Zip line course opening near Asheville

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Nature will soon take on a whole new perspective.

The newest thrill ride isn't at Carowinds or Six Flags, it's deep in a forest about 20 minutes north of Asheville, N.C., There, in 240 acres of hardwoods, a group called Navitat is building a zip line course and a series of bridges and landing spots designed to give people a unique tree canopy excursion.

Zip lines seem to be the next big thing as the newest addition to the family makes at least five zip line courses in North Carolina, to go along with one in Longcreek near Walhalla and another in Winnsboro.

In each, participants travel a course comprised of platforms constructed in the trees, sky-bridges, zip lines, trails and rappels. Riders are clipped in throughout their tour and are escorted by guides as they move along the course.

The new Navitat trail allows participants to explore a century-old forest amid the treetops, glide across a wide valley floor and do it all against a backdrop of western North Carolina's majestic mountains.

The course was designed and is being constructed by Colorado-based Bonsai Design Inc., the leading canopy tour installer in the country. The tree-based course uses no poles or other structures to support the platforms and course features.

Each tour lasts about 3½ hours, and participants travel from 2 feet high to more than 200 feet off the forest floor. They travel along separate zip lines ranging from 50 feet in length to 1,100 feet as they tour the forest.

The course is located in Moody Cove, a 240-acre tract of forestland in Barnardsville, N.C. The site is home to forests of hardwoods – some more than 100 years old – native and rare plant species, streams and mountain wildlife.

Ninety-five percent of the site is densely forested, with many large hardwood trees, including oak, yellow poplar, Chinese chestnut, black cherry, American beech, maple, ash, black locust, American sycamore and white pine.

Besides providing fun, Navitat hopes to educate guests about the natural environment, history and culture of the North Carolina mountains. Before beginning construction, Navitat commissioned an inventory of the site's natural resources and established a management plan for non-native invasive plant species.

While the course is still under construction, Navitat expects to offer its first tours May 15. It is already taking reservations at its web site. Other courses open as the weather warms with most of them open by Memorial Day.

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FOR MORE INFO

For more information on zip lines, including how to build your own, visit: www.ziplinerider.com or www.ziplinekit.com

Here are some zip line locations in the Carolinas:

■ Carolina Adventure World is in Winnsboro. Info: www.cawzipline.com

■ Chattooga Ridge Canopy Tours is in Longcreek. Info: www.wildwaterrafting.com/chazip.php

■ Navitat is located in Barnardsville, N.C. Info: www.navitat.com

NATURE BECKONS

Compiled by Scott Keepfer, Outdoors Editor



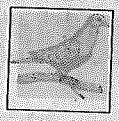
Budding time: The unique striped maple tree is nearing the flowering stage. These smallish understory trees have singular buds at the end of each stem, and their main branches offer a telltale identification -- green color, with vertical dark-purple to black stripes.



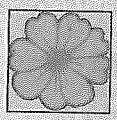
Calling all girls: Male leopard frogs are seeking the affection of their female counterparts, and they're quite vocal in their advertisements. Leopard frogs, which are smaller relatives of the bullfrog, make a chuckling noise and may call day and night around small ponds.



Coming out: Heavy rains followed by warm weather, particularly at the outset of spring, often will result in the sudden appearance of many reptiles and amphibians that have been inactive for months. Foremost among these are box turtles, fence lizards, garter snakes, skinks and wood frogs.



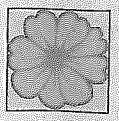
Bird "listening": Many birds may be heard before they're seen this time of year. Winter feeding flocks remain active for many species, and these birds create quite a commotion as they move together. Some flocks may include cedar waxwings, chickadees and titmice, among others.



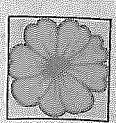
Yellow beauty: Yellow jessamine, our state flower, already is blooming in the Lowcountry and Piedmont, and soon will be blooming in the Upstate. You may encounter patches of its bright yellow flowers any day now, with the twining vine offering plenty of attractive, tubular blossoms.



Tons of tadpoles: Wood frog tadpoles are now abundant in many still waters in the mountains and foothills. In some small ponds, they are so plentiful that they blacken the bottom of entire pools of water. They'll leave the water in about 6 to 8 weeks to begin their life on land.



Snowy white: Serviceberry trees, resplendent with their profuse, snowy white blossoms, are adding a splash of color to the early pre-spring woods. A smallish tree usually peaking at 15 to 20 feet tall, the serviceberry is seen along edges and in some forest interiors as well.



Flowering early: The long-spurred violet is already peeking out from under the leaf litter of winter. These small but beautiful flowers are purple or pale blue in color. The lower of the flower's five petals will have a telltale spur, which may range from one-half to 1 inch long.

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