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Paul Breuer still enjoys leading trips down the New and Gauley Rivers.



Adventures on the Gorge overlooks the New River and its namesake bridge.

Fifty Years, Two Rivers, Some Hippies, Meryl Streep and Luck. Here's How West Virginia Outfitters Popularized Rafting and Grew Their Operations into One of the World's First and Largest Adventure Resorts

FAYETTEVILLE, W. Va. February 14, 2023 - One of the first and largest adventure resorts in the world, [Adventures on the Gorge](#) (AOTG), can trace its roots back 50 years ago to the earliest days of whitewater rafting in Southern West Virginia's [New River Gorge](#). The story of the resort's evolution is one of imagination, youthful determination, excellent timing and a whole lot of luck.



Breuer's Mountain River Tours was the first outfitter to offer commercial trips down the Gauley River.



The resort has added a variety of overnight accommodations.

Paul Breuer was a cash-strapped college graduate and self-described hippie from Ohio who had learned paddling skills working at Cincinnati's Morgan's Canoe Livery, a family-owned company that had pioneered a burgeoning paddling industry in Southwestern Ohio.

In spring 1969, Breuer and some friends put those skills to the test by attempting to raft Southern West Virginia's New River when the water was especially wild from spring rains.

The group traveled from Cincinnati to the New River Gorge with two inner tubes, some maps and other basic supplies. They lashed the inner tubes together, topped them with a wood frame for rowing and named their creation "Turkey" after one of the crew members found a turkey feather at the put-in site.

Turkey worked. Until it didn't. After a harrowing flip that dumped the five-man crew, three rafters swam to safety while Breuer and one other managed to mount one of the inner tubes, ditch the frame and paddle by hand atop the tube to shore. The frame was never recovered. This [video](#) documents that legendary early paddling trip through the raging hydraulics and pools of the New River in the spring.

Over the next four years, Breuer returned to Southern West Virginia again and again to gain rafting experience on the New and Gauley Rivers. By 1973, Breuer acquired enough experience and equipment to launch Mountain River Tours (MRT). The company was among the first to offer rafting trips on the New River and the first to provide rafting trips on the Gauley River.

Although Breuer and like-minded adventurers may not have set out to popularize a new sport deep in the mountains of Southern West Virginia, that is precisely what happened.

Whitewater Rafting Grows, But Not in a Straight Trajectory

Other outfitters quickly joined the growing club of adventurers. Dave Arnold, Kevin Whelan and Jeff and Doug Proctor launched Class VI. Steve Campbell and his family started Rivermen. Every spring, these friendly competitors would set up operations in trailers and tents and at picnic tables, offering guided trips on the New and Gauley Rivers. Every year, their operations became a little more sophisticated. They added overnight rafting trips. Facilities were upgraded. Cabins were built to lodge the rafters.

The outfitters became West Virginia ambassadors, cooperatively marketing and promoting their operations to state leaders and tourism organizations.

And the number of rafting guests increased annually.

Thanks largely to Breuer, the Gauley River became a paddling destination as well. In 1985, the rafting industry received a huge boost when Congress added whitewater paddling to the list of official purposes of the Summersville Dam, a 20-year-old dam operated by the Army Corps of Engineers that had been built to control flooding downstream near Charleston. The change meant that water would be released from Summersville Lake into the Gauley River during certain established days, essentially guaranteeing exciting paddling conditions. That was the year that "Gauley Season" was launched, and Mountain River Tours and other outfitters added Gauley Season paddling to their trip offerings. Three years later, in 1988, the National Park Service designated the [Gauley River National Recreation Area](#), adding further protection to the region.

The industry garnered the support of state-level legislators as well. When rafting enthusiasm slowed in the early '80s, largely due to the deep

national recession, the outfitters launched Whitewater Wednesday, an annual river trip for legislators to experience - and support - the adventure of rafting. Gov. Jay Rockefeller and Congressman Nick Rahall were among the politicians to experience Whitewater Wednesday. It was partly due to Governor Rockefeller's enthusiasm and persuasive conversation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that resulted in the coordinated water release for Gauley Season.

In another, more recent example, a bipartisan push by Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito was largely responsible for upgrading the New River National River - a designation established in 1978 - to the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve in December 2020. The national park strengthened protections for more than 53 miles of river - from the Bluestone Dam to Hawk's Nest Lake - as well as 70,000 acres of land.

Hollywood also helped popularize the sport. Released in 1972, "Deliverance" was a harrowing thriller starring Burt Reynolds, Jon Voight and Ned Beatty playing a group of friends who encountered horrific challenges during a canoe trip in Georgia. This award-winning movie, with its compelling music and spectacular scenery, prompted near-immediate interest in river sports.

By the early 1990s, rafting enthusiasm had waned. Then came a 1994 Hollywood blockbuster called "The River Wild" starring Meryl Streep and Kevin Bacon. Although the thriller was filmed on rivers in Oregon and Montana, rafting outfitters worldwide benefited from the resulting spike in popularity among river adventure-smitten movie viewers.

The Next Logical Step - A Resort Dedicated to Adventure

For the next 30-some years, the industry grew and the sport became increasingly popular. While paddling the New River was the bread-and-butter for most outfitters, the raging Gauley River during the fall - when it known as the "Beast of the East" - became the bucket list U.S. paddling destination for experienced rafters.

With the increasing popularity of the sport, the hippies-turned-businessmen outfitters began acquiring land and building cabins, campgrounds and other lodging to accommodate their guests. And they added more adventures.

Ziplines had begun to pop up around the country. Rock climbing, mountain biking and hiking were also popular outdoor adventures. Fishing experienced a resurgence, thanks in part to the 1992 film "A River Runs Through It." And the New River Gorge, with its mountains, forests, river and wilderness areas, as well as its convenient location within a day's drive of much of the country, was a perfect place for travelers to experience these adventures.

In 2007, a group of investors with a passion for whitewater rafting and a vision for expanding tourism in the New River region brought together three of the region's top outfitters, Mountain River Tours, Class VI and Rivermen. The investors also acquired the outfitters' assets including rafting equipment, cabins, retail facilities and restaurants.

The result was [Adventures on the Gorge](#), one of the world's first resorts built for an array of guided outdoor adventures. The central concept was to offer a line-up of adventures that could be experienced by everyone, not just the fittest and most athletic of travelers.

The resort is situated on 250 acres overlooking the New River Gorge and adjacent to what is now the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve after NPS upgraded the destination to national park status in December 2020.

In 2009, the acclaimed [TreeTops Zipline Canopy Tour](#) was constructed in the resort's lush, on-campus Eastern Hemlock forest. In 2011, the resort added the assets of another outfitter, Songer Whitewater. Next came [TimberTrek Aerial Adventure Park](#) and [Canyon Falls Swimming Pool](#) in 2012. Four years later the resort opened the [Lookout Post](#), a small-group conference center.

In 2017, the resort opened 20 [Kaymoor Cabins and Suites](#), bringing the number of cabins at the resort to 128. And in 2021, the resort added a guest welcome center, the [Sunset Pavilion](#) perched on the edge of the gorge and a favorite space for outdoor dining and events, a campground with RV sites, glamping tents, tent platforms and a bathhouse. In 2022, AOTG purchased an adjacent nine-acre property with two multi-bedroom [vacation homes](#) for larger groups.

Adventures on the Gorge Today

Although a handful of other resorts dedicated to adventure have been built in the U.S., few offer as diverse and extensive a lineup of adventures as AOTG. Rafting trips on the New and Gauley remain the most popular of all of its offerings. Other adventures include two ziplines, an aerial obstacle course, fishing, kayaking, SUP, rock climbing and rappelling, mountain biking and guided hiking.

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About Adventures on the Gorge

Established in 2007, Adventures on the Gorge is one of the world's first adventure resorts. Located on more than 250 acres adjacent to the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, the resort offers more than two dozen outdoor adventures including whitewater rafting on the New and Gauley Rivers, aerial adventures, rock climbing, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, fishing, mountain biking and hiking. The resort features an array of lodging choices including deluxe multi-bedroom [rental homes](#) and [cabins](#), [hotel-style](#) cabins, [loft-style](#) cabins, [rustic](#) cabins, [glamping tents](#), [RV sites](#) and [campgrounds](#). In addition, the resort offers [restaurants](#), [shops](#), a [conference center](#) and a variety of [vacation packages](#).

For more information, visit the [website](#) or connect with the resort on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [TripAdvisor](#), [YouTube](#), [TikTok](#) and [Vimeo](#) and by signing up for AOTG [e-newsletter](#).

Reservations can be made [online](#) or by calling 1-855-379-8738.

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