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Ziplining Through Color
Autumn adventure in New England's ski towns
by [Justin Shatwell](#)

When you're afraid of heights, a thin grated walkway pegged 40 feet up a tree is an uncomfortable place to find yourself. It's even less comfortable when everyone around you expects you to jump off it--but that's exactly what I signed up for here at Alpine Adventures' zipline course, on Barron Mountain in the White Mountains town of Woodstock, New Hampshire.

My guide is young and nonchalant. He takes the pulley fastened to my climbing harness, clasps it onto the cable above, and says, "Now I need you to step up on this railing, and when I tell you, just push off." For a moment I trust him. Then reality reasserts itself and I mutter, "That seems...counterintuitive."



To say that I'm having second thoughts as I stare down the thin steel wire arching through the trees would be an understatement. At the bottom of the course, the rest of the group--mostly women and children--look on expectantly. I'm the last one to jump. My guide counts down: "3, 2, 1, go!"

My legs don't so much push off as crumple beneath me, but it's enough to launch me into space. There's a split second of free fall; then the harness firms up beneath me and I'm riding the lazy curve of the wire like a variable in a physics equation.

The pulley lets out a loud hum as the trees flash by on either side. I look down and see the ground coming up below. The landing is faster than I expected, and my feet don't keep up. I stumble a few steps, then fall softly into the moist earth. As I pull myself up, I can't stop laughing.

Imported from Latin America, ziplining is rapidly spreading across the Northeast as ski and snowmobile

towns look for ways to diversify. You can run a course safely throughout the year, and so far it's been a hit with tourists. Some tours are fully booked weeks in advance. Alpine Adventures' "Treetop Canopy Tour" was the first zipline course in New England when it opened in 2006. It was a fairly tame set of jumps. Then competition forced the company's managers to think bigger, and last year they opened a second course, affectionately dubbed "Sky Rider," which offers some of the longest and highest zips around. Zigzagging back and forth across a horseshoe-shaped valley, this five-jump tour takes you above the trees rather than through them. The crown jewel is jump two: a quarter-mile-long zip 200 feet above the canopy. It takes a full minute to cross.





This is the zip that has figured most prominently in my pre-trip nightmares, but I'm still riding the buzz of my first jump, and I volunteer to go second. I zip through the curtain of trees at the edge of the valley, and the mountain drops away below me. I can feel the distance beneath me in the soles of my feet, but I keep my eyes open and look out to the right.

The valley spreads out before me, and I can see the thin line of I-93 stretching all the way to Plymouth, some 15 miles to the south. The sun is struggling through the dark clouds that have plagued us all day, sending mottled shafts of light across Mount Cilley, across the highway. All around me, the trees blaze in oranges, golds, and reds, like brushstrokes on the landscape. I feel as though I'm flying through a Thomas Cole painting.

I let myself relax and sink a little lower in my harness. The hum of the pulley is comforting. As I glide into the tree cover on the other side of the valley, I wonder to myself whether there's any way they could make this one last just a littler longer.

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