatarawra stream	Tramper fell off 2-3m drop and rolled down a slip towards creek. PLB was activated. Rescue helicopter dropped a medic through the canopy. LandSAR deployed and Canyon called to assist with rigging due to steep terrain and being next to little Akatarawa Canyon	Day Walking	The team arrived just as the patient was evacuated by Heli.
25/11/2025	Boom Rock Wellington	Two young males were car camping out of Makara Beach. They went for a coastal excursion to the north based on advice from a local but near Boom Rock they lost their route and became stranded on a steep slope with diminishing phone battery and not prepared to spend a night out in the open.	Day Walking	CanyonSAR called to provide rope rescue skill due to concerns the 2 were halfway down the cliff. Canyon on standby until Police got eyes on and were able to walk them out.
13/11/25	Birchville Upper Hutt	61yo female left her home and parked her car on Gillespie Road, Birchville and was last seen walking down Gillespie Road towards Akatarawa Road. She had a history of depression and suicide attempts.		CanyonSAR team was deployed to clear steep stream ways in the search area. Subject was later located deceased by LandSAR team..
23/12/2025	Hutt Gorge	At around 19:30hrs on 22nd December 2025, Police received a 111 call from three stranded and trapped males from within the Kaitoke Gorge after they were unable to proceed or self-evacuate after the river levels rose. They had gone down the river starting at Kaitoke with the intention of finishing at Upper Hutt on inflatable rubber rings.	Tubing	CanyonSAR contacted - advised that canyonSAR wouldn't be able to easily travel through the gorge with any great efficiency and recommended contacting Wellington Rafting to provide easy access. Only had 1 member available to assist on the raft.

				Police sent in Landsar teams on foot to locate and support the males overnight and deployed a rafting company at first light to extract.
06 Jan 2026	Mt Huxley	Mountaineer attempting to climb Mt Huxley failed to return from his trip. Teams deployed as part of mult0group, multi agency SAROP	Alpine Climbing	Wanaka CanyonSAR flew to the top of the canyon. First D and search
Jan 2026	Batton Saddle area	Male solo tramper reported overdue Dec 30, search rapidly escalated to involve multiple catchment areas and steep streamways. This rapidly exhausted local resources. A national callout was initiated and 3 teams flew in from around the country to assist in the search. The main search was suspended (day 17!) and the individual was found alive by DOC contractors on day 19 approx 20Km from the last known point!	Tramping	CanyonSAR utilised to search steep streamways
22/03/2026	Karori South Stream	Flood event in Wellington caused a small steam to rise to extreme levels and wash through and damage a small studio sleepout. Police called the following morning as the occupant and his vehicle were missing and there were concerns they were caught in the flood waters.	Flood response	CanyonSAR called to search the waterway, Op Sutton. Subject's debris and belongings from the house located downstream, the vehicle was washed over 1km. Subject found deceased by Police SAR team on the coast.
1/4/26	Falls River ATNP	Standby for an overdue canyon team in Falls River. Informant was not aware that the team would be camping in anchorage after their trip and reported the team overdue at 2030hrs. Police contacted local canyon experts and based on known team experience, weather and water conditions the decision was made to wait the night and check in with DOC staff at anchorage the following morning. where the team were found happily camped up unaware that their callout person had hit the button...	Canyoning	Standby, based on known high level of team experience and a favorable weather/water forecast. No deployment required as the callout person misinterpreted team intentions to camp post canyon.