

Canyoning: How Do I Start?

Canyoning! An Overview

Imagine hiking up a mountain trail that parallels a deep canyon, where down below you hear water flowing over the rocky canyon bottom. You reach a point where the trail crosses the stream. After dressing for the descent, you begin following the watercourse down canyon, dealing with obstacles as they come. Ropes, harnesses and specialized training become the method of travel as you rappel off waterfalls. You may swim, wade or down-climb as you hike your way through the canyon. This is Canyoning!

Before you begin?

Canyoning is NOT an extreme sport and the inherent risks can be mitigated through good, practiced technique. Canyons **do** present a variety of opportunities for people to hurt or kill themselves. Anyone can wander down a canyon and find trouble. When that a beginner pulls the first rappel rope, he commits himself to descending the canyon, whatever they encounter.

Canyoning is a technical sport with serious consequences. Especially when getting started, the most important technique is to seek out and canyoneer with knowledgeable veterans. Choose adventures within your abilities, while developing experience and expanding your skills. Smart problem-solving is the primary skill to develop.

Interested in giving **canyoning** a "go"? But don't know where to start?" Here's a plan for getting on rope and out into the canyons.

The Plan

- Step 1: Find a guide or club with an introductory program and do a canyon.
- Step 2: Still interested in canyoning? Start researching available canyoning information via the internet, books, magazines, and other resources. While there is no "one place" to learn all about canyoning, there are a few great go-to resources to check out. See the resources listed at the end of this booklet.
- Step 3: Take a course. Professional canyoning training introduces you to the core concepts, skills, equipment, and nuances of canyoning in an incredibly efficient format.
- Step 4: Join a club or meetup group. Practice, practice, practice

Get Information – Get Involved

The Internet

First, spend an hour or two with, Tom's Utah Canyoning Guide (http://www.canyoneeringusa.com/utah/). Tom Jones canyoning since 2001, started the website to share information on canyoning routes, techniques, equipment, and ethics with the world at large, in hopes of making connections with others interested in the same. By poking around on Tom's site, you can quickly develop a sense of what canyoning looks like and what tools and skills you might need to get into it. After you've had a look at Tom's site, you can dig deeper with some of the resources listed at the end of this booklet.

Social Networks

Another set of good, free info resources are the public canyoning forums, several are listed at the end of this booklet. Joining these groups is an easy way to plant yourself into the on-going discussion of the canyoning community at large. It's not easy to learn about anything specific this way – you may have little context to help you understand the discussion topics – but if you stick around long enough, you'll pick up the general tenor of the community, learn about ongoing issues, and read lots of good trip reports. If you have questions, members of these groups are generally happy to answer, no matter how elementary your query may be.

Take a Class

Professional canyoning training introduces you to the core concepts, skills, equipment, and nuances of canyoning in an incredibly efficient format. While you can certainly learn the same skills from friends or via your local club or meetup group, it takes a LOT longer to acquire skills this way, and you rarely find really good teachers who can show you the industry-standards in safety and technique. In class, you also get to use the best equipment available, so when you start buying your own gear set, you have a solid context of "what is possible" (guide gear) vs. "what is absolutely" necessary (the gear allowed by your budget). Most guides are more than happy to help you prioritize what the most important first purchases are, versus the stuff you can wait for or improvise on your own.

Perhaps the best thing about taking a <u>canyoning course</u>, however, is **you have access to an accomplished canyoneer's brain** for the day (or two or three days, depending on the course) AND he/she also has access to yours. This means you can show up with a billion questions, and get at least a few hundred answered during your time with the guide. In addition, your guide can expand upon your questions, tailoring topics to your previous experience, canyoning interests, and geographic location. While canyoning courses cost good money, the knowledge you gain by getting custom-tailored education is incredible and will save you a LOT of time, energy, and risk in the long-run.

Canyoning requires considerable improvisation and judgment. This really is a wilderness adventure. Rappels are often done using improvised anchors - trees, bushes, jammed rocks,

stuck logs, spikes of rock, etc. Canyoning rappels are often exceptionally awkward - wet, through narrow slots, often muddy, with difficult starts, with a pack on, into pools, off bad anchors and often with problems pulling the ropes. And the ropes have to be pulled, or the canyon cannot be continued. There is a saying in climbing that applies to canyoning:

"Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from surviving bad judgment."

Admittedly, many people just kind of went and figured it out as they went along, and most didn't die. Make it easier on yourself by finding people who already have it figured out, and tagging along with them for a couple of canyons, until you see how things work. One good place to meet new canyoning partners is the Canyons E-Group on Yahoo. Put yourself out there and get invited on someone else's trip.

Canyoning-specific training programs are very worthwhile, whether you are a complete bumbly or an experienced big-wall hardman. Canyon ropework is different than climbing ropework.

How do I start doing more technical canyons safely on my own?

Well, actually, you don't. Several important aspects of technical canyoning **require** a developed sense of judgment about elements like anchor quality, rock quality, and climbing difficulty. Problem-solving skills are best developed by canyoning with experienced canyoneers. One of the nice things about canyoning is it is not actually physically difficult, so competent canyoneers can take unexperienced friends on canyon trips and everybody has fun.

How do I prepare for a canyon outing?

Canyoning is a year-round sport that does not require the same physical fitness levels as rock climbing. While a canyoning event isn't strenuous, it will demand your constant attention. Start rested and hydrated. You need to be fit enough to hike one to three miles up a trail, and then be able to make your way down a canyon. Rappelling by itself is a relatively easy activity where you get to enjoy the beauty of the canyon as you rappel down a waterfall!

Advice for those new to canyoning

Some recommendations on how to avoid canyoning accidents, incidents, and tragedies:

For Everyone: Respect the ever-changing nature of canyons. They change, considerably, in a short period of time. Carry extra gear. Be prepared for the canyon to be different than described, or different than the last time you went through.

For Beginners:

Don't be a Beginner, Led by a Beginner. The majority of accidents occur to people descending their first or second canyon, people unfamiliar with canyoning and the skills required, often descending in large groups, led by someone who has only a vague idea of what they are doing. Don't do this. Instead, hook up with experienced canyoneers who can show you how canyoning is done. Find a competent person to lead the group.

Know Before You Go. You'd be surprised how many people start down a canyon with very little idea of what they will encounter. Use this website, and compare details against other sources. Some canyons change dramatically depending on the water level. What was a delightful romp the week before could be a desperate struggle against hypothermia the next week.

Do the Right Thing. Some of the adventures are appropriate for beginners - many are not. Choose your route based on your skills and the skills of your group. Canyoning is not contest; if you are in it for the challenge and adrenaline, you are in the wrong sport... take up sport climbing or motocross.

Bring the Right Stuff. Skimping on gear is not a good idea. Everyone should have a helmet, a harness and their own rappel device. When required, everyone should have a wet suit or dry suit. Everyone should be competent to rappel on the rope chosen for the adventure.

Get Some Skills. Canyoning requires specific skills. Learn them, either by taking a course or by hanging out with more experienced canyoneers.

Don't Train People in the Canyon. People who don't know how to rappel should be trained in a safe, comfortable environment - not in a canyon.

Wear a Helmet. Sure, you might think you look like a dork, but you'll look even worse lying in a hospital bed being fed through tubes.

Advice For Experienced Canyoners

Things are Different Here. Colorado Plateau canyons are unlike canyons elsewhere in the world. Take it easy and get a feel for the lay of the land before charging off to do the hard ones. The popular canyons in Zion are the most like 'civilized' canyons elsewhere. In other Utah canyons, Wilderness values are emphasized and bolts are rarely found!

- Making sure the rope will pull. Canyon raps are not usually as clean as climbing descent rappels.
- Rappelling on single and double strands, using thin and thick ropes, with light and heavy loads, wet and dry.
- Rappelling into pools and disconnecting (without drowning).
- Building natural anchors in difficult situations with few resources.
- Having efficient ropework for multiple short rappels.
- Multi-stage rappels not pulling the rope until the next set of anchors is in hand.
- Getting past keeper potholes.

Wear a Helmet. Think tubes (see above).

Avoid Hubris. Good traditional climbing skills are the basis for good canyoning skills, but there's more stuff to learn. Canyoning is not climbing - don't kid yourself. Easy canyons are straightforward and will teach you little, and will NOT prepare you for more challenging canyons. Canyoning with experienced canyoneers is your best bet.

Keep your Eyes Open. There are often multiple anchors available at a drop - consider all options before committing to one or the other. Just as lost hikers leave cairns, canyoneers who make bad choices also leave slings.

Check the Anchors. Canyons are often descended by folks with really poor skills. This leads to a lot of poorly chosen, poorly placed and poorly rigged anchors. Check anchors and rigging before using them, re-rig when needed, and remove unhelpful slings.

Admittedly, many people just kind of went and figured it out as they went along, and most didn't die. Make it easier on yourself by finding people who already have it figured out, and tagging along with them for a couple of canyons, until you see how things work. One good place to meet new canyoning partners is the Canyons E-Group on Yahoo. Put yourself out there and get invited on someone else's trip.

Be especially cautious of canyons with flowing water and/or continuous potholes. Pothole escapes are one of the most technical aspects of canyoning on the Colorado Plateau, and blowing it makes for skeleton soup. Practice such skills as pack tosses, partner climbing, and hooking - and have the right equipment when needed - in easier canyons, so you will know how to do them in the more difficult canyons.

The best way to develop canyoning technique is to canyoneer with people who have been doing it for a while. With a good base of climbing skills, you are far ahead of non-climbing beginners.

Adopted from

http://www.zionadventures.com/ZBlog/canyoning/getting-yourself-into-canyoning-in-2012/





Welcome to the Ouray Canyon Club



The Ouray Canyon Club was launched in the spring 2012 for the purpose of promoting and teaching safe and ethical canyoneering. We are especially dedicated to introducing Ouray City residents, Ouray County residents, and western slope residents to the wonderful world of canyoneering and the amazing canyons in our own backyard.

Each August the club hosts the annual Ouray Canyon Festival attracting canyoneers from across the country and around the world. The festival is held at Fellin Park next to the Hot Springs Pool, Main Street, Ouray, Co. Future dates include:

August 9-15, 2015 (this will also be the International Canyoning Association event)

August 18-21, 2016

For more information visit these websites:

http://ouraycanyoncoalition.org/ http://ouraycanyonclub.com/ http://www.meetup.com/ouray-canyon-club http://www.ouraycanyonfestival.net/ http://www.meetup.com/ouray-canyon-festival



MISSION

American Canyoneers will promote and preserve access to public and private lands by building on a foundation of **ACES**: Access through Conservation, Education and Safety.

VISION

Protecting and promoting open access for canyoneering enthusiasts through outreach, negotiation, and endorsement of best practices in the sport. Respecting our natural resources ensures the opportunity for future generations to embrace this endeavor. Educational information will be made accessible that focuses on educating the public and land managers alike, on what the sport is, canyoneering requirements, and safe practices.

A.C.E.S.

Preserving **ACCESS** to canyons is the core purpose of American Canyoneers.

CONSERVATION sustains our public and private wildland resources so they can be enjoyed by future generations.

EDUCATION is essential if we are to sustain our canyon resources.

Promoting **SAFETY** helps prevent tragedies and allows land managers to spend their finite resources on conservation and education.

RESOURCES

This **RESOURCE LIST** is provided as a service to folks interested in canyoneering topics related to the American Canyoneers mission. Outdoor Access Groups, Canyon Route Descriptions and Information, Online Canyoneering Communities, Guide Services and Technical Training, International Canyoning Organizations.



American Canyon Guides (ACGA)

The level of skill and professionalism ACGA Certified Guides exhibit is second to none. By choosing to certify with the ACGA you will join an elite group who take pride in our skill and abilities and consider ourselves second to none among canyon guides around the world.

The ACGA certifies guides at two levels. **Certified Professional A/B** and **Certified Master Guide A/B/C**. Professional A/B certification is aimed at the guide who works primarily in dry or still water canyons (e.g. Colorado Plateau). In addition to these skills, competency in Swift Water skills is required for Master A/B/C certification.

Following is the list of skills by all ACGA guides. In addition to technical skills, ACGA guides possess soft skills including: ability to communicate clearly, cooperate with others, give direction when required, manage group safety and direct rescue efforts will all be evaluated

Canyoneering Techniques – Level 1A

These baseline skills are the foundation ACGA guides. Intimate familiarity with a variety of knots and techniques gives you numerous options when dealing with the multitude of problems you will encounter during a guiding day.

Canvoneering Anchors – Level 1B

ACGA Certified Guides possess a thorough understanding of anchors and anchoring principals is essential. The ability to build safe, reliable anchors and evaluate existing anchors will help you expertly manage the safety of your group.

Canyoneering Rigging - Level 1C

ACGA Certified Guides possess the ability to rig a variety of systems in order to manage the safety of your group in any situation from simple static blocks and releasable systems to multiple strand rappels and various belay systems.

Miscellaneous Topics – Level 1D

A ACGA guide has a thorough understanding of environmental and ethical standards, logistics, navigation, weather, flash floods and dealing with adverse conditions.

Canyoneering Techniques – Level 2

These advanced knots, anchors, rigging, ascending and escape systems allow you additional options for dealing with problems that come up during a day of guiding. Mastery of these advanced techniques is essential to being a consummate guide.

Canyoneering Techniques – Level 3

In order to properly manage and care for a client in distress you must have a solid mastery of guide rescue techniques. These are similar to but differ from high angle and team rescue. You will have limited resources available and must be able to perform and direct an effective rescue quickly, safely and efficiently.

If pursuing A/B/C Master Guide certification you must also demonstrate mastery of techniques to deal with canyoning challenges in the swift water environment. As flash floods are an ever present danger even in Class A/B canyons, a thorough understanding and familiarity with these techniques is highly recommended for all guides.

Soft Skills

There is more to guiding than demonstrating the latest rope trick. You are responsible for your clients and must lead them safely and efficiently through the canyon while attending to their needs, managing them both as a group and as individuals.

The ACGA certified professionals listed here come from many different backgrounds, but one thing unites them all – their desire to rise to their full potential and excel at what they do. Our certified professionals have undergone rigorous training and examination that meets and exceeds international standards. For you as a consumer, ACGA certification provides a decisive tool for choosing the right person for your needs and objectives.

Certified Master Guide A/B/C

Two Methodologies Leading to Canyon Guide Certifications:

- American Canyoneering Academy (ACA)
- Alpine training Systems (ATS)



The American Canyoneering Academy

The American Canyoneering Academy (formerly the American Canyoneering Association) is the premier source for training, technical forums and services for recreational canyoneers, canyon leaders, guides and rescue professionals in the United States, Canada, Latin America and around the globe.

Founded in 1999 to ...

- Promote safety, self-reliance and ethics through education.
- Facilitate the exchange of ideas and information among an international canyoneering community.
- Provide venues for networking between canyoneers; regionally, nationally and internationally.

The primary focus of the ACA is education and training.

Through our courses, workshops, meetups and informative online forums, the ACA has been and continues to be, instrumental in setting standards and providing leadership for the canyoneering community.

COURSES FOR ALL SKILL LEVELS

Technical & Advanced Canyoneering

The ACA's extremely popular Technical Canyoneering and Advanced Canyoneering courses set the standard by which all other canyoneering courses are judged, providing students with the anchor, rigging and problem-solving skills and techniques they need to become safe, efficient and self-reliant canyoneers. The courses are designed primarily to meet the needs of recreational canyoneers, but also form the training foundation for those planning to seek certification as a canyon leader or professional guide.

ART of Canyoneering

A unique combination of the ACA's Technical and Advanced curriculums, utilizing specialized gear and techniques developed by canyoneering pioneer, Rich Carlson. The ART of Canyoneering curriculum may be offered as a multi-day workshop or as a series of one-day workshops.

The single-day modules include:

- o Anchors
- o Rigging
- o Techniques On Rope
- Techniques for Problem Solving
- o Canyoneering Self-Rescue

Canyon Leader/Guide Training

The ACA's Canyon Leader training program is intended for aspiring professional canyon guides and for recreational canyoneers who wish to facilitate canyoneering programs in group settings such as scouts, universities, camps, schools and clubs.



Canyon Rescue Technician



The Canyon Rescue Technician (CRT) is a multi-skilled rescuer trained in a combination of technical canyoneering, swift water and high angle rescue skills. He is one member of a Rapid Access Team (RAT) of first responders that can quickly access an injured or stranded group of canyoneers, initially assess the scope of the problem, provide escape assistance, give first aid, and be the liaison between the party being rescued and the high angle rescue team on the rim. He also has the skill and training to initially package and transport

an injured patient to a place in the canyon more accessible to the high angle rescue team or helicopter.

Canyon Rescue Technician is an ideal training program for professional rescuers, Search and Rescue (SAR) team members and backcountry rangers who must access technical canyon terrain.

Rappel Master



Our Rappel Master training program is designed for individuals whose occupations require rappelling, for those who are in charge of rappel training, and



Canyoneering takes place all over the Globe. Wherever you find a mountain range, you are likely to find technical canyon routes nearby. The ATS team will prepare you for a lifetime of canyon descents though our extensive course options. Upon successful completion of our courses, you will be able to take this sport into your own hands and conduct your own decent without the assistance of a guide. Our most popular program takes the novice all the way from an intro of the sport to covering self-rescue. During this program you will complete three separate days of technical training with at least two canyon descents. This is the equivalent of taking our Canyoneering Level 1-3 courses.

Level 1 - Intro to Canyoneering



A great intro to the sport with a full day spent descending a local canyoneering route. We'll cover gear, basic rope systems, and safety protocols, all while rappelling down waterfalls.

• Level 2 - Anchors

Spend a morning learning all the basic anchor systems for canyoneering followed by an afternoon of building your own anchors while descending a technical route. Emphasis is placed on leaving behind safe and professional anchors while learning how to cautiously inspect and backup previously installed



• Level 3 - Self-Rescue



This full day is spent learning how to help yourself when something goes wrong. Self-rescue is an integral part of any adventure sport and considerable time is spent on being prepared for what can happen. Depending on the location this course may take place inside or outside.

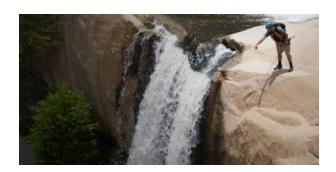
Level 4 - Intro to Advanced Rope Systems and Swiftwater



At this intensive two day course, you'll have the chance to learn advanced rope systems and swiftwater rescue protocols specific to canyoneering. This course is only offered when the water is at the correct levels to create an optimal learning environment.

Level 5 - Group Rescue

This course is for the canyoneer looking to take their skills to a whole new level. A full day is spent at a ground school going over every rescue scenario and solution that we can imagine. On the second day, we'll put it all to the test as we complete real time staged rescues during a technical canyon descent.







Our Mission

The Canyon Collective is a collaborative effort of the canyoneering community to build the first ever crowd-sourced canyon database. Our mission is to share our canyon stoke by creating a platform to share beta, trip reports, photos, videos, gear reviews, and more. The site is completely free, powered by canyoneers, for canyoneers.

As a member, you can:

- o Share unique knowledge and experiences with the community.
- o Post trip reports, canyon conditions, photos, and videos.
- Improve and expand the content of the canyon betabase by submitting beta or revisions to existing routes.
- o Read and share gear reviews.
- o Research canyon routes, participate in forum discussions and join meet-up groups.
- o Ask for and provide technical knowledge, or share canyon beta and conditions

What type of experience can I expect on Canyon Collective?

Our goal is create a positive, nurturing, useful and entertaining center for discussion of canyon-centric topics. We hope you share that goal with us, and will make contributions to the community that have a positive effect. This shared goal is the basis for participation.

http://canyoncollective.com/

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Resources

The list is not comprehensive, nor does it imply affiliation with t. If you'd like your link to be added, please contact us.

Canyon Route Descriptions and Information

Adventure Hikes and Canyoneering in the San Gabriels (SoCal)

BluuGnome (Various) http://www.bluugnome.com/

Canyoneering Northwest (Pacific Northwest) http://www.canyoneeringnorthwest.com/

Climb Utah (Canyoneering and Mountaineering) http://climb-utah.com/

Todd's Desert Hiking Guide (Arizona and elsewhere) http://www.toddshikingguide.com/Hikes/Hikes.htm

Tom's Utah Canyoneering Guide (Utah) http://www.canyoneeringusa.com/

uCanyon-Canyoning News, Beta, and Resources http://www.ucanyon.com/

Canyon Gear

Adventure Plus (Utah) http://www.adventurepluslc.com/

Arizona Hiking Shack www.hikingshack.com/
Crags and Canyons http://www.canyoneering.net
Imlay Canyon Gear http://www.imlaycanyongear.com

Joe Braun's Guide to Zion National Park http://www.citrusmilo.com/zionguide/allhikes.cfm

Stefen Folias' Canyoning Links http://www.math.utah.edu/~sfolias/
Luke Galyan's BluuGnome http://www.bluugnome.com/

Ouray Mountain Sports http://ouraysports.com/

Shadow Cat Adventures (Arizona) http://shadowcatadventures.com/
Stefen Folias' Canyoning Links http://www.math.utah.edu/~sfolias/

Online Canyoneering Communities

Average Joe Road Trips http://www.ajroadtrips.com/go/

AZ-Tech Canyoneering-Arizona Meet-up http://www.meetup.com/AZ-TECH-CANYONEERING/

Bogley Outdoor Community http://www.bogley.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?15-Canyoneering

Canyon Collective http://canyoncollective.com

Canyons Yahoo Group http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/
Kiwicanyons.org – Canyoning in New Zealand http://www.kiwicanyons.org/
Oz Canyons Yahoo Group http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OzCanyons/

International Canyoning Organizations

Association Italiana Canyoning (AIC) – Italian Canyoning Association http://www.canyoning.it/

Commission Internationale de Canyon (CIC) – Assoc. for Canyoning Professionals http://www.cic-canyoning.org/

FEDME – Spanish Mountain and Climbing Federation (Spain) http://www.fedme.es/

Guide Services and Technical Training

Alpine Training Services (Los Angeles, CA) http://www.theatsteam.com/adventureworks/courses.html

American Canyoneering Academy http://www.canyoneering.net

ACGA – American Canyon Guides Association

CenterFocus Experiences (Arizona)

Desert Highlights (Moab, UT)

Excursions of Escalante (Escalante, UT)

Get In the Wild Adventures (Hanksville, UT)

Intrepid Adventure Sports (Moab, UT) North Wash Outfitters (Blanding, UT) Pura Vida Adventures (North Carolina)

San Juan Mountain Guides

Uber Adventures (Southern California)

Utah Canyon Adventures, LLC (Utah)

Zion Adventure Company (Zion National Park)

360 Adventures (Arizona)

http://www.canyonguides.net

http://www.thecenterfocus.com

http://www.deserthighlights.com

http://www.excursionsofescalante.com/

http://www.getinthewild.com

http://intrepidadventuresports.com

http://www.northwashoutfitters.com

http://pvadventures.com

http://mtnguide.net/canyoneering

http://www.meetup.com/canyoneering

http://www.utahcanyonadventures.com

http://www.zionadventures.com

http://www.360-adventures.com/canyoneering

This booklet prepared by the Ouray Canyon Club

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Bridal Veil Bed and Breakfast http://bridalveilbandb.com

San Juan Mountain Guides http://mtnguide.net/canyoneering

Box Canyon Lodge http://www.boxcanyonouray.com

Ouray Chamber Resort Association http://www.ouraycolorado.com