

Zippering into construction over the gorge

Zip Zag gets ready for Potato Festival opening

By Kelsey MacDonald

The experience of gliding above New Brunswick's premier waterfall and deep gorge will soon thrill tourists and adventure-seekers. Construction of the zip line across Grand Falls will start this week, Eric Ouellette, president of Zip Zag, told the Victoria Star.

"The idea came to me when I was working at the Fundy Parks in 2008. When I saw the zip line there, that's where I got the idea. Instead of just gliding over the soil (like the zip line at Fundy Park) to get from Point A to Point B, you can glide over the gorge,"

Ouellette said. He plans to have the zip line open year-round, offering a unique seasonal perspective for participants.

"This is just phase one that we are building this year," Ouellette stated. "We have more zip lines planned for the remainder of the gorge."

The initial construction will feature two cables running parallel to each other so that two people can cross over together on either cable. The second phase of the project will comprise of guided tour of the gorge complete with instructions on braking techniques to allow participants to control their

speed. The initial phase features automatic braking mechanisms designed for participants weighing between 70 to 250 pounds.

"Once all the lines are up (phase one and two), the finale will be gliding over the falls," said Ouellette.

Workers will start digging holes for the poles and building the foundation for the zip line next week.

"So far, we've ordered all the poles which we need in order to pour the foundation. The goal is to have it ready for the 50th Regional Potato Festival."

The Grand Falls Regional Potato

Festival runs from June 30 to July 4.

Ouellette assures wary participants that the idea of zippering across the gorge may sound frightening, but the project is designed to provide safe thrills.

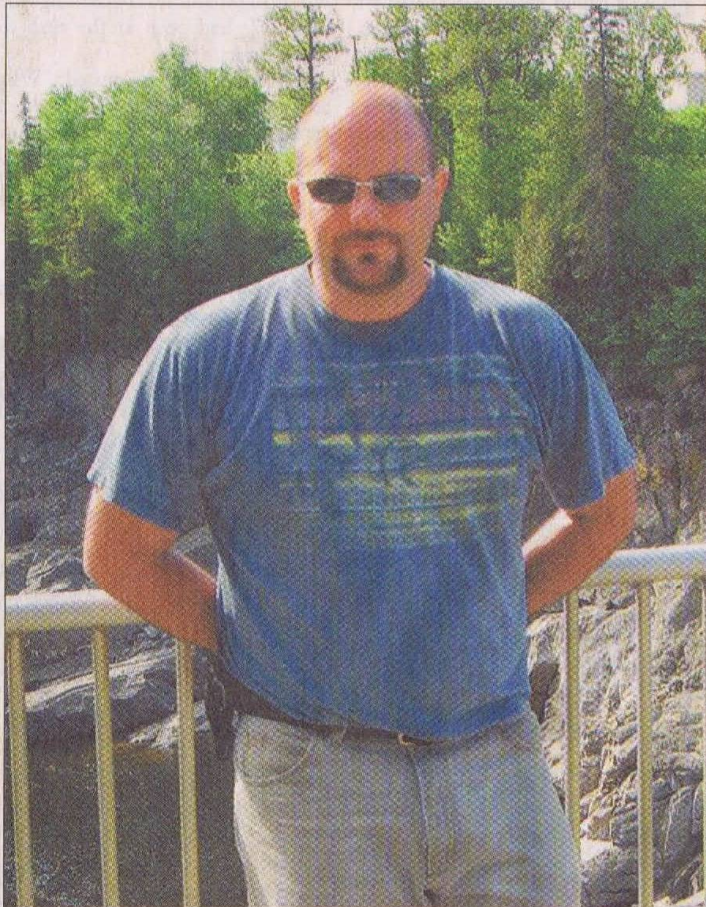
"We hired a group from Detroit and they've installed up to 20 courses. They came in 2009 and were impressed with the idea and will be returning to put the cables through and train the personnel of Zip Zag. We will be following a maintenance procedure to check certain things every month and every year. There is a lot of engineering that has gone into this project."

"Right now we're spending a lot of money on the harnesses - things you can't go cheap on." He pointed out that taking a zip line flight a safer mode of transportation than airline travel.

Ouellette has big plans for Zip Zag, but noted that the focus right now is to get the zip line built.

"2011 will be our big marketing year... We don't plan on being here for just a few years - we plan on capitalizing on this and bringing people to the area for years to come."

For more information, visit: www.zipzag.ca.



Construction starts

Eric Ouellette, president of Zip Zag, stands in front of the site where the zip lines will cross. Construction is scheduled to begin this week and estimated finish date set for July 1. (Kelsey MacDonald photo)



Drilling through the rocks

In February, Zip Zag workers drilled for geotechnical information to determine the rock quality in order to design the zip line accordingly. (Contributed photo).