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## May 26 wilderness climb in Georgia

Posted by Wild Bill - 04/29/2007 01:00pm

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Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park near Pine Mountain, Ga., will host a one-day backwoods tree-climbing event on Saturday, May 26, for experienced climbers with their own equipment who will be in the west Georgia/east Alabama area for the Memorial Day weekend.

This is a free, climb-at-your-own-risk event that will start at 10 a.m. at the park office, 2970 Georgia Highway 190, in Pine Mountain. We will leave the office almost immediately so please do not be late.

Even though the event is free, all vehicles must pay a \$3 parking fee and each climber must complete the park's liability release form. A parent or legal guardian must accompany any climbers younger than 18 years old.

The park's camping areas will be crowded during the popular weekend but a limited number of backcountry campsites are available. Other park activities for Saturday night include a bluegrass concert.

From Atlanta, go southwest on Interstate 85 for about 55 miles, then south on Interstate 185 for 13 miles. Exit onto Georgia Highway 18, turn left, and follow the signs to FDR State Park. You will pass the internationally famous Callaway Gardens Resort.

From Montgomery, go northeast on I-85 into Georgia and turn south on I-185 for 13 miles to Georgia Highway 18. Turn left and follow the signs to FDR State Park.

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Posted by Geof\_K - 05/02/2007 12:12pm

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Thanks for the invite Wild Bill.  
I cannot be there, but I'll be there for the November climb.

Geof

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Posted by Wildrice - 05/23/2007 11:37pm

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I have had some phone calls and e-mails regarding the Wilderness Climb-- I hope this assist you all:

We will meet at the Park Office and then head towards the Trading Post. We will park at the Trading Post Parking and hike about .4 to .5 miles in a wilderness setting(that means no people should be there besides us).

The place has a creek that is about 8ft to 12ft wide and also includes smaller braided streams or brooks, so the fern layer is thick and lush.

This area is dominated by Poplars and Oaks, but also has hickories, and Longleaf Pines. Most trees are old growth.

Average height of trees range from 80ft to 100 plus ft tall.

If you have any questions please free free to contact me or Wild-Bill.

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## Permission to Climb

Posted by Wildrice - 06/01/2007 01:14pm

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Maybe this is a good way to start. I am an Interpretive Ranger for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. I work at a large state park that is run by a park manager and his assistant manager. Both of them are also law enforcement rangers. As a DNR Ranger I have to be honest; most state and federal parks do not allow/permit technical tree climbing. Please understand that the managers/superintendents of these parks have to be concerned with many, many factors such as visitor safety, campground management, fire suppression, law enforcement, traffic control on busy weekends,

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maintenance problems, ecosystems, native plants, protected species, historical resources, and a whole host of other factors.

Roped tree climbing is still a new wilderness activity inside state and federal parks, and most rangers do not know about it. Their duties are often already so cumbersome and varied that they have little time to learn about new activities.

My park does allow guided climbs (event climbs, open climbs, wilderness climbs, etc.) that are supervised by a ranger or trained park volunteer. All climbers must sign a liability release form and agree to follow park regulations and practice good wilderness ethics. The climbing is done generally in areas well away from the main campgrounds and park attractions.

I was able to help bring the activity into the park because I trained as a tree climber and facilitator and I was willing to donate some of my off-duty time to manage the program. I also have several trained volunteers to help run the program, and we have used tree climbing to assist local university professors with their research projects.

Now, several other state parks in the Georgia system are looking at technical tree climbing (adventure, research and educational tree climbing) as a viable outdoor activity. It has take a long time to spread the word, and it is still developing..

How would I go about it if, say, I was a technical tree climber on the West Coast and I wanted to get permission to climb in a California state park?

I probably would make a weekday appointment (weekends are not good) with the Park Manager/Superintendent or the Senior Interpretive Ranger and ask for enough time to demonstrate our double-rope climbing techniques. If possible, I would probably create a short PowerPoint program on my home computer that would be about five to eight minutes long and would cover the main technical and safety points of our sport; anything longer than eight minutes would probably bore them. Nearly every state and federal park how have plenty of computers in their offices that can handle a CD or DVD, so there's usually no need to take a laptop to the meeting.

If they put me off for a few weeks I would try to pleasantly contact them again. Eventually, most of them will agree to meet because they really are nice people and are dedicated public servants - they're just sometimes overworked.

I would dress appropriately and professionally - clean shirt, clean blue jeans or climbing pants, clean boots or hiking shoes (let's face it, a tie-dyed Jerry Garcia tee shirt and purple laces in your hiking boots isn't going to impress them) - and I would take a few minutes before the meeting to make sure I could correctly spell their names and to learn a little about the park and its history. Any climbing equipment I brought with me would be clean, organized and in good condition. I would leave any chainsaws or handsaws or any other tools/gear of that nature at home.

You should bring all your credentials, such as first aid certification; wilderness programs certifications, climbing course certificates, etc.

Don't be disappointed if the Park Manager/Superintendent says the idea has to be "kicked upstairs" so the officials in the state or regional office can comment. Sometimes it might take several months to get a final answer, but do not be afraid to "touch base" with the Manager/Superintendent about once a month to find out if a decision has been made.

Please note, that I am presenting this from a self-climbing individual, which means no facilitation, etc is in the game plan.

I would like to state that I do not support any form of Ninja Climbing, Stealth Climbing, or other similar climbing activities because if this is done(regardless if caught or not) it is setting a standard for others to follow. I believe in SAGE(Set A Good Example), if we want to be accepted then we have to SAGE.

Also, it is illegal to harm/damage natural and historical resources on State or Federal Property.

Below is some stuff from the Tree Climber Coalition that Wild Bill wrote(please note that the below document is created by Wild Bill and the Tree Climbing Coalition ). It might be helpful.

Have a Great Journey,

Wildrice

The best places to climb in the forest

Most climbers say they are looking for three things on a good wilderness trip: A tree that challenges their skill, a tree that

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has a great view, and a tree where they can enjoy the peace and quiet of the forest. It helps if all three can be found in the one perfect tree that probably is going to be hard to find without hiking off into the densest stretch of woods and looking up every few steps.

Knowing where to find the best climbing trees, and where you can climb without breaking any laws or interfering with other visitors to the backcountry, is a primary step in wilderness tree climbing. This assumes that you're climbing on public-owned land. If you're on private land, then we strongly recommend you get permission from the landowner to avoid serious trespassing charges.

Most wilderness and backcountry climbing is done on federal- or state-owned land, where permission is needed.

Climbers should be aware, though, that public lands have regulations due to specific conditions. For example, so many inexperienced rock climbers have been expensively rescued from a backcountry cliff just a couple of hours north of Atlanta that the district ranger now arrests anyone caught in the area with climbing equipment, and confiscates their equipment.

And, just because there's no specific law against tree climbing, that doesn't mean you are free from arrest. John Routon, a retired deputy sheriff who is a master tree climbing instructor, has pointed out that any experienced law enforcement officer or ranger can find a lot of different ways to charge someone who's been climbing trees if he or she thinks it is necessary.

The climber who wanders into a crowded national or state park on a Saturday morning in an orange arborist T-shirt, wearing a harness with a pruning saw hanging from it, is going to attract unwelcome attention. If the climber walks up to the nearest sequoia or redwood, fires a line into the topmost branches and begins an ascent directly over a popular hiking trail, then he or she has shown a complete lack of respect for the other visitors and has immediately made it more difficult for other tree climbers to be accepted by the public and the rangers. And he or she probably will pay a stiff fine in state or federal court.

If enough climbers show this kind of disrespect, federal officials will make a law against tree climbing. It is every tree climber's responsibility to make sure that the non-climbing public doesn't become the anti-climbing public.

The best way to stay on the good side of rangers and other forestry officials is to practice the principle of respect at all times. This is done by showing respect to your climbing tree, the wilderness around you, fellow climbers, other visitors to the forest, and the rangers who have the often difficult task of keeping it safe and clean for everybody. If a ranger tells you to stop doing something (even if you know you're right) then follow his or her orders as quickly as you can safely do it. Once you've stopped you can politely ask for an explanation. The ranger, particularly on a busy weekend, might not have time right then to fully outline his or her objections to your activity, but should be willing to set up an appointment to discuss it at a later time. Most rangers are willing to work with outdoor recreationalists who approach problems in a professional manner.

Of course, if you are really climbing in a wilderness area where you're well off the beaten path, and you are practicing safe climbing techniques and using good wilderness ethics, the ranger is not likely to object unless other visitors complain about your activity.

Tree climbers should learn the differences between the various kinds of federal- and state-owned public lands, and know that each has its own set of rules.

The most restrictive areas for tree climbers are usually national parks and state parks. Nationally, the National Park Service, a branch of the Department of the Interior, runs these. Park Service rangers are primarily involved in providing large numbers of visitors with the opportunity to safely view nature up close. State parks generally have similar missions and are normally run by rangers with missions similar to their federal counterparts. Many of these parks have regulations, which require that people stay on designated hiking trails and in designated areas. Any unusual activity -- tree climbing is definitely one of those -- is immediately stopped because they fear it might harm someone or interfere with another visitor's enjoyment of the outdoors.

Second are national and state day-use historic sites, battlefields and monuments. On the federal level, these are also run by the National Park Service and are generally too small or too crowded for enjoyable tree climbing activities. The regulations at many of these sites are similar to those in national parks.

Next down the list are national and state wildlife refuges, where any activity that disturbs wildlife is generally discouraged. Nationally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service run these refuges. It is a separate branch of the Department of the Interior, but it cooperates closely with the National Park Service and with the Agriculture Department's U.S. Forest Service. Small groups of two to four people who climb in out-of-the-way areas likely would be welcomed by rangers unless they become destructive or noisy, or pose a real or perceived threat to wildlife or other visitors. Many wildlife refuges have strict limits on the number of daily visitors, and permits may be needed before you can legally venture into the backcountry.

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The least restrictive areas for tree climbers are national and state forests. The U.S. Forest Service, a branch of the Department of Agriculture that was formed in 1905, runs national forests. The mission statement of the Forest Service, updated in 1960, says, "National Forests shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes. This administration must be carried out in a way that provides the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high level annual or regular periodic output of the various renewable resources without impairment of the productivity of the land."

The various forestry commissions in each state usually run state forests. The rangers in both national and state forests are primarily involved in fire and pest protection for the trees, although some have been designated to work with the various visitors to the forests. Many professional foresters will likely be receptive to non-invasive climbing techniques and may even be interested in learning how to do it.

There are two types of national forests, and tree climbers should be aware of their differences.

The first type of national forest is the kind that is managed for the normal production of timber and pulp. Well-maintained logging roads usually serve these areas and they have generally loose regulations that allow a wide range of recreational activities for visitors. Professional guides are allowed to lead groups into most national forests, and people are generally allowed to camp anywhere except in areas specifically posted for no camping. Many national forests are also wildlife management areas for hunting.

The second type of national forest is the designated wilderness area. Most roads into designated wilderness areas have been closed off and allowed to grow up, motorized vehicles are prohibited, logging is generally not allowed, and commercial activities such as professional guide services are not allowed. Backcountry camping is generally allowed, except in areas specifically posted for no camping. Hunting is allowed in many wilderness areas on specific days.

State forests generally have rules and regulations similar to the national forests.

Tree climbers have found that rangers in national forests and state forests usually get along very well with visitors who respect the regulations and the rights of other visitors.

Some of those other visitors are hunters and fishermen. Although many people do not think the taking of wildlife is ethical, it is legal just about everywhere in North America. And the fees they pay for hunting and fishing licenses amount to many millions of dollars each year that are used for conservation projects, trail maintenance, protection from forest fires, wilderness safety programs, and the purchase of more wilderness areas. An argument in favor of tree climbing is that hunters are often allowed to use tree stands in most wildlife management areas of national and state forests, and roped tree climbing has proven to be far safer than the use of the tree stands.

### Suggested ethics for tree climbers

Wilderness is, according to the U.S. Forest Service, "a location for renewal of mind and spirit. This rejuvenation is more than what might occur from simply redrawing or escaping from urban pressures. What makes the wilderness experience unique is the tranquility, peace and silence to be found (there) and the opportunity it affords for contemplation."

But without rules and ethics, even the most remote stretch of backcountry can become as trashy, noisy and unhealthy as a Paris street corner when the French garbage collectors are on strike. Almost every hiker has come across the rusty refrigerators, oily engine blocks and ripped sofas that have been wantonly discarded in the middle of the night beside forest service roads. Most campers, at one time or another, have been awakened at 3 a.m. by carloads of drunken teenagers. And nearly everybody has come across the occasional campsite so badly littered that nobody else would want to camp there.

Those are just a few of the reasons why we have to follow rules, why many organizations and agencies have to develop lists of ethics, and why the government has to hire extra forest rangers.

Rules, it has been said many times, are what you follow when other people are watching; ethics are what you follow when nobody is watching. And a major part of any wilderness ethic is wilderness etiquette.

Edward Abbey, a conservation writer and outdoor ethicist in the mid-1960s, puts it this way: "We have agreed not to drive our automobiles into cathedrals, concert halls, art museums, legislative assemblies, private bedrooms and the other sanctums of our culture; we should treat our (forests) with the same deference, for they, too, are holy places."

If Abbey is right, and most wilderness visitors think he is, then we owe it not just to ourselves but also to all of humanity to follow some rules of conduct when visiting Mother Nature's most holy sanctum.

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Here are a few ethical tips compiled from lists by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, other organizations, and other tree climbers. They include general tips for all forest and backcountry users, and specific tips for recreational tree climbers.

All tips are centered around the no-trace ethic so future visitors can experience the same beauty, peace and quiet that you enjoyed. No one wants to do more damage than a favorite spot in the forest can stand.

1. Plan ahead to minimize impact! Avoid holidays and popular weekends. Tree climbing usually isn't much fun when there are large crowds using the forest and adjacent recreational areas.

2. Limit your group size! The U.S. Forest Service recommends six or fewer as the optimum number of people in the backcountry, and the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society both suggest eight. Actually, many areas can handle more people if they're careful. Tree climbing groups should use common sense to determine the number of people their climbing area can handle, and large groups could easily be split into several smaller teams that climb in widely scattered trees.

3. Pack it in, pack it out! Do not leave even one piece of litter in the forest or at parking areas. In fact, tree climbers can score a few points with rangers by cleaning up the occasional mess left behind by previous visitors to the forest.

4. Minimize your impact on the forest! Wear clothing that blends with the terrain or woods, avoid loud noises and shouting (two-way radios work well with tree climbers), follow existing trails when possible and avoid trampling bushes and other undergrowth. Walk single-file in the center of the trail and try not to kick up dirt and stones.

5. Avoid over-camping in an area! Most wilderness campsites will return to normal in just a few months if they're not overused. Pick a site that's invisible from popular trails and other camping parties, and camp at least 25 feet from natural water sources and "beauty spots" in the forest.

6. Don't contaminate water sources! Never wash dishes, clothes or yourself directly in streams or springs, always use biodegradable soap and dispose of wastewater at least 100 feet from the stream. Latrines should be dug at least 100 feet from the stream, and should be thoroughly filled in before leaving the area.

7. Use extreme care with fires! When possible, avoid building a campfire. If you must make a fire, make a fire ring with rocks, do it in the safest possible spot and keep it small, so it can be easily and quickly extinguished to avoid forest fires. Never cut standing trees or pull up vegetation to build a fire. Check for fire danger before entering a wilderness of backcountry area. Campfires are often illegal during peak fire seasons.

8. Respect wildlife! Don't disturb wildlife if possible, and never feed a wild animal. Mother Nature has done a wonderful job of providing wildlife food and habitat in the last few million years and it's not likely that man can improve on her efforts. For example: white oak acorns have extra protein to give animals more energy in early fall as they gather food, while red oak acorns usually drop a few weeks later and have extra fat to help animals store up weight for the winter. Wild berries from dogwoods, persimmons, hollies and other trees and plants are loaded with the right carbohydrates and complex vitamins that wild animals need in various seasons. Your picnic lunch likely does not contain the nutrition that most wild animals need to survive. Also, avoid climbing a tree where a wild animal has its nest or den.

9. Respect your climbing tree! A wilderness climb is done in a wild tree, as opposed to a tame tree in the park that has been cleaned up for inexperienced climbers. Use a cambium saver or rope saver when necessary. Do not cut or break small limbs that get in your way; instead, if you're experienced enough to climb in the wilderness then you're experienced enough to find a way around them. Leave your arborist saws at home or back at camp. Remember that many other forest visitors will get upset if they see you carrying saws into the woods, and they most likely will complain to the nearest ranger. Climbing spikes should never, ever be used in a wild tree and are, in fact, illegal in many state and federal forests.

10. Protect other visitors to the forest! Don't climb in a tree that overhangs a foot trail or road, don't block trails or roads with your equipment and packs, and don't allow inexperienced people to stand under your climbing tree. For security reasons, it is often best to hide your packs and other non-climbing equipment well off the trail while you're aloft.

11. Be friendly with strangers! Most people will eventually understand your activity if you take the time to explain it to them in a friendly and professional manner. Point out to them that you have done everything you can to protect the tree from the impact of climbing. Show them how you get the rope in the tree and how you ascend the rope. You might even gain another recruit or two for our growing sport of recreational tree climbing.

12. Climb in out-of-the-way places when possible! You'll have fewer complaints from other forest visitors and you'll probably have a more enjoyable climbing experience.

13. Obey any orders from a ranger! If he or she tells you to stop climbing in a tree or refrain from another activity, then do

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it as quickly as safely possible. Do it pleasantly and without argument, and then politely ask the ranger to explain his or her reasons for stopping the climb. Rangers sometimes might not have time right then to discuss it, but are usually willing to make a future appointment. Many rangers will work with you in the future if they know you're willing to follow the regulations.

14. Always tell somebody where you will climb! Write out the directions to your climbing area, where you plan to park, what trail you plan to hike, and when you plan to be back. Include, if possible, the exact longitude and latitude of the tree and the telephone number for the ranger district office or the proper law enforcement agency.

15. Carry a map of the area and a compass! And know how to use them. A GPS receiver is also great if used in addition to the map and compass. A cell telephone is also desirable, particularly if there are inexperienced backcountry climbers in the group, and should be carried even if you can't get service at the tree and have to hike to a nearby hilltop or high point for emergency service. Discuss the route to the climbing tree and its location with everyone in your party, and establish a place to meet if you get separated.

16. Always follow the rules for safe tree climbing! Always take your first-aid kit, and make sure any supplies that were used on the last trip have been replaced. Make sure your ropes and harnesses are in good shape, never climb above the limb where your rope is anchored, check your knots and down lines frequently, and never allow an inexperienced person to climb without close supervision. Climb in teams of three or more if possible, and encourage climbers to take turns as the ground person.

17. Limit the number of climbers in a wild tree! In the excitement of ascending a wild tree that has never been climbed before, it's quite easy to get too many ropes and climbers into the tree at one time. Experience has shown that three to four ropes and climbers is the maximum that most wild trees can handle, particularly if there is a lot of brush at the base of the trunk that will tangle lines. If possible, one climber should remain on the ground

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Posted by Electrojake - 06/02/2007 10:23am

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A long post but a good post. . .

In my world, State parks and National recreation areas are strictly off limits. That leaves me with a ton of small undeveloped county and township hunting areas to climb in, usually 500 to 1500 acre patches of woods.

It is understandable that when people start climbing our national treasures, i.e. formerly undisturbed old growth and such, the local authorities MUST be strict to protect the environment that we all share.

When unsure of the "rules", common sense and a general respect for your surroundings works great.

WR, Thanks for compiling that info for us!  
Electrojake

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