Canyon Rating System

The core format of the American Canyoneering Association's Canyon Rating System includes two digits.

- The first digit is a numeric character that represents terrain and technical rope work.
- The second digit is an alpha character that represents water volume and current.
- Additional values may be added to represent relative risk, time/commitment, swift water and slot characteristics.

CANYON RATING EXAMPLES

Core Rating: 3B ... Expanded Rating: 3B PG IV

Core Rating: 3C ... Expanded Rating: 3-C3 R II

Core Rating: 4A ... Expanded Rating: 4A S X III

NOTE: Ratings refer to descents in normal conditions, during what is considered the normal season for the canyon. Adverse conditions, such as higher than normal water volume or colder temperatures, will increase the difficulty of the descent. Time ratings are based on average group of six or less. Larger and/or less experienced groups will take longer.

NOTES:

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Terrain and Technical Rope Work

1 Canyon Hiking

Non-technical. Travel is possible up or down canyon.

2 Basic Canyoneering

Scrambling, easy climbing requiring frequent use of hands. Rope recommended for hand lines, belays, lowering packs and possible emergency use. Travel is possible up or down canyon.

3 Intermediate Canyoneering

Exposed technical climbing. Down-climbing could be difficult and dangerous; most people will rappel. Rope required for belays and single-pitch rappels. Obvious anchors. Retreat up canyon will require ascending fixed ropes. Basic pothole escape techniques (i.e. partner assist, counter-weights).

4 Advanced-Expert Canyoneering

Route may involve any combination of the following:

- difficult and exposed free climbing and/or down-climbing,
- climbing using direct aid,
- multi-pitch rappels,
- complex rope work (i.e. guided rappels, deviations, rebelays),
- obscure or indistinct natural anchors,
- advanced problem-solving and anchor-building skills.

NOTES:

American Canyoneering Association
Forums: www.canyoneering.net/forums
Meetup: www.meetup.com/ACA-Canyoneering

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Water Volume/Current

A Normally dry or very little water
Dry falls. Water, if present, can be avoided and/or is very shallow. Shoes may get wet, but no wetsuit or drysuit required.

B Normally has water with no current

Still pools. Falls normally dry or running at a trickle. Expect to do some deep wading and/or swimming. Wetsuit or drysuit may be required depending on water and air temperatures.

C Normally has water with current

Waterfalls. Expect to do some deep wading and/or swimming in current. Wetsuit or drysuit may be required depending on water and air temperatures.

Class C canyons may be rated more precisely using the following optional system:

C1 Normally has water with light to moderate current. Easy water hazards.

C2 Normally has water with strong current. Water hazards like hydraulics and siphons require advanced skills and special care.

C3 Normally has water with very strong current. Dangerous water hazards. Experts only.

C4 Extreme problems and hazards will be difficult to overcome, even for experienced experts with strong swimming skills.

NOTES:

ART of Canyoneering
Resources: www.canyoneering.us

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Risk/Seriousness

G General Audiences
Should be straight-forward for those with appropriate skills.

PG Parental Guidance Suggested
Even with appropriate skills, beginners may sweat.

R Risky
One or more extraordinary risk factors exist.

X Extreme
Multiple risk factors exist that will complicate the descent.

Time/Commitment

Half Day
- **I** Short. Normally requires only a couple of hours.
- **II** Normally requires a half day.

Full Day
- **III** Normally requires most of a day.
- **IV** Expected to take one long, full day. Get an early start.

Multi Day
- **V** Expected to take an average one and a half days.
- **VI** Expected to take two or more days.

S = Slot Designation

Slots can be so narrow that it is necessary to stem above the floor of the canyon to move horizontally. An "S" or "Slot" may be appended to indicate some sections of the canyon are extremely narrow.

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