
canopy researchers can learn form us

Posted by jmaher - 01/26/2004 05:29pm

I was recently shown an article that is to appear in a prestigious scientific journal. The article was written by a well-regarded scientist who goes into the tropical canopy as part of his field research. The purpose of the article is to detail canopy access techniques that could be employed for canopy research.

At the beginning, the article asserted that there were only two methods of canopy access suitable for the researcher working on a tight budget. These were single rope technique, of which he advocated only one method, and the use of climbing spurs. He also mentioned canopy towers, booms, canopy rafts, and other exotic means of access, all of which he rejected as being too expensive. I agree with this rejection, however, I do not agree with the ideas that there is only one method of SRT suitable for canopy access and that climbing spurs are a suitable option for exploring the forest canopy.

This article is representative of a condition that I find bothersome. Most canopy researchers, it would seem, have never really taken the time to explore the vast amount of knowledge and techniques that exist within our own recreational climbing community. I would like to offer up the opinion that canopy researchers would do well to spend more time listening to those of us who climb regularly and often and are constantly experimenting with new and better ways to advance ourselves upwards into the tree tops.

A conversation with this particular scientist was revealing in that I discovered he had never heard of double rope technique. When asked how he advanced himself beyond his initial entry pitch, he replied that he usually simply climbed his way about the canopy using a lanyard. If limbs were out of reach, he did not go there. He had never considered the possibility that there were methods that would allow him to move all about the tree, almost anywhere he wanted to go, without ever having to abandon his rope. He had never considered taking a throwline into the tree with him and using it to extend his climb. All of his settings involved tying off his rope to anchors at ground level. He had never seen a pull-down in which the climbing rope is tied off at the anchor limb. The SRT method that he used and advocated is a method that I had never seen before, was quite complicated, and was quite equipment intensive.

After only one climb with this scientist I was able to convince him of the necessity of learning to double rope climb. He was also quite amazed that I was able to rig my rope for my SRT entry pitch in such a way that when I reached the top of the pitch I was able to have both ends of my rope available for further advancement through the crown of the tree.

Several days after this climb, he had the opportunity to see other recreational climbers in action, and we had the opportunity to overwhelm him with more techniques, tricks, and general climbing information than he could handle. By the time we were through, he had been thoroughly converted, and admitted that it was time he abandoned the method that he had been using, since we were all climbing circles around him.

The point I would like to make here is that the scientific climbing community would do well to spend more time listening to the recreational climbing community. We have a lot to offer, and while we may not be in possession of the same academic credentials as most of these scientists, we do have a lot of information and expertise to offer in the way of useful and proven climbing techniques. One of my goals is to create a better liaison between the scientific community and the recreational community.

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Re:canopy researchers can learn form us

Posted by oldtimer - 02/20/2008 12:43pm

Ok this is the article that initiated the conversation about "Research Climbers not knowing how to climb." or something like that.

A couple of issues here:

1.- Joe is talking about ONE person's Techniques.

2.- Joe took the time to educate and show the researcher alternative techniques and the canopy researcher was able to see the light!

3.- Kind of hard to evaluate a general population of anything by looking at just ONE individual specimen in the sample. This researcher apparently was never had the opportunity to be trained in Technical Climbing Techniques and was using whatever he was familiar with.

4.- Sometimes a researcher (or anyone for that matter) considers himself "an expert" and publish something making assertions that may not be exactly right to the rest of people but because they are the "authority" and "published" the

paper then others consider his/her ideas to be true. (Like spiking up a tree to climb it -ouch!) I have seen that in here also when some climber says something and considers himself the authority and others just jump in and show his wrong ways (self locking vs screw gate biners for example) or (Metal vs aluminum). Some people will defend their ways of doing stuff as the only way of doing it but others are quick to point out personal preferences and other safe ways to operate and accomplish the same results.

In conclusion; I think that Joe did not make an accusation against "canopy researchers" in general as using poor climbing techniques but just showed a particular example for us to learn from.

I am glad the MEA posted this topic and has created some discussion back into the board that has been slow in the last couple of months. This type of exchanges when kept at a professional level are a great tool to exchange info and to keep us interested in posting and exchanging info. For instance, I would have never been able to see the video and photos from their research if they had not posted a link here.

I think the more the general public (us) knows about these topics and their importance the more we would be willing to support a research funding or call a congressman to ask for help supporting some research instead of something that is completely out of our radar or level of understanding. Sometimes educating the general public (the taxpayer) is as important as actually doing the research because without somebody footing the bill some of these investigations would never be undertaken.

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Re:canopy researchers can learn form us

Posted by MEA - 02/20/2008 05:59pm

Hi Oldtimer,

All your points below are well stated, and I completely agree.

I should have been more careful in the wording of my initial post, as there is certainly no evidence that recreational climbers in general doubt the climbing skills of canopy researchers in general.

Thanks again for your insight and feedback.

~MEA

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