

## Ride offers view of Mount Washington at 45 m.p.h.

By Marty Basch  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PINKHAM NOTCH, N.H. — After his landing in the ski area parking lot, Paul Hunkle of Billerica was exhilarated. “There was nothing to it,” he said. “I wasn’t even nervous.”

Neither was his wife, Sue. The couple had soared side-by-side at speeds of up to 45 miles per hour across from hulking Mount Washington in the mighty Presidential Range. They had traveled over autumn foliage and were able to look down on ski trails from 100 feet above.

“It was nice to look around and see the beauty of Tuckerman Ravine,” Sue Hunkle said.

Wildcat Mountain’s got a new thrill, a zip line cable ride unveiled in July. On the ZipRider, harnessed riders plunge 2,100 feet from a platform on the lower half of the Cheetah Race Trail along a steel cable to a landing station on the edge of the main parking lot. In between, the line stretches over the forest, Bobcat Trail, lifts, the main base lodge, and the mountain’s snowmaking source, the Peabody River.

The ZipRider is closed now until Nov. 24, when Wildcat is scheduled to open for the winter.

The idea is to run it year-round but Wildcat’s fierce winter reputation isn’t lost on general manager Tom Caughey. He’s quick to call the zip line “weather dependent” and acknowledge that wind has an impact on operations. Too strong, and treetop fliers are grounded. “We’ll be monitoring conditions every day,” he said. “Winter precipitation will have an impact. The conditions we want for good skiing aren’t necessarily good for zip riding.”

Wildcat marks its 50th birthday this season, and the ride shows how the industry is changing. It’s not just about skiing and snowboarding. There are alterna-

tives like snow tubing, ice skating, and indoor pools. “We were primarily looking for more summer activities,” said Caughey. “But we also looked at an activity that would bring another level of excitement to the mountain experience on a year-round basis.”

Two cables strung along towers are the air strip for zipping. Those heading to the base lodge with skis and snowboards will hear the sky riders before they see them. Not quite a whoosh or a screech, the steel cable resonates as fliers soar through the sky creating a low hum that increases in volume as they fly by.

Rider speed is determined by weight and wind. To zip, riders must weigh between 75 and 275 pounds and be 52 to 80 inches tall.

The trip to the zip line begins on a chairlift many veteran skiers probably haven’t ridden since they were in grade school: the Snowcat Triple. The novice lift is the route to the top of the Cat’s learn-to-ski area. A short uphill walk through the woods leads to the zip line platform by an old ski racing shack where an attendant straps riders in.

The attendant releases riders after getting an all clear from staff at the landing station. Then it’s an adrenaline rush. Mount Washington’s glory passes by all too fast. Stellar natural sights like Tuck’s, Lion’s Head, and Huntington Ravine shoot by. In less than a minute, the ride’s over, uplifting but too short.

Winter riders, according to Caughey, won’t soar with their skis and snowboards. They’ll leave those in the racks. Zipsters can fly with proper winter boots, including those for skiing and snowboarding.

He’s considering allowing skiers and snowboarders the chance to ski to the takeoff point and connecting them with their gear afterwards.

During its first months in operation, Wildcat had several hundred people a day ride the zip line. There were some long lines. To alleviate that next season, Caughey says two more zip lines will be installed.

And Wildcat is banking that, like cruising down a favorite ski trail, one run won’t be enough. “You can’t just do it once,” said Shanon Ensey, from Columbus, N.J. “This is my second time, and I’d do it again.”

*Marty Basch, a freelance writer in Center Conway, N.H., can be reached at [marty@martybasch.com](mailto:marty@martybasch.com).*

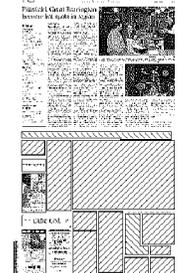
### If you go . . .

#### Wildcat Mountain

Route 16, Pinkham Notch, N.H.  
1-888-SKIWILD (754-9453)  
[skiwildcat.com](http://skiwildcat.com)  
Weekends 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Thanksgiving to April and daily during vacation weeks in winter, weather permitting. Single ride \$19, additional rides \$10.

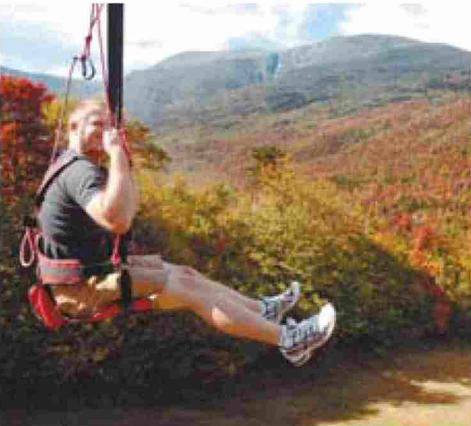
**Directions:** Pinkham Notch is about 150 miles or about 3 hours from Boston. Take Interstate 95 north into New Hampshire and exit 5 in

Portsmouth (left-hand side) to Spaulding Turnpike/Route 16. Travel north on Route 16 to Glen and on to Pinkham Notch.





On the ZipRider, riders fly 2,100 feet from a platform on the Cheetah Race Trail to a landing area in the main parking lot.



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