

# Canyoneering Safely

## Requirements for Unit Canyoneering

*Canyoneering Safely* is the Boy Scouts of America's procedure for organizing BSA technical canyoneering in ACA (American Canyoneering Academy) rated Class 3 and higher canyons.

Unit activities involving canyoneering require a high level of planning, skill, and training. The principles in the *Guide to Safe Scouting* form the framework of canyoneering activities. Leaders are responsible for making sure all points of *Canyoneering Safe-*

*ly* are followed. Canyoneering is a specialized climbing/rappelling activity and unit committee chairs must ensure that an adult on the tour has taken BSA *Climb on Safely* training available at [my.scouting.org](http://my.scouting.org). Local councils are also a resource for planning canyoneering activities.

Young people today seek greater challenges, and canyoneering offers a worthy challenge. Technical canyoneering offers high adventure, stunning scenery and great personal satisfaction as the challenges of safely navigating a slot canyon, scrambling both up and down chutes and obstacles, swimming through potholes, and rappelling in the confines of narrowed-walled canyons is overcome.

The adult supervisors' relationship with youth should reinforce the importance of following instructions. The adult supervisors and the canyoneering instructors share this responsibility. The instructors are responsible for all procedures and for safely con-



ducting the canyoneering activity. The adult supervisors work cooperatively with the canyoneering instructors and are responsible for all matters outside of the canyoneering activity.

Cub Scouts may hike ACA rated Class 1 canyons with age-appropriate bouldering over obstacles or other steep faces without going more than a few feet off the ground with trained adult spotters. Cub Scouts may not participate in canyoneering activities in ACA Class 2 or higher canyons.

Webelos may hike in ACA rated Class 1 and Class 2 canyons with age-appropriate bouldering over obstacles or other steep faces without going more than a few feet off the ground with trained spotters. Webelos Scouts may not participate in canyoneering activities in ACA Class 3 or higher canyons.

Scouts may participate in canyoneering activities in ACA rated Class 1 and Class 2 canyons with age-appropriate bouldering obstacles and trained spotters. They may also participate in canyoneering activities in ACA rated Class 3 technical canyons. All bouldering moves should have appropriate spotters. Scouts may not participate in canyoneering activities in ACA rated Class C canyons.

Older Scouts, Sea Scouts and Venturers may participate in canyoneering activities in ACA rated Class 1 and Class 2 canyons with age-appropriate bouldering obstacles with trained spotters. They may also participate in canyoneering activities in ACA rated Class 3 canyons and Class C canyons. All bouldering moves should have appropriate spotters.

Participation in canyoneering activities in ACA rated Class 4 canyons is not allowed for any BSA units.

Each of the following points plays an important role in *Canyoneering Safely*. Fun and safe canyoneering activities require close compliance of *Canyoneering Safely* by the adult supervisors, the instructors, and all participants.

## 1. Qualified Supervision



All canyoneering must be supervised by a mature, conscientious adult at least 21 years of age who understands the risks inherent to these activities. This person knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in his or her care. This adult supervisor is trained in and committed to compliance with the eight points of the Boy Scouts of America's *Canyoneering Safely* procedure and responsible for recruiting and verifying the qualifications of the qualified instructors.

A minimum of two adult supervisors are required for each group.

The adult supervisor is responsible for ensuring that someone in the group is currently trained in Wilderness First Aid (a 16-hour course). A course of equivalent length and content from another nationally recognized organization can be substituted. A higher level of certification such as emergency medical technician (EMT), licensed practical nurse (LPN), registered nurse (RN), and licensed health-care practitioner is also acceptable if the person is trained in backcountry medical care. The American Red Cross Emergency Response, a 43 ½-hour course that includes CPR, is highly recommended.

## 2. Qualified Instructors

The ratio of participants to instructors is 5:1 with a minimum of two instructors.

The **qualified instructor** managing the canyoneering activity must meet the following criteria:

- Be a qualified instructor in accordance with *Climb on Safely* (other than qualifications that are limited to artificial structures) and have a current canyoneering qualification from a nationally-recognized organization that specializes in canyoneering instruction
- OR
- Be a professional canyoneering guide/instructor that is licensed by the state or accredited by a nationally-recognized organization as a canyoneering guide



All qualified instructors must be current in their training and qualifications (assessment within three years).

Additional **instructors** required to meet the 5:1 ratio requirement must be competent as determined by the **qualified instructor** and be at least 18 years of age.

There are many institutions and/or businesses that offer training for climbing and rappelling; however, most do not prepare instructors to lead groups of people on canyoneering outings. Your local council COPE and Climbing Committee, Area COPE and Climbing Advocates, and Region COPE and Climbing Chairs can help locate resources to answer your questions about canyoneering. For guidance or additional information, contact the BSA's Outdoor Programs/Properties Department through your local council office.

### **3. Physical Fitness**

Adult supervisors must require evidence of fitness for the canyoneering activity with a current BSA Annual Health and Medical Record. If a participant exceeds the maximum weight for

height restrictions contained on the BSA Annual Health and Medical Record, they may not be allowed to participate. The adult supervisor should adapt all supervision, discipline, and precautions to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions. The adult supervisor should inform the canyoneering instructor about each participant's medical conditions.



#### **4. Safe Area**

A qualified canyoneering instructor must have descended the canyon prior to the activity and where possible a recent descent should be done. The instructor must survey the canyon in advance of the activity to identify and evaluate possible hazards such as climbing, rappelling and swimming hazards, and to determine whether the site is suitable for the age, maturity, and skill level of the participants.

Each participant and staff member must wear a UIAA- or CE-approved rock-climbing helmet while in the fall zone of the canyon. Everyone must be belayed or tethered when within 8 feet of an edge where a fall of more than 6 feet could occur.

#### **5. Equipment**

The canyoneering instructor must verify that the proper equipment is available for the size and ability level of the participants. Helmets, harnesses, rope, and climbing hardware must meet appropriate requirements as outlined in *Belay On*. All equipment must be acquired new and/or furnished by the instructor and used and retired according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

#### **6. Planning**

When planning, observe the following:

- Plan and obtain approval for your activity in accordance with the *Guide to Safe Scouting*.
- Share the canyoneering plan and an alternate with parents and the unit committee.
- Secure the necessary permits or written permission for using private or public lands.
- Group size limitations as set by land managers must be observed.
- Enlist the help of qualified canyoneering instructors.
- Prior to the canyoneering activity, each participant should participate in an on rock rappelling activity. Rappels should be similar to the rappels in the canyon to be descended. In many canyons there is one way in and one way out. Thus, unusual fear or apprehension on the part of all participants must be addressed prior to entering the canyon.
- If the canyon requires swimming, all participants must pass a BSA swimming ability test (e.g., Swimmers or Beginners) as appropriate for the canyon. All swimming should adhere to the appropriate principles of BSA Safe Swim Defense.
- The instructor should have a topographic map for the area being used and obtains a current weather report for the area before the group's departure.
- It is suggested that at least one of the adult leaders has an electronic means of communication in case of an emergency. Before any activity, an adult leader should develop and share an emergency plan that includes the location of a nearby medical facility and the means of communicating with parents during the activity.



## 7. Environmental Conditions



Flash floods can be very dangerous.  
WHEN IN DOUBT, STAY OUT!

The instructor, each adult leader, and each participant assume responsibility for monitoring potentially dangerous environmental conditions that may include loose, crumbly rock, poisonous plants, wildlife, and inclement weather. Use the buddy system to monitor concerns such as dehydration, hypothermia, and sun exposure. The adult supervisor is responsible to ensure the group leaves

no trace of its presence.

Flash floods pose unique hazards when canyoneering. Each instructor, supervisor and participant should understand and remain alert to signs of a flash flood.

## 8. Discipline

Each participant knows, understands, and respects the rules and procedures for Canyoneering Safely and follows *Canyoneering Safely* and Leave No Trace. All participants should respect and follow all instructions and rules of the instructor. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing and should be reviewed for all participants before starting the activity. When participants know the reasons for rules and procedures, they are more likely to follow them. The instructor must be strict and fair, showing no favoritism.

