

Review from INDY.COM

August 13, 2009 by Justin Jacobs

First-of-its-kind course in state seems safe in every way

With her arms wrapped around a thick tree trunk 59 feet above the forest floor, Mary Rager was trying to think logically.

“Hypothetically speaking, if the tree would fall over, it’ll go that way,” the 22-year-old said calmly, pointing toward a dry creek bed below. “And I’ll be on the upside.”

Luckily for Rager and the dozen others crowded on the small wooden platform built around the trunk, such what-if projections weren’t necessary. The tree wasn’t going anywhere. But the people were.

Wearing harnesses, helmets and gloves, and hooked onto a steel cable, they glided, one by one, through the forest to another, lower platform on Indiana’s first zipline course.

Just a few miles from the Ohio River in Southeastern Indiana, Dagaz Acres has provided a low-ropes adventure course since 2007. Over eight days last September, though, Dagaz owner Patrick Noonan, 52, and a team of 10 built seven ziplines from scratch.

Nearly a year later, more than 1,000 people have zipped through Noonan’s woods, without one accident or injury.

“Who’s worried about falling?” said Noonan, tapping the taut cable. “These cables will hold 20,000 pounds. You could take your car with you. Now, who’s next?”

With one look at Patrick Noonan, you realize that men don’t come outdoorsier than he is.

His gloves were nearly worn through, his skin sun-baked. He didn't seem to notice the overbearing humidity on this July weekday. Noonan's goatee is as grizzled as the trails he carved through the 80-acre property, which he bought in 2005. Two years and three 55-foot trailers of cleared-out debris later, Dagaz Acres first opened.

Now, with his two-hour zipline course complete — an idea he got while zipping on vacation in Maui — Noonan said Dagaz Acres is “a family dream come true.”

“My family came together to run this business outdoors, using their talents. We get to share something here,” said Noonan, whose three sons, daughter and sister-in-law all work at Dagaz, leading zipline tours and managing the property, 23 acres of which are in use for eco-adventures and leadership training.

Back on the platform, Marsha Loudon, 53, said she was celebrating her son Cameron's 16th birthday.

“I don't like to give presents. I like to give experiences. You buy stuff and it's just stuff. Let's do something!” said Loudon, who lives in Rising Sun.

So how did the zipline stack up against previous birthday trips?

“Watching my mom kick and scream is hilarious. The Marsha-kick is legendary. But I just want to take my helmet off so my hair can blow in the wind,” said Cameron, pointing to his blond buzz cut.

Loudon turned to family friend Rager and smiled. “Oh, you just came here to collect the insurance money if something bad happens,” she joked.

While the mood throughout the two-hour zipline trip was light — it's hard not to smile when competing to see who can spin the most while zipping above Frog Creek — Noonan stays serious about two things: safety and environmentalism.

Before any eager zippers' feet leave the ground, Noonan and his crew teach groups how to operate the equipment, answering questions like "Where does my leg go in this harness" and "What happens if I . . . stop?"

Noonan's refusal to leave an environmental footprint on the property is subtler. Nothing goes to waste and nothing gets left behind in his woods. A poplar tree that toppled in a storm onto one of the cables was chopped into seats that now rest around a fire pit.

In Dagaz Acres, zippers don't feel like they're intruding in the outdoors, just flying through it.