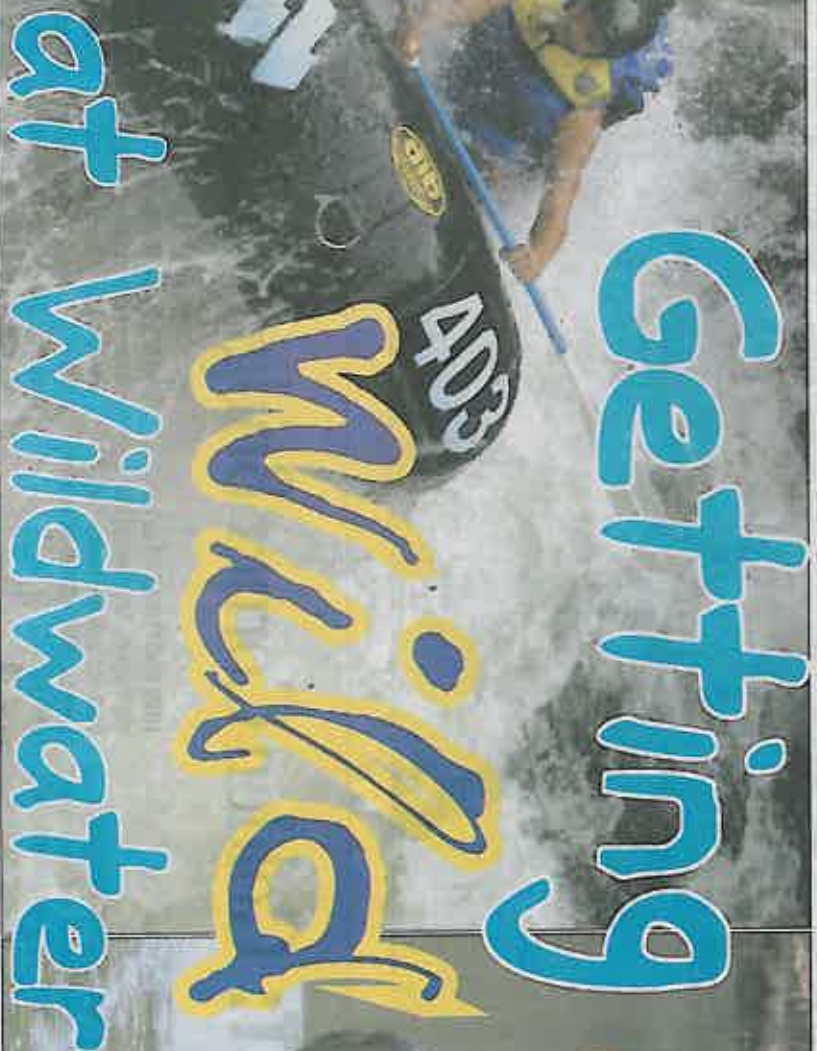


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Getting Wild at Wildwater

Left: Wildwater, based in Long Creek, offers whitewater rafting trips on the Chattooga, as well as ziplining and ropes courses until early fall. Right: A zipliner glides across Academy Lake. The 19-acre zipline course at Wildwater Chattooga is a fun activity for family members of all ages.

FOR THE JOURNAL

Ziplining, rafting provide springtime adventures

BY MIKAYLA KREUZBERGER
THE JOURNAL

LONG CREEK — Oconee County and the surrounding area, in springtime, prove perfect for outdoor adventures.

With spring rains, the wild and scenic Chattooga River is roaring and water levels are at a seasonal high — perfect for whitewater rafting and other water sports. Spring also means nature is in bloom, and Wildwater's Jack Wise said the company's Chattooga Ridge zipline canopy tour gives spring beauty a whole different perspective.

Wildwater is based out of the historic Long Creek Academy off of Hwy. 76 in Long Creek. Since 1971, the family business has offered world-class whitewater rafting tours down sections III and IV of the Chattooga River, which forms the South Carolina/Georgia border. Today, Wildwater offers rafting, zipline canopy tours and challenging ropes courses throughout the Southeast, including in Asheville, N.C., Nantahala, N.C., Pigeon Forge/Catlinburg, Tenn., and along the Ocoee River in Tennessee.

Wildwater Chattooga — both its rafting trips, zipline tours and ropes course — is open for the season, and Wise said the canopy tour's newest feature is the Bell Tower Express.

"It's an 1,100-foot tower with incredible views of Long Creek and the South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia Mountains," he said. "It just opened this year."

Zipliners can "zip" from the Bell Tower to the rest of the 19-acre canopy tour, which includes 13 different ziplines to a variety of trees, four sky

bridges and six "zips" over Academy Lake.

"It's a learning adventure as much as it is an activity," Wise said. "The guides are knowledgeable about the trees and there's a ton of wildlife, especially in the spring season."

He said catching a glimpse of the flying squirrels is a favorite among zipliners.

Ziplining began in Costa Rica during the 1980s, when tree canopy scientists discovered an accessible way to "zip" between trees without causing damage to the environment.

"In the last two or three years, aerial tours, or ziplines, have blown up everywhere," he said. "It's a very popular activity."

To build the complex zipline systems, Wildwater contracted with Challenge Design Innovations (CDI), a specialized building company out of Boone, N.C.

"CDI and Wildwater are both members of the Association of Challenge Course Technology (ACCT), and ACCT sets the standards for proper safety and use of technology. They do regular inspections of our courses, and we do our own monthly inspections, as well," Wise said.

The best part about ziplining? "It's multigenerational," Wise said. "There are families that come out here — kids, parents and grandparents. It's cool to watch the whole family enjoy themselves."

Kids must be at least 10 years old and at least 70 pounds. There is no age limit, but the maximum weight is 250 pounds.

"We've noticed that ziplining and rafting have a crossover, too. Some people want to do both, and groups are able to split up — some don't want to get wet, so they zipline, and others



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The Bell Tower Express is Wildwater Chattooga's newest attraction. The 1,100 foot tower has views of Long Creek and the South Carolina and Georgia mountains — and don't forget, you can zipline off it, too!

just want to get wet," he said. Wise said his favorite rapid along the Chattooga is the Cork screw.

"Section IV is more difficult with more rapids, and section III is an easier ride," he said. "The higher water levels in the spring make for a more exciting trip."

"Section IV is rockin' right now, and section III is a great ride."

Rafting trips last until early fall, when water levels are at their lowest.

Rafting and zipline guides are certified in first aid and cardio-

pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and have had specialized and interpretive training in their specific areas.

"We're hiring right now at every Wildwater location, including Chattooga," Wise said.

"We're looking for friendly faces and good people skills — we hire all sorts of people, anywhere from 18 years old to some employees who are in their 60s and 60s."

Applications are available online or at the Long Creek office. Wildwater Chattooga also

provides kayaking and paddleboard clinics, as well as group lodging (yurts, cottages and cabins), a river store and a snack bar. Spring break discounts are available.

For information about Wildwater Chattooga, including all its amenities, visit <http://wildwaterrafting.com/> or call (866) 319-8870 or (864) 647-9587. Wildwater Chattooga's headquarters is at 1251 Academy Rd., Long Creek, SC 29658.