

Zip-Line Treetops Adventure

Zip-Line Treetops Adventure is one wild slide down a New Hampshire mountainside

The wild, swinging rides that Tarzan takes from treetop to treetop via conveniently located rope vines look like a heck of a thrill. If you ever gazed in awe at those corny old Tarzan movies and wondered how it feels to swoop on a vine swing through the jungle foliage, wonder no longer. Get yourself to Lincoln, New Hampshire, for the new Zip-Line Treetops Tour hosted by Alpine Adventures Outdoor Recreation. For a dose of airborne exhilaration (but without the stomach-churning drop of bungee jumping), there is nothing like it.

Alpine Adventures, which offers snowmobiling and off-road summer safari tours, has installed a zip-line tour high in the white pines and hemlocks of Barron Mountain. The zip line is a series of cables and rope bridges that are strung from platforms about 30 to 40 feet high in series of pine trees that descend in a jagged row down the mountainside. Riders sit in harnesses that hang from the cable. When attendants holler, "Zip away!" riders leap from the platform and catapult down the cable into the next-lower platform, powered by gravity and their weight on the cable. The whole treetops tour is composed of seven zip lines totaling 2,000 feet of cable and rope bridges.

It is the first zip-line in New England and the fourth in the continental United States, says Randy Farwell, co-owner of Alpine Adventures. Farwell plans to offer the zip-line tour year-round (when you are high in the trees on a New Hampshire mountainside, sliding down a cable, a little snow doesn't make a bit of difference.) Zip-line adventures are a new offering in the growing segment of eco-tourism and outdoor adventure vacations.

Almost without exception, zippers on the treetops tour catapult into the waiting attendants' arms hollering and whooping and wearing face-splitting grins. The adventure, though, really starts earlier, when the company's off road vehicle packed with zippers turns off the paved road and heads up the mountain. The company vehicle is a six-wheel drive Pinzgauer built in Austria and used by the Swiss military to transport troops over rough terrain. ("This thing is geared like a dump truck," growled one passenger, who was hanging on tightly as the vehicle rocked insanely up the mountainside.) When the driver first turns the Pinzgauer off the paved road and up the dirt trail, he switches the music coming across the speakers to the Darth Vader theme from "Star Wars." The message is clear: weenies need not apply.

The jump-off point for the first zip is actually a big rock perched at the top of a steep ravine; the cable leads to a platform high in a tree, but still below the altitude of the rock. In any group of zippers, there is probably a little hesitation when the company guide says, "Who wants to go first?" Then, everybody wants to go second. How to describe the feeling of zooming through thin air from treetop to treetop, descending through ravines in the deep pine forest? There is nothing like it. Bring your own Tarzan-style jungle yodel or just make it up as you go.