

I'M SCARED OF HEIGHTS - SO I TRIED KELSO CONSERVATION'S AERIAL CHALLENGE COURSE

REPORTER VERONICA APPIA EXPLORES KELSO CONSERVATION AREA'S TWO NEW CHALLENGE COURSES



VERONICA APPIA
Column

As I get older, my ability to perform any activity that is even remotely courageous requires a lot more mental cheerleading - that is, if I even end up going through with said activity at all.

Growing up, I promised my little sister that at some point before I got married we would go sky diving. I never took it off my bucket list, but with my wedding now mere months away, the prospect of jumping out of a plane seems more unlikely than ever and I'm (kind of) making peace with that.

Aside from my newly discovered fear of heights, I also have been known to have terrible gross motor skills. Those who know me well would vouch that I'm pretty clumsy and have about a mule's level of grace.

All this being said, naturally, I was a wildly appropriate candidate to test out the new challenge course at Kelso Conservation Area.

Kelso Conservation has recently introduced two new courses for visitors: the Escarpment Walk Aerial Ropes Course (which I tried out) and the Vultures View Climbing Tower (three climbing walls that take visitors over 45 feet up high).

The aerial ropes course is an hour-long feature that gives climbers the opportunity to test their balance and coordination while suspended off the ground.

Both features opened on Canada Day long weekend and have been available both to the public and to campers throughout the summer.

AJ Leeming, Manager of Programs and Services at Kelso Conservation, says for those visiting who are a little bit apprehensive about heights, it is important to note that the course is safe and the equipment

used ensures that climbers will not fall more than four to six inches.

"One of the perceptions is 'Oh my gosh, I'm way up in the air, it must be unsafe,'" he said. "The fear of heights sort of naturally kicks in, but one of the cool things is that with the system, the life safety cable you're on, you're going to fall a longer distance if you trip walking down a long grassy field than you would on the course so it's actually incredibly safe."

Leeming says the course was built not only to challenge individuals, but to also offer a unique team-building experience.

"It gets you - in a really cool way - outside your comfort zone and doing something that you probably haven't had the experience to try before," he said. "Whether you are one person and you learn something about yourself, maybe overcoming a fear of heights, or you come in as a team where you can work together to problem-solve, there's a lot to be learned by providing the physical challenge that the ropes course does."

My challenge course supervisor Jacklyn Short



Jacklyn Short/photo

IFP reporter Veronica Appia takes on the course.

helped me get properly strapped into my harness with my lanyard clipped on and then took me to ground school, where I learned how to get on and off of the course and how to transfer my safety cable from challenge to challenge.

Then, we got up to the top to begin.

"I think I'm going to start here," I tell her, choosing what I thought would be a very stable option for my first challenge - a bridge with circular stepping platforms.

She gives me a knowing smile.

I go to step off. I stop.

"Wait. How do I get on?" I laugh.

"If you need help getting on, you can hold on to this staple," she says, pointing

to a little handle attached to the post at the start of the challenge.

So I do. I get onto the bridge and the whole thing starts to sway left, then right. I let out a shriek.

"This is a lot more difficult that it looks," I tell her.

Long story short, I made it through the course, slowly but surely, focusing on my balance and weight distribution as I moved from element to element, only occasionally embarrassing myself throughout. It was a lot of fun.

As I sit here writing this, I am proud to say I feel the slightest soreness in my triceps, which means I got a little workout out of the challenge as well.

Bonus. For further information

WHAT TO WEAR

Closed-toe shoes. Clothing that covers the areas of the body that the harness will touch (this will alleviate any potential discomfort)

PRICES

Escarpment Walk Aerial Ropes Course (\$20)

Vultures View Climbing Tower (\$20)

Access to Escarpment Walk Aerial Ropes Course and Vulture's View Climbing Tower (\$35)

Add two Quick Jumps to your Vulture's View Climbing Tower experience (\$6)

Access to Giant Steps for a view (\$10)

Weight and height restrictions Escarpment Walk Aerial Ropes

COURSE:

Maximum height: 7 feet (213 centimetres) Maximum weight: 275 pounds (125 kilograms)

Guests under 45 inches (114 centimetres) must be accompanied by a chaperone. Vultures View Climbing Tower: 22-330 pounds (10-150 kilograms)


QUICK JUMPS:

44-275 pounds (20-125 kilograms)

36 inches-7 feet (91-213 centimetres)


about Kelso parks and the activities being offered this summer, visit <http://www.conservationhalton.ca/park-details?park=kelso>.

Veronica Appia is a reporter with the Independent. She can be reached at vappia@metroland.com.



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