

Canyoning Activity Standards

Overview

The Mountaineers offers Canyoning programs ranging from introductory to intermediate. Mountaineers Canyoning Activity Standards are designed to establish program consistency and designate authority & process for changing or adopting new standards in a quickly evolving Canyoning context.

Definitions

Background

There are two main canyon grading systems in the world: [FFME](#) and [ACA](#). While the ACA system is the most commonly used system in the US, the FFME system provides greater specificity with regards to potential aquatic conditions which is useful for the canyons typical of the PNW. [Ropewiki](#) provides ratings in both scales. Mountaineers canyons are determined by the FFME grade system.

Basic Canyon - up to v4a3III. Basic Canyons may have traverse lines, challenging rebelay, special navigation challenges, or pitches greater than 30m. Canyons that have more than 10 rappels >7m are intermediate canyons.

Intermediate Canyon - up to v4a4V. Intermediate canyons may have hydraulics up to a4, high consequence movement, and a belay may be seldom practical. Intermediate canyons require proficient personal movement and self-rescue for all participants, as well as a basic knowledge of team rescue skills. Canyons where team rescue is nearly impossible are Advanced Canyons.

Advanced Canyon - v5a5VI or higher. The Mountaineers does not lead trips into Advanced Canyons.

Trips

Canyoning trips will be rated with these categories, and the rating must be available to participants when they sign up. Note that the canyon rating is based on the average water flow for the usual season that a canyon is descended in. It is the Leader's responsibility to indicate the most accurate canyon rating for the time of the trip, based on seasonal conditions. Participants must have the prerequisite skills as defined by the prerequisite badges, and are responsible for participating only in trips that are within their physical and technical capabilities, wearing suitable clothing, and carrying appropriate equipment.

All Mountaineers canyon trips must have a minimum party size of 3, including a Canyon Leader and an Assistant Leader.

Canyon trips will have a maximum party size, including Canyon Leader and Assistant Leader, that is determined by the [Outdoor Ethics Policy](#) as well as the commitment level of the canyon:

Participants

Participants on a Basic Canyon trip must meet the following qualifications:

- Basic Course Graduate -OR-
- Basic Course Equivalency -OR-
- Leader Permission

Participants on an Intermediate Canyon trip must meet the following qualifications:

- Intermediate Course graduation -OR-
- Leader Permission

Equipment

Each participant must

- Carry a UIAA-approved helmet, with a whistle attached to the chin strap, and wear the helmet in terrain with significant objective hazards.
- Wear a harness rated for canyoning, caving, or climbing
- Have a double lanyard made with dynamic rope attached to their harness
- Have a variable-friction descender
- Wear canyon shoes or sturdy shoes with soles that provide grip in both wet and dry environments

Leaders will advise participants about required Canyoning equipment for the trip, including:

- Wetsuits or drysuits
- Canyon Packs, Rope Bags and Dry Bags

Each Leader and Assistant Leader must carry

- Ascenders & Foot Loop
- Knife
- Rigging gear (may include: Figure 8 Device, alpine draw, extra carabiners, VT Prusik, extra carabiners)
- Mechanical progress capture device (Petzl Micro Traxion, Tibloc)

Each group must carry at minimum

- Group emergency kit, including a personal locator beacon or satellite communication device, sufficient for the party size
- A primary rope, minimum of 2x the length of the longest rappel
- A second rope, minimum 1x the length of the longest rappel
- Minimum 30' of tubular nylon webbing & 2 quick links

Leaders

Leaders must be approved to lead Canyons by the sponsoring committee, and must be vetted according to the following standards:

Assistant Canyon Leader

Qualifications::

- Intermediate Canyon Course or Equivalency
- Descent of 15 unique aquatic canyons
- Participation on 2 Mountaineers canyon trips that are not part of a course
- Wilderness First Aid training
- Completion of online course and assessment
- Pass Assistant Canyon Leader Technical Assessment

Lead Instructor

- Assistant Leader or Leader Status
 - Note: a Leader must be present on the in-canyon days

Clubwide Activity Standards - Canyoning

Approved 12.21.2021

- 5 unique aquatic canyons in the past 12 months

Canyon Leader

Requirements:

- 18+ years of age
- Intermediate Canyon Course or equivalency
- Pass Assistant Canyon Leader Assessment
- *Mountaineers Foundations of Leadership* online training
- 15+ aquatic canyon descents, 10 unique canyons
- 5 Mountaineers canyon trips as Assistant Leader -OR- 5 non-Mountaineers canyon trips as a leader
- Wilderness First Aid training
- Minimum of 2 mentored leads with different leaders
- Ability to swim 25 meters without buoyancy, 4 meters under water
- Ability to jump 2 meters vertically into water
- Committee vote of approval

Skills:

- **Movement:** Canyon Leaders demonstrate safe movement ascending, descending and traversing canyon terrain including: steep ground, uneven terrain, ridges, gullies, slippery terrain and easy rock steps.
- **Navigation:** Canyon Leaders are proficient in off-trail navigation, have an understanding of and ability to identify the watershed of a creek, and are able to use a variety of navigational tools to find their way to a canyon, through a canyon, and out of a canyon. Canyon leaders are also proficient at route selection while navigating canyon terrain, including avoiding unnecessary obstacles such as hydraulics and unstable terrain.
- **Personal and Group Risk Management:** Canyon Leaders are proficient in a variety of risk management protocols including rigging and rope management, bag management, proper sequencing of rappellers, monitoring party member disposition, and emergency planning.
- **Group Planning & Logistics:** Canyon Leaders adequately plan and prepare themselves and participants for the outing, including communicating expectations and requirements. Canyon Leaders monitor conditions leading up to the outing and anticipate participant needs, communicating regularly with participants in advance of the outing.
- **Organization and group leadership:** Canyon Leaders communicate with participants before the trip, at the trailhead, and during the trip, including checking on participant well-being, defining clear roles and responsibilities, and changing plans as necessary.
- **Defensive swimming:** Canyon Leaders can identify, analyze and assess water hazards in a canyon. Canyon Leaders can navigate water hazards as the first person down, and can use rigging and other techniques to divert participants from the hazard as needed.
- **Basic rope work:** Canyon Leaders are proficient at using semi-static and static ropes, rappelling single-strand or double-strand as needed for the situation, utilizing variable friction devices, ascending and descending ropes, employing techniques for managing rope abrasion, rigging retrievable traverse lines, rigging fixed and releasable rappels, and proper use of rope bags.

Tactics and strategy

- **Emergency procedures:** Canyon Leaders are able to assess an emergency situation in the context of the canyon. They have an emergency action plan which considers communication techniques, evacuation options, escape options, and roles and responsibilities within the party.
- **First aid:** Canyon Leaders have first aid training, and are able to assess a scene, recognize and treat hypothermia, cold injury & heat disorders, stabilize an injury, provide remote care including overnight, and direct party members to call for assistance and perform tasks that maintain the safety of the groups.
- **Camping and bivouacs:** Canyon Leaders adequately plan for and are able to facilitate a bivouac if necessary.

Knowledge:

- **Hazards:** Canyon Leaders are able to assess terrain and weather hazards as well as any wildlife that may present a danger in that region. Canyon Leaders understand basic hydrology, topology and geology in the context of hazards that may be present in a canyon, including: the existence of heavy flow or hydraulics, the absence or presence of escape routes, the rock quality and attributes of the canyon, and the access to high ground within a canyon.
- **Protocols:** Canyon Leaders are fluent in communication protocols including hand signals and whistle signals. Canyon Leaders understand general security protocols including canyon progression, anchor rigging and assessment, rope management, and group management.
- **Emergency procedures:** Canyon Leaders understand The Mountaineers [emergency procedures](#).
- **Trip Management:** Canyon Leaders understand The Mountaineers protocols for managing accurate rosters on the website, listing and closing trips, and filing incident reports as needed.
- **Land manager protocols:** Canyon Leaders know where to find Land Manager regulations for a given canyon and understand the importance of following them.
- **Legal liability & insurance:** Canyon Leaders understand the following: The Mountaineers provides liability insurance for its leaders as long as a trip is listed on The Mountaineers website with an accurate roster; The Mountaineers requires all participants to sign a waiver before they can register for a trip; The Mountaineers does not provide accident insurance for participants or leaders.

Leaders are expected to lead Canyons within their ability, to maintain their leadership and technical skills through regular practice and training, and to be up to date in current Canyoning skills & techniques taught by The Mountaineers.

Courses

Activity committees may offer Canyoning courses **teaching a range of Canyoning skills. Established courses, curriculum framework and educational outcomes are outlined in Appendix A.** New courses must have stated educational outcomes and a written curriculum framework that is informed by a pilot course.

Equivalency

Committees may grant course equivalency for applicants that:

- Submit a resume of their Canyoning experience that shows that they have canyon training and experience that meets or exceeds the requirements for course graduation, and
- Demonstrate through a practical examination that they can perform the skills required for course graduation

Basic Equivalency Requirements:

- 5 unique aquatic canyons
- 10 total technical canyon descents
- Aquatic Requirements:
 - Formal river-based whitewater training or canyon-specific whitewater training within the past 5 years -OR-
 - Referral from a Mountaineers Canyon Leader
- Complete online orientation & application
- Complete technical assessment

Intermediate Equivalency Requirements:

- Basic Waterfall Course or Equivalency
- 20 unique aquatic canyons
- 25 canyon descents
- 2 Mountaineers Canyoning trips that are not part of a course
- Wilderness First Aid Training
- Aquatic Requirements:
 - Formal river-based whitewater training or canyon-specific whitewater training within the past 5 years -OR-
 - Participate in a Mountaineers Intermediate Whitewater module
- Completion of online course and assessment
- Technical assessment
- Referral from a Mountaineers Canyon Leader

Other activities

The Mountaineers may offer ad-hoc canyoning clinics and practice sessions, and host presentations about canyoning. These enrichment activities must be aligned with Canyoning Activity Standards even if they do not have a formal, regular curriculum.

Revision History

12.19.2018

12.17.2020