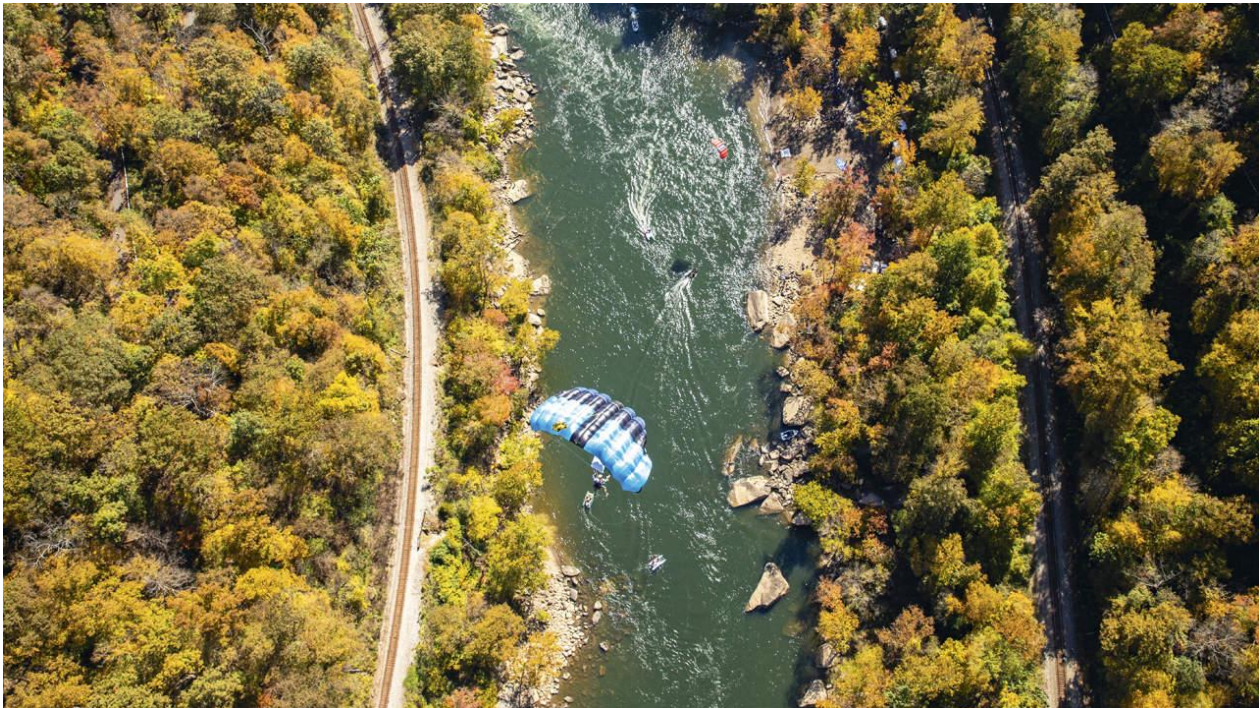


New River Gorge: Bridge Day [C1]

Il terzo sabato di ottobre, da oltre trent'anni, si svolge il più grande evento di sport estremi del mondo, nel quale i BASE jumpers rischiano la vita lanciandosi dal ponte del New River Gorge, nel West Virginia. Due organizzatori ripercorrono la storia di questo avvenimento e ci spiegano le precauzioni da prendere affinché sia sicuro e divertente per tutti.



New River Gorge Bridge in West Virginia in the US is [host](#) to the largest [single-day](#) extreme sporting event on the planet. On Bridge Day, BASE jumpers fly 267 metres into the [gorge](#) below, while rappellers ascend and descend from the [catwalk](#). 'BASE' [stands for](#) 'building, antenna, [span](#) or earth', the four categories of fixed objects that participants jump from with parachutes on their backs. The [spans](#) are typically bridges, like the one across New River.

DARING FEATS

Bridge Day takes place every third Saturday in October. Tens of thousands of spectators gather on the bridge to marvel at the daring [feats](#), while [vendors](#) sell food, drinks and memorabilia. The bridge itself is an iconic landmark, a

single-arch construction [span](#)ning almost 1km. To find out more, Speak Up spoke to Tim Naylor of the New River Gorge Convention & Visitors Bureau. He explained that Bridge Day really started with an illegal jump by local veteran Burton Ervin, two years after the bridge was built. **Tim Naylor**(American accent): We call him the father of Bridge Day. He had this crazy idea to jump off the bridge and nobody had done it before. And then late one night August 1979, he jumped. He got out of a moving vehicle, and jumped off. There were people at the bottom with [spotlights](#) trying [to dot](#) him where to land and he did it. He was arrested but then he took that to the Fayette County Commission and said, "Hey, this is something that you can do and it can be done as an event." And then that all really [brought about](#) the birth of Bridge Day.

A BIGGER DEAL

Every year attracts more visitors and more participants. Bridge Day BASE coordinator Marcus Ellison — a BASE jumper himself — [recalled](#) last year's attendance. **Marcus Ellison** (American accent): Last year we had somewhere around 315 or 320 range. We collectively made 767 base jumps last year. **Tim Naylor**: The jumpers are able to get in as many jumps as they can in that time frame, but it is [time-consuming](#); jumping, getting to the bottom, repacking your [gear](#), taking the bus all the way back up to the top. So on average two to three jumps.

SECURITY

The event is a huge logistical operation. Organised by the Bridge Day Commission, it also counts on the involvement of the Fayette County Council and other government agencies before and during the event, as Naylor explains. **Tim Naylor**: At the event we have Water Rescue, a water rescue organisation that helps. We have State Police [manning](#) the entrances on both sides, also helping control the [crowds](#), as well as the Sheriff's Department. National Park Service, they do their part.

PREPARATION

Marcus Ellison and his team [handle](#) safety for the participants. BASE-specific [gear](#) is required and a [gear](#) inspection takes place when the jumpers first arrive. They also make sure the jumpers themselves are prepared, says Ellison. **Marcus Ellison:** It's a beginner event, so we do a lot of teaching and it's a lot of people's first BASE jump ever. So we want to make sure that those people have [gear](#) that's not only safe, but it is also [hooked up](#), [rigged](#) and is performing as it should. On the day of the event, we have several different people in our staff check people along the way as they come into the line. Experienced jumpers that have been here year after year, because it's a very high-energy environment out there and, if it's your first time out there, it can be a lot and [overwhelming](#).

COORDINATION

On the day, the rappellers start with a [flag-raising](#). Their turns on the [ropes](#) then have to be coordinated with the BASE jumpers, who have to know where the rappelling lines are, as Ellison explains. **Marcus Ellison:** We [brief](#) the jumpers about where those are and what to do if they hit one and how to avoid them. The river underneath the bridge is [swift](#) water, [swift](#), white water. The water is moving quickly and it's a lot of high energy. So we have four motorised boats in the water at all times in case people land in the water. And a lot of people choose to land in the water, because there's a saying that goes, "You can dry faster than you [heal](#)". So instead of trying [to pile](#) it in on the [gravel bar](#) down there, take the water and, you know, let your [ankles](#) live to see another day.

BEAUTY BEFORE ADRENALINE

Part of the appeal of Bridge Day is the beauty of the area at that time of year. It was recently declared the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, the 63rd national park in the United States. **Marcus Ellison:** In the beginning of this event, it was never intended to be about BASE jumping or anything like that. It was originally meant to be a fall foliage viewing festival,

because it happens in October and we live in an area with a lot of different types of trees and the leaves fall off and change colours in the fall.

BUT WHY?

While Bridge Day sounds like a lot of fun to watch, it begs the question, what drives the participants to launch themselves off the bridge? We asked Marcus Ellison about his own personal experience as a BASE jumper. Why does he do it and how does it make him feel? **Marcus Ellison:** I find a deep freedom and silence in the moments when your feet disconnect from the object. That split second of release when there's nothing else there, nothing else matters except for that performance right then and there. All your life problems and whatever fade into the background and you have this very clear moment of existence and freedom. That's what I continue to do it for, because it feels incredible. www.officialbridgeday.com

Glossary

- **crowds** = folle
- **swift** = rapida
- **drives** = spingere
- **host** = ospitante
- **catwalk** = passerella sospesa
- **flag-raising** = alzabandiera
- **ankles** = caviglie
- **single-day** = di un solo giorno
- **feats** = prodezze
- **hooked up** = agganciare
- **to pile** = impilare, ammucciare
- **spanning** = estendersi
- **heal** = guarire
- **gravel bar** = striscia di ghiaia
- **begs the question** = portare alla domanda
- **gorge** = gola
- **span** = campata (lunghezza di un ponte)
- **spotlights** = riflettori
- **brought about** = realizzare, portare avanti
- **brief** = dare istruzioni
- **vendors** = venditori
- **to dot** = segnalare
- **overwhelming** = sconvolgente, incredibile
- **split second** = frazione di secondo
- **stands for** = significare
- **manning** = presidiare
- **handle** = gestire
- **rigged** = armare
- **ropes** = corde
- **recalled** = ricordare
- **time-consuming** = lungo, impegnativo
- **gear** = attrezzatura
- **fade** = svanire