

# Adventure Sports Center International

## Now Open At WISP

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After years of discussion, planning and anticipation, ASCI — the Adventure Sports Center International — is now open for business as the East Coast's premier adventure destination. Located just above Maryland's Wisp Resort next to Deep Creek Lake, ASCI sits upon 18 acres donated by Wisp, atop the 3,115 foot summit of Marsh Mountain. The Center's operations are housed in a structure reminiscent of a casual country lodge, featuring two covered side porches and dormer windows, and housing offices, a conference/class room and pro shop with carefully selected equipment for sale or rent.

Open to the public since May 2007, ASCI has added another reason to visit Marsh Mountain, one that makes it unique: it is now home to the world's only controlled whitewater course located atop a mountain. This 1,700 foot-long course, which caters to skill levels ranging from amateur sports enthusiasts to world-class competitive athletes, offers visitors an authentic whitewater experience in a setting that appears natural, yet is controlled by state-of-the-art technology that allows for multiple adjustments. Options include guided whitewater rafting, kayaking and canoeing. The average rafting trip lasts about two hours, including five to seven circuits.

Those who prefer to stay dry can explore the 550-acre Fork Run Recreation Area adjacent to ASCI. Opportunities now available include 3.5 miles of trails for mountain biking and hiking, plus areas for rock climbing and “bouldering,” defined by Wikipedia as the sport of “climbing without a rope on large boulders to a height no higher than that from which a fall causes significant bodily harm.” By May 2009, mountain bikers and hikers will have an additional seven miles of trail to explore. Other planned options include a freeriding course for a more



extreme mountain biking experience, additional rock climbing and bouldering venues, rappelling, outdoor classrooms, a Global Positioning System navigation course, a group camping area, trailhead amenities, a Challenge Course and even a course on medicinal plants.

Education is a primary focus for ASCI as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. “This is a great nexus for outdoor recreation and environmental awareness,” says Matt Taylor, ASCI’s director of operations. “This is an institution that allows us to practice what we preach and build clients’ personal awareness. Plus it’s tons of fun, a bigger-than-life gymnasium.” Taylor says he has seen people who were once fearful of water and rivers emerge with a newfound sense of self-esteem after successfully navigating the course’s rapids.

The ASCI logo, EVOLVE, cleverly illustrates the concept of adventure sports as a catalyst for personal growth. Juxtaposed near its letters are five silhouettes of an individual in the process of, in ASCI’s words, “evolving to the next level of adventure:” 1) lounging in a recliner, 2) stooping in a rather ape-like position, 3) standing somewhat more upright, 4) purposefully striding along, and finally, 5) skillfully maneuvering a kayak with proper body position and paddle poised overhead.

The Center itself has evolved considerably since opening in May. “We’re ahead of where we thought we’d be,” says Taylor. “We strive to be conservative and stay within boundaries, yet be ambitious with our goals. We want to foster a long-term sensibility that combines conservation with recreation.” By mid-summer, at least 200 visitors per day came to experience the whitewater course, and more than 1,000 spectators attended the summer’s Olympic whitewater trials. Taylor hopes the Center will eventually lure up to 500 whitewater enthusiasts per day and 5,000 attendees to major events during the whitewater season.

“The public is most curious about the whitewater course, especially the technical details,” says Taylor. “It’s essentially an artificial riverbed, a hybrid of natural

materials and high-tech techniques.” Designed by the McLaughlin Whitewater Design Group of Denver, Co. (<http://mclaughlinwhitewater.com>) with input from ASCI staff, the course features six wave-shaper metal plates on hinges that can be raised or lowered with pneumatically controlled bladders that literally raise and lower the course’s bottom to adjust its 10 individual rapids to achieve Class II, Class



III or Class IV conditions. A conveyor system located between the entry point and the course itself allows visitors to experience multiple trips along the course without having to disembark. The course is designed to simultaneously accommodate about 120 rafters and 30 individual boaters.

And then there’s all that water—13 million gallons—that’s needed to fill the course. Fortunately, a reservoir in the form of Deep Creek Lake sits below the course. The WISP needs water from the Lake to operate some of the most sophisticated snowmaking operations in the world. The Center needs water from the Lake for the whitewater course. So a synergy emerged from a mutual need. The WISP tied its pumping system to that of ASCI; in return, WISP developed a system to pump water around the ASCI whitewater course to decrease the water temperature

and thus create a giant radiator for snowmaking. The result is energy savings. In the summer, excess water from the course is fed into the Wisp irrigation system to water the WISP golf course and mountaintop residences. The result is water savings. It's a win-win situation that works for the greater good.

The ASCI vision took shape after the 1989 Whitewater Slalom World Championships were held on the Savage River in Garrett County. The event's organizers were encouraged by the former president of the ICF (the International Canoe Federation, the world's governing body for all paddle sports) to utilize the world-class outdoor resources of Garrett County and the Allegheny Mountains and thus make adventure sports a part of the region's overall cultural and economic future. Because naturally occurring whitewater in Garrett County can only be found in remote locations, the idea of building an artificial, re-circulating whitewater course gained support. The vision soon expanded to include programming in other adventure sports now offered or planned.

Before developing ASCI, its founders laid a foundation for adventure sports in Garrett County by creating the Garrett College Adventure Sports Institute (ASI). This was the first undergraduate program in adventure sports recreation management in the United States. Since then, ASI has graduated students who are now leaders in the adventure sports industry. As anticipated, ASI has developed local talent as a home-grown human resource for ASCI; seven are graduates. The two entities share a common vision, as well as many of the same board members.

And so ASCI was born, with construction beginning in August 2003 and completed in April 2007. Its doors opened to the public the next month. The total cost: \$24 million. In the course of excavating the more than 40 million pounds of rock at the site, it became clear that many of the larger boulders (up to 80 tons each) could be used in the course to simulate a natural riverbed and allow easy access at all points of the course for safety personnel.

"ASCI is staffed with leaders in outdoor experiences," says Taylor. "We make the outdoors accessible." World-class instructors help visitors hone their skills in all disciplines offered. As per its educational mission, the Center runs corporate retreats, teaches GPS and orienteering skills,

offers onsite child care at the Adventure Zone, hosts children from groups like the Darrell Green Youth Life Foundation and operates a Kids' Adventure Camp. To support local paddlers, ASCI hosts the Friday Night Fun Series of bi-weekly whitewater competitions that allow participants to accumulate weekly points to win a title as the King or Queen of the River or pick up weekly prizes.

In addition, ASCI offers three service programs. The Yough Paddling Club, according to Taylor, "gives local paddlers ownership of paddling in the area" and encourages seasoned paddlers to help their younger cohorts enhance their skills. The Community Days program offers residents of Garrett and Allegany Counties an 80 percent discount on rafting and kayaking at the course. And the Scholarship Fund, with more than \$20,000 to date in contributions, allows local school groups to visit the Center and enjoy its programs.

Then there are the world-class events that inspire and energize participants and spectators alike. A month after opening, the ASCI Showdown Pro Climbing Competition featured top athletes in the fields of freestyle kayaking and rock climbing. In early August, the Center hosted the US National Whitewater Slalom Competition for its last race before the pre-Olympic competition in Beijing, China. The US Freestyle Kayak National Competition is slated for the last weekend of September. And the 2007 Whitewater Symposium will unite those working in all aspects of kayaking, from instructors to manufacturers to outfitters. Taylor plans to locate the International Whitewater Hall of Fame at ASCI, and envisions its evolution into an Adventure Sports Hall of Fame.

On a more local level, ASCI will participate in Garrett County's fall festivities by hosting the first annual Autumn Glory Adventure Triathlon, featuring whitewater paddling, mountain biking and trail running. The date is October 13.

If there is a central theme to ASCI, it would be synergy: with the Wisp Resort; with ASI; with Garrett County government, tourism and businesses; with the community; with the world of professional adventure sports athletes; with its environment and among its talented staff members. The result is a unique, family-friendly venue that offers visitors a taste of the wilderness in a spectacular setting.