

Zip World

Kid on a wire

What's it like to soar five hundred feet through the air at one hundred miles per hour? Just ask 13 year old Finlay George, who took an unforgettable trip on the longest zip wire in Europe at Zip World in Snowdonia.

I didn't really expect this. Two weeks ago I was finishing school for the summer. I don't think I got out of my pyjamas for the first few days of the holidays. But here I am standing on the edge of nothing in this weird suit about to fly 500 ft in the air for a mile above a quarry in North Wales. I can see the island of Anglesey from here.

There is a group of about 15 of us, all ages. We're kitted out in a cross between a spacesuit and the overalls you see prisoners wear. It's not a strong look, but we're all in this together. Zip World is based at Penrhyn Quarry in Bethesda, where slate has been mined for over two centuries. This was the biggest quarry in the world at one time and it employed two thousand men. Now it employs two hundred people and the two zip lines stretch across areas of the quarry that are no longer in production.

We're briefed by Helen and taken to the Little Zipper, which is still the third longest zip wire in Britain. This is just an appetizer. We get familiar with the routine of being hooked up to the mechanism that transports us across the 500 metre zip line at around 40 mph (65 kmh) at a height of 72 feet (22 metres). Rather than dangle from the wire, you lie flat, which gives you a brilliant sense of flying through the air.

The Little Zipper calms any potential nerves and gets everyone's adrenaline really going for the Big Zipper. We're driven slowly up the winding ascent to the top of the quarry in a red truck, all clutching our helmets and goggles like amateur astronauts. Everyone chatters, glassy-eyed with excitement, cheering when Kristian the driver bungles a couple of hill starts. As we near the top we can see Penrhyn Castle and its grounds in nearby Llandegai – a 19th century mock castle built on the original 15th century fortified manor house.

The Dawkins-Pennant family owned Penrhyn quarry and now the house is in the hands of the National Trust. But it's fair to say that our thoughts are not focused on the one-ton bed made of slate that was made for the visit of Queen Victoria in 1859. After all, it's one thing standing on top of the world. It's another when you know you're just about to throw yourself off it at 100 mph (160 kmh).

So here I am, right back where we started. There's a lot of drama going on. Two way radios crackle as the well-rehearsed procedure of strapping me up and putting me in position is communicated firmly and with authority. There's no messing about. As I lie down and prepare myself to be released, I realise my destination is way out of sight.

I can feel the blood pumping just that little bit faster around my system. The radio crackles again and formalities are exchanged between operators at the bottom and the top of the line. The safety clip is released on the wire.

'Big base, safety is off,' says Mark, the instructor.

'Are you ready?'

I'm ready.

'Three... Two... One... Go!'

The first thing is the exhilarating whoosh of noise. The speed literally knocks the breath out of my chest and I can't help myself, but cough out a laugh like a madman. It feels like I'm cutting through the air. It's overwhelming, I think about how small I am and how I'm hurtling through centuries of hard work by others.

I'm flying – hurtling above the gigantic steps of the quarry below, soaring above the vivid blue of the quarry lake. It feels brilliant. Across the lake, getting lower as the line stretches towards Big Base I can see people craning their necks upwards from the visitor centre. I can measure my speed more easily along the last third of the journey, slowing down to the bottom of the run.

And then it's over. The instructor hooks me in, smiling as he brings me back down to the ground. It's exhilarating. Unforgettable. I could sit here and write for hours about how it felt, but you're much better off finding out for yourselves.

Source

www.visitwales.com/things-to-do/activities/rocks-ropes/zipworld-europes-longest-zipline
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