



Safe Delivery of Gorge Walking and Canyoning post COVID -19

This document provides guidance to activity providers delivering Gorge Walking and Canyoning during and after the Coronavirus pandemic. These guidelines have been drawn up by Wales Adventure Tourism Organisation (WATO) regional groups (South Wales Outdoor Activity Provider Group and Snowdonia-Active) and core member representatives, on behalf of its wider membership.

The aim of this document is to enable organisations and their leaders to support the safe enjoyment of Gorge Walking and Canyoning as soon as is practicably possible, in line with Government guidelines.

It is recommended that providers take a responsible and phased approach, taking appropriate actions now, and then slowly embracing more complex delivery arrangements over time. The approaches described here may need to be adapted going forward in accordance with changes to Government guidelines.

The actions and procedures suggested here take into account those issued by National Governing Bodies and co-ordinating bodies for a range of other adventurous activities.

These suggested approaches should be considered in conjunction with an organisation's existing Operating Procedures and Risk Assessments. The term 'Gorge Walking' has been used throughout and should be considered to include the term 'Canyoning'.

1. Organisational actions prior to delivery

- a. Liability – ensure you are clear about what implications exist for you as a Gorge Walking provider and for your staff, should a participant or staff member become infected during the delivery of a session. Consider also whether you will be insured to use sites that have been closed by its landowner/s. In the absence of a National Governing Body for Gorge Walking/Gorge Scrambling/Canyoning, it is likely that insurers will expect you to follow appropriate current guidance.
- b. It is acknowledged that many sites may be popular with a range of outdoor users. Given this, one aspect of your new safe management system and risk assessment is to plan for busy venues and to consider new approaches to ensure safe use of such sites. It may be that you consult with a range of local users in more detail than previously, in order to spread out arrival times on any given day.
- c. Carry out additional training for staff and freelancers, which should include areas such as:

- Additional requirements for risk assessment and operational procedures
 - Travel arrangements
 - Equipment issue and fitting
 - Changes to how group briefings are given
 - Guiding approaches and client safe management on session
 - Returning of equipment at the end of the session and storage on any journeys
 - Packing and cleaning of equipment once back at base
- d. Plan to adapt and consider the numbers of staff interacting with groups and with each other.
- For example:
- Run staff briefings and meetings remotely
 - Consider delivering sessions using only one staff member. However, given the nature of social distancing, it may be that a session delivered with two staff allows that session to be run within the parameters of safety and allows more social distancing between group members on the session
 - If possible, undertake pre-briefing by phone with participants
 - Ask staff to wear COVID-19 related PPE when appropriate.
 - Ensure hand gel is available to all customers and staff and upon arrival all people to clean their hands, prior to fitting equipment, prior to entering the gorge and prior to removing the equipment
- e. Consideration of changes to rescue operations
- Follow current local guidance from the relevant rescue services
 - Ensure your RA and operating procedures reflect guidance and new approaches to rescue. If required, consider staff training.
 - Consider how water levels may affect the session in view of a rescue working with a COVID-19 based approach
- f. Booking procedures, including website information:
- Update websites to show that there is a Covid-19 policy in place.
 - Advise customers that you will be operating in line with National Activity guidelines for Gorge Walking and current Government guidelines.
 - Make it clear that group sizes will be reduced accordingly and in line with latest government guidelines.
 - Encourage participants to travel to the activity in a way which is in line with current Government guidelines for travel arrangements.
 - Ensure that any overnight stay which is related to the delivery of Gorge Walking is in line with current Government guidelines.

- Include an up-to-date list of symptoms and explain that anyone with any of these should not attend. Provide clear guidance on booking forms and/or medical/ consent forms which participants sign.
 - It may be necessary to consider excluding certain age groups e.g. >70 years, or other vulnerable groups. This could be achieved as advise to participants rather than by hard and fast rules.
 - As the operation of Gorge Walking will be different to that pre-COVID-19, it will be necessary to make it clear that participants must be able to swim unassisted and put on a wetsuit unassisted.
 - It is suggested and advised that you ensure under 18's have a relevant family adult accompanying them. This could make group management easier, gives additional support mechanisms for hands on support and to further ensure that social distancing is adhered to. It could also assist leaders when having to administer any first aid and address any welfare issues.
 - It may be necessary to explain any different arrangements for changing and public conveniences, e.g. changing outside away from others and a lack of access to public toilets.
- g. It should be made clear to customers making a booking, that if any member of their group develops symptoms subsequent to booking, they must inform you and not attend the session. It is recommended that you check with your group, on the day before the session, that they are all still well enough and willing to take part and whether they have been in contact with anyone with symptoms or confirmed to have COVID-19.
- h. Develop a system for participants and your staff to be able to inform you if COVID-19 symptoms develop within an appropriate time period after the activity. Each organisation should have a clear follow-up process for other participants and staff members involved in the session. Make it clear that their information may be retained (for a period in accordance with Government guidelines). It is suggested that this should be included in your booking documentation at this time.
- i. Consider carefully issues around storing personal information. Make it clear that you will keep their details for a time after the activity so that if someone taking part in the activity later develops COVID-19 symptoms, you need to inform other participants and your staff team.

2. Delivery Actions for Leaders

- a. Ensure you are familiar with up to date first aid and resuscitation guidelines, particularly in relation to CPR protocols.
- b. The relevant COVID-19 related PPE for first aid and rescue scenarios need to take into account social distancing measures, and these should be carried by the leader.

- c. Consider a system for staggering arrivals, changing and for handling elements of delivery where people would normally be close together in the same space.
- d. All participants and staff members should clean their hands upon arrival.
- e. Distribute activity equipment in a manner that maintains social distancing and does not risk contamination of equipment by staff before it is given to participants.
- f. Decide how you will store participants' valuables in a way that maintains social distancing and avoids contamination between items belonging to different participants, e.g. car keys, jewellery, bags, etc.
- g. At the start of the session, provide a safety briefing to explain the relevant measures you have in place to minimise the spread of COVID-19, e.g. what to expect in the session, the coaching style of the leader, and participants' increased role in supporting each other and assisting if there is an accident.
- h. When briefing, choose a spacious outdoor area and consider standing adjacent to group members rather than facing them.
- i. The main potential source of contamination is between the leader and participant. Strict social distancing needs to be maintained between the leader and participants throughout the activity, with the understanding being that the participants can assist and be in close proximity to each other, where that is in line with Government guidelines. It is recognised that this may make some sites unusable at the moment.
- j. Water levels should be well within the 'norm' to ensure delivery of a low risk session.
- k. Group Management - Given the nature of many venues, it may be that once you have risk assessed each venue, you may decide that all or some venues do not allow sessions to be managed safely, given any social distancing and other government guidance in place at the time. However, having assessed each site, then the following may be applicable for the whole site or part of a site:
 - Adjust the route as necessary - avoid pinch points, use fewer challenging obstacles. Consider changing the way you normally operate to be able to maintain social distancing and to reduce the possibility of needing to give hands-on assistance or rescue assistance.
 - In order to reduce the likelihood of staff having to provide close assistance, the activity will need to be adjusted so that the participants are able to self-assist and navigate the route themselves, with the leader observing and coaching. Participants should be able to enter and exit the water at any point un-assisted or with a little help from a fellow group member, rather than the leader.
 - Reduce risk at all stages of the activity. Consider whether jumps, or some jumps, should be part of your session to remove the chance of injury and potentially rescue of a participant. If you do decide to use jumps, provide demonstrations and guidance, particularly for jumping into the water. Participants should jump independently and only progress in height if their technique is acceptable. Jump

sites should be reviewed to ensure only sites that do not require close management are used. Leaders should observe from a safe distance, being able to take prompt action if there is a problem or assistance is necessary.

- Consider using ropes on sections where spotting is normally practised. It may be that many areas that you would usually spot can be roped from above with either a hand-line or belayed climb, in order to maintain social distancing whilst ensuring the safety of participants.
- Provide hands-free rescue if possible, based on the rescue principals of 'Shout, Reach, Throw, Go'. This will work better if participants are fully briefed and coached in these techniques from the start. For water-based rescues you can consider coaching another participant to assist first wherever possible. If you need to assist, use rescue aids first, such as a throw line, tube, sling, etc.
- If an injury is sustained out of the water, ask a group member to assist first wherever possible. If absolutely necessary, provide first aid and use appropriate COVID-19 PPE, whilst following your Emergency Plans.
- For a suspected spinal injury, ask participants to assist at first, wherever possible. If absolutely necessary, give first aid use appropriate COVID-19 PPE, whilst following your Emergency Plans.

3. Post Delivery Actions

- a. Encourage participants to do as much washing of equipment as possible under staff supervision, e.g. dunking, rinsing, putting on hangers, etc.
- b. All equipment needs to be thoroughly cleaned, including buoyancy aids, helmets, wetsuits, footwear, safety bags, etc. Consider vehicle cleaning requirements as well.
- c. Undertake research to find a cleaning product that kills Covid-19 and make sure it is used strictly to manufacturer's instructions.
- d. Wear adequate COVID-19 PPE to wash equipment at all times. Wash hands thoroughly afterwards.
- e. Remind participants that if anyone in their household shows symptoms (as per government guidelines) after the activity, they need to report it to you so that you can inform any other participants and staff.
- f. All participants and staff should clean their hands before leaving.
- g. Use equipment rotation when possible and aim to ensure used equipment is not re-issued for 72 hours or more, unless you are able to thoroughly clean your equipment in line with manufacturer's instructions on COVID-19 cleaning. Providers should consider using an effective equipment management system to ensure equipment is both traceable and trackable at all times.