

Unzipped in Glenwood Canyon

Zip-line misadventure over the Colorado River

by Dave Gibson

With a myriad of exciting adventures to choose from, vacationers flock to Glenwood Springs, CO during the peak summer tourist season. Rafting, caving, climbing, biking, zip-lines, and an alpine slide are among the recreational opportunities with the famous Glenwood Hot Springs waiting to soothe one's aching muscles in the waning daylight. It has always been one of my favorite nearby destinations. On my last visit, July 24th I decided to try the zip-line ride which takes you over and then back across the Colorado River.

Glenwood Canyon Zipline Adventures at Glenwood Canyon Resort (1.5 miles east of Glenwood Springs on Interstate 70 at the No Name Exit), offers a variety of programs. The easiest and most affordable available is the \$35 Express Zip package where

you launch yourself from the 40 foot high tower and zoom 350 feet across the Colorado River, traverse a suspended bridge, then complete the zip-line circuit from the return tower. Adrenaline junkies can do it all a second time for another \$10 if once wasn't enough.

In the Leap of Faith, 35 ft. above the ground, you jump at a trapeze bar hoping to make a connection like a circus performer – some make it, and some don't.

For those in search of a challenge, they can try their luck on the Adventure Ropes Course negotiating the Multi-Vine Ropes, Swinging Steps Bridge, Raider Bridge (not recommended for Bronco fans), and the Climbing Walls. After conquering the obstacles and being buoyed by a sense of grand achievement, unwinding on the 5,000 square foot covered deck by the No Name Bar & Grill overlooking scenic Glenwood Canyon is a good ending to a great day.

A young Association for Challenge Course Technology standard trained staff assists riders

with their safety harnesses, helmets, and leather gloves which are dragged atop the zip-line for braking. Groups engage in a ground demonstration before departing and are always clipped with a locking carabineer to a cable while on any platforms. Manager Jeff Hale proudly stated that there had been no injuries during their two years in business and 13,500 satisfied riders. Rigged and ready to ride, I lingered about the grounds snapping pictures of "zipppers" before taking my turn. From the launch tower a mother and her two grown daughters stepped off simultaneously in a Thelma and Louise moment for three. River rafters having just completed the intimidating Shoshone Rapids floated by underneath as the girls reached the other side without incident. Others completed the loop flying into the landing tower with legs raised high and big smiles on their faces.

One of the women of the mother/daughters trio may have weighed 300 lbs. and was approaching the landing tower. Unable to reach the cable above her, she had no way to slow down. Hand braking is optional, as a staff member will receive you at the platform, ending your "zip." Coming in low, fast, and hard like a wrecking ball, I thought nothing of it as I took her photo. At second glance, her harness looked as if it was ill-fitting and had been pulled higher on her body than intended. Terror filled her eyes when a second later with tremendous force she slammed backwards into the lightly padded platform! The entire bottom half of her body, from her lower back down, failed to clear the landing area. She cried out in pain, helplessly dangling on the edge begging to be pulled up. Writhing in agony, we got her to her feet. That, in hindsight, was possibly not the best approach she could have made to avoid sustaining spinal injuries upon impact. Seemingly only badly bruised though, she was led to a picnic table to lie on her stomach. Still groaning five minutes later, an ambulance transported her to the emergency room. Thinking that she'd positively cracked vertebrae or lacerated a kidney, I'm happy to report that she was released from the hospital two hours later with just some bruises and a great story to tell her family.

After that, I thought perhaps additional safety tests or retooling of policy might be in order, but more rides continued that day without

any further action. After witnessing the crash, I had to ask myself what the difference was between a 300 lb. woman and a 6'3" 250 lb. man. Maybe only my knees would clear? I soon learned that there was a 280 pound weight limit that was not adhered to. My 1/8th ton would make me the second heaviest load that afternoon, and I no longer trusted the ride or operator after seeing the fun the previous lady had. A zip-line ride for me at

that point was out of the question.

From my perspective, after providing so many uneventful zip-line rides, Glenwood Canyon Zipline Adventures became lackadaisical in its responsibility for providing a safe experience. The management assures me that they now have a scale on site and will screen potential passengers more thoroughly. Maybe it's worth another shot some day when this image has faded from memory.



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