

CANYONING GUIDE HELPS OTHERS EXTEND THEMSELVES

BACKGROUND

Annette Phillips grew up in the lower North Island and settled in Hamilton from age 11. Outdoor recreation wasn't part of her upbringing, though summers provided the freedom to explore. "I was a suburban kid with a classic Kiwi upbringing," she says. "We spent school holidays at the beach and there was at that point the freedom to explore, away from adult supervision."

High school presented a turning point.

"When I was 14 or 15, a group of us decided we wanted an adventure. So we organised a rafting trip down the Mohaka River. It was amazing."

MOTIVATION

In 1997, Annette enrolled in a Diploma in Adventure Tourism at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology. The course influenced her next steps. "The learning from that course cemented that outdoor pathway for me," she says. "It gave me a great foundation across several outdoor pursuits. I saw that it was possible to make a living from this. And there was a real community around it."

ACHIEVEMENTS

For many years now, Annette has been a keen trapper and rock-climber, but she has also pursued other interests.

"I am definitely not your classic, straight down the line outdoor guide" she says.

Her past experiences have included working for a kayaking company in Abel Tasman National Park and a mountaineering company in Wanaka, as well as travelling and working in hospitality.

Twelve years ago, she became a canyoning guide for Deep Canyon in Wanaka. That was when she realised this was the area she wanted to specialise in. "I did one season and lived and breathed it. The rest is history," she says.

At the time, there was no formal qualification for canyoning in New Zealand, so Annette obtained one in Europe. In 2011, she was part of the team that helped NZOIA develop a national qualification, which she also completed. The skills and experience Annette gained from canyon guiding also led to

other opportunities such as working on reality TV shows (including a Bear Grylls series) to help with rigging and instructing the contestants.

PRESENT DAY SITUATION

These days, Annette alternates in the summers between working on a tourist boat in Fiordland and canyon guiding for Wanaka-based South Canyons, her partner's company. At 42, she remains passionate about what she does.

"It's hard work. You're constantly assessing risk. You have to be totally on your game the whole time. You also get to give people access to something incredible and unique, and to share that experience with them. You help them challenge themselves and achieve things they didn't think they had in them."

Annette is a NZOIA canyon assessor and holds the NZOIA Canyon 2 qualification. "Obtaining this qualification has enabled me to engage with a professional body which has a solid platform and benchmarking of skills to work against," she says.

"Being an active NZOIA member also keeps me connected with an impressive community of guides and instructors to share and collaborate with."

