Arch/Arcs Canyon – Rappel Descent



Written by Brendan Clark, Topo by Ryan Fox

Version 1.1 – August 1, 2025

Approach Instructions

Arch/Arcs Canyon is the furthest west drainage on Mount McGillivray before the very large cliff band that parallels Highway 1. This canyon is one of the best dry canyons in the Bow Valley – it offers a short but steep approach to a fantastic canyon with 12 rappels down interesting water-worn rock. Park at a small pullout on the south side of Hwy 1, about 1km west of the Heart Creek trailhead at the base of Mount McGillivray. This parking area is **only accessible heading eastbound on Highway 1** – if travelling from the east (Calgary, etc), you must head west to Dead Man's Flats and use the overpass to head back east.

Parking is located here: https://maps.app.goo.gl/GUpkcJPXXg5Ygoyf6

From parking, follow a small trail up the hill to reach the main Trans Canada Trail. Turn right (west) and hike on the trail through the forest for about 200m. Just before the trail exists out of the forest near a 3-pole power line, look for the cairned trail on your left. This is the climber's trail that leads to the base of the routes Old Man Rules, Creature from the Black Lagoon and others on Mt McGillivray – it also accesses the top of the canyon.

Follow the trail up – it's steep and slightly exposed in spots. You can see the canyon below you on your left as you hike up. **Trail distance: 850 m, 200 m gain, about 30 to 45 min.**

CLICK HERE FOR A GPX TRACK OF THE APPROACH TRAIL

Required Gear

1 x 60m rope

Helmet, harness, personal anchor, rappel device & lockers, rappel backup (prusik, etc).

Notes

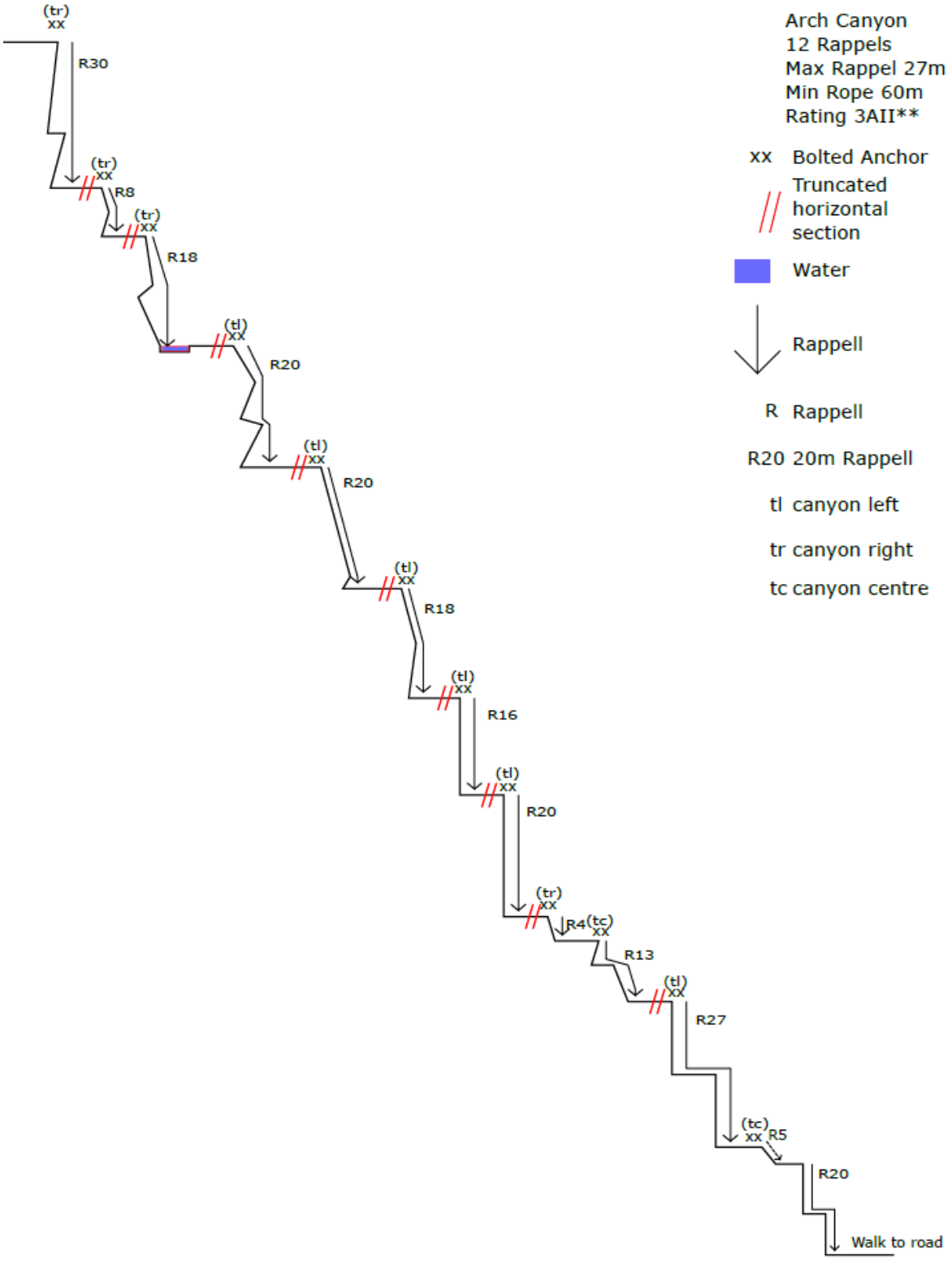
- This canyon is suitable for climbers and others with rappel experience; specialized canyon experience or equipment is NOT required. Wetsuits are not required. You can treat this canyon like a standard rappel descent of any modern climbing route.
- All anchors are bolted with fixed stainless steel hardware (typical climbing anchor)
- There are a total of 12 rappels if completing the entire canyon
- You can exit the canyon in many places by scrambling back up to the trail
- The canyon is typically dry, but may be wet (and slick!) after periods of high rain
- There is one mandatory pool that will get you wet up to about your knees

Naming Note

The name "Arch Canyon" has been used to refer to this canyon by several people, although "Arcs Canyon" may have been the original name – nobody seems to know for sure.

Canyon Topo – developed by Ryan Fox

Arch/Arcs Canyon – 3AII **



Rappel 1: 24m rappel with a ledge about 15m down and a nice overhang. The anchor is a little ways back from the lip.
Rappel 2: An 8m overhung drop. May be possible to downclimb on the left.
Rappel 3: A 3 tier drop, about 18m total. There is a small pool at the bottom that is hard to avoid without getting wet. It holds water well into the season after the creek has dried up.
Rappel 4: A 20m, 2 tier drop with a bit of an overhang on the bottom portion. The ledge partway down may have water in it but it is easy to avoid.
Rappel 5: A 20m sloping rappel in a cool slot.
Rappel 6: An 18m rappel that had a log in it at time of writing.
Rappel 7: A 16m rappel sloping to the left.
Rappel 8: A 20m rappel. Can also hike around on the right or possibly downclimb on the left.
Rappel 9: 4m rappel or hike around on either side
Rappel 10: A 2 tier drop with a 4m overhanging section, a large platform, and a 6m ramp.
Rappel 11: This is a double drop, don't pull your rope in between drops. Rappel the first drop, stay on rope for several metres horizontally, and rappel the second drop. Total distance from the anchor is about 27m. Can be done comfortably with a 60m rope.
Rappel 12: Another 3 drop rappel, 20m total. The first is about a 5 meter sloping ramp that can also be downclimbed, but the rappel anchor is above it.
Easy walk out along the creek bed from here.