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Zip, line and laughter

Canopy tours offer exhilarating adventure

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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LONG CREEK — Ever wonder what it feels like to fly? What about swinging through the trees like Tarzan?

Maybe your imagination is running a little wild if you've thought about being a flying Tarzan, but if so, it's your lucky day.

The Chattooga Ridge Canopy Tours at Wildwater Rafting's Chattooga Adventure Center in Long Creek have recently opened to the public.

Becky Wise, representative from Wildwater, said the construction and final preparations were completed just less than three weeks ago and so far, the response has been "up"lifting.

'It's a ton of fun, bottom line. It's such a unique experience for anyone to try. The construction of each platform and zipline is top-notch and the safety equipment is the same way. Sure, people see how high it is and get a little apprehensive, but by the time they tackle that first zip, they are addicted.'

Katie Al-Rammal
Canopy guide

"It's a new way to recreate," she said. "This canopy tour is the first of its kind in the area. For us, it means that people will stay in Oconee County a little bit longer to round out their stay."

Zipline tours are far more common at tourist hot spots in Central America and other island getaways, she added.

"The difference with this zipline is that it's more about enjoyment and soaring through the trees rather than riding steep, fast drops," she said.

The adrenaline certainly pumps, however, as the course for "zipping" spans over 20 acres high above the historic and former Long Creek Academy property and lake.

Katie Al-Rammal, canopy guide, said the tour is age-friendly; specific safety instructions are explained and the proper gear is fitted to each person prior to the "zipping" journey.

"It's a ton of fun, bottom line," Al-Rammal said. "It's such a unique experience for anyone to try. The construction of each platform and zipline is top-notch and the safety equipment is the same way. Sure, people see how high it is and get a little apprehensive, but by the time they tackle that first zip, they are addicted."

The tour consists of 10 total ziplines and includes four sky bridges, including a "recession bridge," with planks of wood missing.

"We joke that we ran out of money and couldn't finish the wood planks," said Matt Dean, guide. "But that's just a joke. The missing planks make it fun for those to cross it, kind of like Indiana Jones."

In addition to the rafting, ropes course and canoeing that Wildwater offers, the zipline course takes about three hours to complete.

Each platform is either a standalone structure or built around two of the strongest trees in the area, the grand white oak and maple tree, Dean added.

Patricia Brown, first time zipper, summed up her experience in one word.

"Awesome," she said. "I was talked into trying this, and I'm so glad I was."

Wise added that it's an exhilarating experience for the entire family.

"A couple of weeks ago, we had three generations of a family out here zipping," she said. "How cool is that?"

Officials suggest that potential zippers be in relatively good physical condition and be at least 10 years old.

"The minimum weight requirement is 70 pounds, because you need at least that much weight to travel far enough on the ziplines," Wise said. "It's probably more mentally strenuous than physically for our guests, at least at first."

While zipping through the elements, take notice of the ground covered with mountain laurel, rhododendron and flame azaleas while keeping an eye out for the numerous hawks, deer and other wildlife in the area.

Want to spend the weekend and try all the activities that Wildwater has to offer? Cabins and other group lodging are available with more currently being constructed.

In order to get started, each zipper is hoisted by a mechanical pulley to the top of a 70-foot platform. From there, it's non-stop fun in the treetops, Dean said.

"We've only had one person decide they weren't going to continue once they got to the top," Wise said. "In that case, we lowered them down to safety. But for the most part, people can't wait to get started. They won't be disappointed."

For more information, visit www.chattoogaridge-canopytours.com or call (866) 319-8867.



JESSICA SIBLEY | STAFF

Katie Al-Rammal, canopy guide, gears up in harness equipment before hitting the zips.



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To start, a helicopter lift brings you to the starting platform. From there, each flier will soar for more than 20 acres through trees and over water.



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The final zipline goes the length of the property's lake. Zippers have the option of dipping their feet in or holding them up to stay dry.