
some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/17/2008 10:52pm

Hi everyone,

I want to comment on what seems to be a common misconception on this site: that forest canopy researchers generally do not know how to climb trees.

For the past 7 years I have been part of a research group working in the coast redwoods of northern California and the mountain ash of southeastern Australia. Every member of our research team is an excellent climber who takes the utmost care not to harm the trees or the forest canopy ecosystem. Our climbing techniques have their origins in both mountaineering and arboriculture, and our techniques evolve as new tools become available. We are safe, careful, and conscientious climbers who explore the trees for the sake of learning about the trees and the life they support.

Respectfully,

MEA

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 02/18/2008 05:54am

Hi there!

I did see one email a while back mentioning some researchers who seemed to be unsafe (I forget who sent it though!) but I can't believe this is a general opinion. After all, you guys do this for a living so you would have to be extremely competent or you wouldn't still be alive! I personally have nothing but admiration for the work you are doing.

Regards,

Michael

p.s. I think I know who you are. Did we meet at Windsor Great Park, England, in June 2005? (drinks by the cricket pavillion after the talk)

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by oldtimer - 02/18/2008 11:40am

MEA any photos and links to some of your research papers would be very educational for this group of tree enthusiasts! Many times we only heard about the bad actors and the good ones never get even mentioned here or anywhere for that matter.

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/18/2008 02:55pm

Thanks for your reply!

For pictures and more info on our research I'll refer you to the following website:

www.humboldt.edu/~sillett/

Happy climbing...

MEA

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/18/2008 02:58pm

Hi Michael (I hope this response shows up next to your message...),

Thanks for your reply.

Yes, we likely met at Windsor Great Park. It was cool seeing those big old oaks.

All the best,

MEA

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by moss - 02/18/2008 07:20pm

If anyone doubts the quality of the climber's on Dr. Sillett's research team they haven't been paying attention. Across the entire group of people who go up into trees for scientific purposes there's is probably considerable range of skill. The same is true in the rec climbing world and in the work climber world.

-moss

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by treeman - 02/18/2008 09:01pm

Hello MEA,

So tell me how you arrived at the impression that we feel canopy researchers don't know how to climb trees? I hope you aren't basing this on one of the postings, specifically Joe Maher's solo comment about his personal experience with ONE canopy researcher? I would get ticked off too if I read that kind of comment about recreational tree climbers at ICAN. If that is the case (jmahr's thread), please respond to that thread directly so we as a recreational tree climbing community have some point of reference to the origins or your impression and concerns.

If you feel we in general (recreational tree climbers)at this site have a misconception about canopy researchers, please let us know how you arrived at this. This is the oldest recreational tree climbing site- the first to go up of its kind. The threads on this particular site are over 5 years old. I have only deleted two entire threads in this site's history.

I have never seen canopy researchers talked down to here. There have been disagreements in the past between recreational climbers and canopy researchers but not outright discredit or disrespect. Are you sure you are addressing the right crowd here? Was it another web site? Was it a particular person? Is it an assumption or reaction from a posting here? Please let us know.

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by oldtimer - 02/18/2008 10:08pm

I can agree with Treeman. In the many years that we have been posting stuff here and at other rec sites I have seen very few posting by Researchers and definitely do not remember anyone questioning their methods, practices or ways of doing their climbing.

Because many canopy researchers do this activity on a regular basis (probably daily) they have even more experience than the average Recreational Tree Climber that usually climbs on a weekend or even less and rarely tackles a huge tree like those on your photos.

So the perception may not be correct that "We" think Tree Researchers are unsafe climbers.

By the way ... thanks for the "link" and photos of your research. Very educational!

:laugh:

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/19/2008 06:46pm

Hi Treeman and Oldtimer,

Thank you very much for your feedback.

Two things prompted me to post that initial message in which I defended the climbing skills of our team:

First, there were a couple of postings (admittedly quite old!) on here that definitely seemed to suggest that researchers only cared about their research and not the climbing techniques or the trees themselves.

Second, in a recent video (Ascending the Giants) the recreational climbers cited their techniques as ones that tall-tree canopy researchers should learn from. They went on to use a Big Shot to shoot into the lowest branch, which would have

then required lanyarding up and thereby impacting the lifeforms on many branches throughout the crown. At any rate, I hope I haven't offended anyone on here, as that was certainly not my intent. I suppose that these sorts of misunderstandings often arise because of lack of communication, so thank you again for communicating with me. All the best, and happy climbing!
~MEA

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by moss - 02/19/2008 07:30pm

MEAs wrote:

...Second, in a recent video (Ascending the Giants) the recreational climbers cited their techniques as ones that tall-tree canopy researchers should learn from. They went on to use a Big Shot to shoot into the lowest branch, which would have then required lanyarding up and thereby impacting the lifeforms on many branches throughout the crown.

Hmmm... haven't seen this video, any links to it available? This is a problem with the term "recreational climber". There is a relatively small community of dedicated recreational climbers who try to adhere to a strict code of "do not disturb" when they're in the forest on the ground or in a tree. But if you consider the available pool of tree climbers in the U.S. you have a large number of working arborists, forest industry workers and random rec climbers who may or may not follow any wilderness ethical standards or may have their own less strict standard. When work climbers go climb a big tree on the weekend for fun they are transformed magically into rec climbers but mileage may vary on wilderness ethics. So my question is: who are these rec climbers in the "Ascending the Giants" video?

It's often mentioned on the arborist message boards that there is resentment that researchers want to limit access to the old-growth forest in the west. Definitely some tension there.
-moss

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by treeman - 02/19/2008 09:40pm

Thanks for staying with us MAE,

No offense taken. I had my bets on the "Canopy researchers can learn form (sp) us" thread. While I still have your ear, I want to ask about this specific posting from your viewpoint as a top research climber. What is your reaction to reading this posting? Would it create a welcoming feeling or polarize you by being talked down to? I had not paid it much attention personally until you posted. It had me snooping a bit closer on the recent content on this forum. My immediate rereading of the post made me want to rename it- How to loose friends and alienate people. I felt guilty for not paying more attention. As you can see by posting dating, there is not a lot of dialog going on here on this forum. That's probably natural because scientists have a language and focus unique unto themselves. Thanks again for your visit.

I haven't heard of this new video. Is it a Jerry Berenak piece? I hope it's not an "extreme" piece. Hearst Productions in Hollywood called me shortly after "The Wild Trees" came out asking for details on how to shoot an extreme redwood climb. I rolled out some horror stories (liability risks) and sent him away. I forwarded the message to Steve as a joke but the e-mail address bounced.

Hmmm...researchers not caring for the trees they climb and technique" ? That doesn't make a lot of sense. I'm sorry you had to take a stand on that issue.

On technique. How did you view the ART gear on the hemlock climb? Did it improve efficiency (disregarding the beauty of fine machine work). I use some ART gear, but I am unfamiliar with the lanyard and positioning devices. Just curious about applications.

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by moss - 02/19/2008 10:33pm

treeman wrote:

...I had my bets on the "Canopy researchers can learn form (sp) us" thread. While I still have your ear, I want to ask

about this specific posting from your viewpoint as a top research climber. What is your reaction to reading this posting? Would it create a welcoming feeling or polarize you by being talked down to? I had not paid it much attention personally until you posted. It had me snooping a bit closer on the recent content on this forum. My immediate rereading of the post made me want to rename it- How to loose friends and alienate people....

I hadn't read that post. It looks like Joe was focusing on a particular research climber and then made a tactical error by appearing to extend that climber's practices to the general research climbing community. As usual it's a bad idea to generalize about any one group of people. I'm sure Joe has all kinds of war stories about idiosyncratic research climbers he's bumped into over the years in Panama.

The only thing I can compare it to is the birding world where some ornithologists have a low opinion of birders. It's the expected tension between professional scientists and amateurs. Same with pro arbs and rec climbers, the pro's tend to look down their noses at weekend climbers. But... those are broad generalizations. In reality there's a tremendous opportunity for productive exchange of information and support between these various groups. In birding the concept of citizen science has really taken hold. The Cornell Ornithology Lab is leading the way with the eBird database and woodland breeding bird surveys which allow citizen birders to make important contributions to scientific research.

So how can rec tree climbers have a role in supporting scientific research? Rec climbers are in a unique position to do breeding bird surveys when they climb in the forest. Staying in a fixed position (except for vertical movement) for 3-6 hours in a tree allows an observer to ID by vocalization or visual all bird species present in the vicinity of the tree. Documenting tree height, girth and species could be very useful for a research database. Photographing and documenting canopy life forms: plant, insect and other on a regular basis could provide very useful information. Rec climbers have the potential to be the outlying eyes and ears for the research community, scientists can't be everywhere. Will Blozan (Google "Tsuga Search") in North Carolina is an excellent example of a non-scientist climber who is making a tremendous contribution to publicizing and understanding the ongoing Eastern Hemlock ecodisaster and is making huge and effective effort to save the tallest remaining Eastern and Carolina Hemlock in the east. In Georgia the Maher brothers have done some great work using their technical tree climbing skills to assist in pollen collecting and cross-fertilization of blight resistant American Chestnut. I really hope that the rec climbing community can become more involved in the efforts to understand and preserve healthy forest and canopy ecosystems. Maybe a forum on the rec climber and citizen science can be a part of the Rendezvous '08 agenda.

-moss

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/19/2008 11:09pm

Hi Moss,

You can watch Ascending the Giants on YouTube.

The problem that I see with recreational climbing in SOME of the western forests, particularly the rainforests, is that there are so many sensitive canopy organisms (epiphytes). Many of the fern mats, moss mats, and lichens that grow in the crowns of rainforest trees are centuries old, yet only tenuously attached to their host trees. One carelessly-placed rope or boot can permanently destroy these creatures and the biodiversity that they themselves support. Of course I speak only for myself here, but this my reason for hoping for restrictions on recreational climbing in old-growth western rainforests. That said, there are plenty of trees in the west, such as giant Sequoia, which support very few epiphytes... and they are spectacular to climb...

~MEA

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/19/2008 11:11pm

P.S. Moss-- Will Blozan is AWESOME!

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/19/2008 11:14pm

Hi Treeman,

You can watch Ascending the Giants on YouTube. I believe the production company is called Uncage the Soul. I'm SO glad you didn't promote the 'extreme' redwood climb thing following The Wild Trees release... thank you. I love my ART positioner (with a swivel)! But I'm a little confused... which hemlock climb are you referring to?
~MEA

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by moss - 02/20/2008 07:31am

Ok, I checked out the Ascending the Giants web site and their YouTube video, at least one that I found. I didn't hear any comments about researchers but it must be somewhere. I remember these guys, a pair of arborists from Portland, Oregon. We had a discussion about them somewhere on the TCI message board. Overall they have good intent and a good message for the general public. They speak quite a bit about leave no trace and low impact climbing. They are promoting a "peak-bagging" mentality. If they're the only one doing it then it's not too much of a problem. The question is how many climbers will be inspired to follow them? We know that if the same champion trees in PNW old-growth are climbed repeatedly that there will be wear and tear on the ground, understory and in the canopy.

Just wondering though, isn't the vertical range of a big shot and fishing reel combo firing a 3 or 4 oz weight similar to crossbows or compound bows used by PNW research climbers?

-moss

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/20/2008 05:53pm

Hi Moss,

In the version of Ascending the Giants that I saw (also on YouTube) the tall tree researcher comment is in the first minute. Yes, I too thought that the video was well done in terms of inspiring people to get out into the woods... whether or not they plan on climbing. Their message generally is a very good one-- educating more folks about how great trees are... yay! I only hope it won't inspire too many people to climb the epiphyte-laden trees of the Olympic peninsula. Regarding your other question, I've never used a Big Shot-- can it shoot 250+ feet? I watched some folks using one in Australia and they too were aiming for the lowest branch of a very tall tree. Perhaps that is less an issue of range and more due to some other factor... not sure.

Anyway, thanks for your insights.

Cheers,

MEA

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by moss - 02/20/2008 08:19pm

MEA wrote:

...Regarding your other question, I've never used a Big Shot-- can it shoot 250+ feet? I watched some folks using one in Australia and they too were aiming for the lowest branch of a very tall tree. Perhaps that is less an issue of range and more due to some other factor... not sure.

I've only fired one with 10 oz bags and 1.75 or 2mm throwline. With full extension of the sling I think I can hit 120+. I've never tried it with a fishing reel and 3 or 4 oz weight so I have no idea. Be curious if anyone is hitting 200+ feet with that combo, it seems like it should be able to. With trees in my area (New England) there isn't any reason to shoot 200' since you'd be going well over the top of our tallest trees.

I figure with any tree entry there is going to be some disturbance of epiphytes, clearly the less number of times an individual PNW tree is climbed the better. I imagine that you have tag lines in trees you are studying so you can ascend directly to the upper canopy without having to screw around with shooting lines (and the potential branch thrashing that's involved) for every climb.

-moss

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 02/21/2008 01:28pm

I've used 8 oz bags with my Big Shot. It extends the range to about 130ft (VERY rough guess). I'm pretty sure that 250ft or even 200 ft is beyond the Big Shot. It's down to how fast the rubber hose can contract (don't forget the rubber itself is fairly heavy and there is also the hysteresis energy loss in the rubber) I'm guessing that 170ft would be about the limit.

Now somebody is bound to reply saying they've shot 220ft :laugh:

Michael

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by moss - 02/21/2008 03:23pm

michaeljspraggon wrote:

I've used 8 oz bags with my Big Shot. It extends the range to about 130ft (VERY rough guess). I'm pretty sure that 250ft or even 200 ft is beyond the Big Shot. It's down to how fast the rubber hose can contract (don't forget the rubber itself is fairly heavy and there is also the hysteresis energy loss in the rubber) I'm guessing that 170ft would be about the limit.

Now somebody is bound to reply saying they've shot 220ft :laugh:

Michael

MEA, thanks for hanging in there in the discussion overall and please bear with us during this slight digression into big slingshot range :-)

Michael, I'm thinking about say a 3 oz weight with fishing line, I wonder how high that would go from a big slingshot?

Also, thanks for challenging my vocabulary! I looked it up here:
Hysteresis

Apparently you're referring to elasticity "lag" or dynamic loss of energy while the sling is in an extended state?

I noticed that the "Ascending the Giants" climbers were using a fishing reel with their big shot. The question is were they taking the lowest available branch because they could visually assess it or was it because it was in their limited firing range? MEA's suggestion that it's best to place the line on the highest reachable branch to lower climber impact on epiphytes makes a heap of sense. It also raises the bar on rope placement and TIP assessment skills since I expect that the TIP will not be visible from the ground.

-moss

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 02/22/2008 10:30am

Ignoring the weight of the rubber itself (way more than 3 oz I'd say) and the hysteresis loss (energy lost from the system as heat during the stretching-contraction of the rubber), which would be the same regardless of the size of shot bag used, the mass of the 3 oz bag + half of the fishing line between you and the branch would probably be less than half of the mass of the 8 oz bag plus half of the nylon throwline I use.

Therefore as potential energy gained = mass x g x height, then the height would be more than twice 130ft. So 280ft would be possible. However the rubber IS a big factor. Another big factor is the increased air resistance-to-mass ratio of the smaller bag, (which is also travelling at a higher average velocity as it needs to reach a greater height) - think of how fast a human free-falls compared with how fast an ant free-falls - smaller objects of similar shape and density slow down faster in the air.

Right, that's enough high school physics. Sorry for the digression :blush:

Michael

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by moss - 02/22/2008 01:51pm

Excellent Michael, appreciate the physics lesson. Another factor to lower the theoretical height limit is increased wind/air drag on the throwline.

-moss

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by atg - 02/23/2008 03:24pm

Hello there, this is will and brian from ascending the giants. We were told about this thread from a good friend of ours, and felt that we ought to respond.

The comment about helping canopy researches was taken a little out of context in the video editing, and in retrospect we can understand how it could be interpreted as a put-down. Sorry. We have nothing but respect for full time canopy researchers, or anybody who climbs everyday, and are aware of many of their techniques and how well suited they are to the specific demands of their work. We wanted to help some less experienced biologists who are not going to need to climb everyday. We were meeting some such people at the time, and have met more since then. It seems hard for many of these folks to get trustworthy advice on tree climbing techniques, and we are happy to share our knowledge with good people.

As far as the big shot is concerned, we agree that it is important to secure the highest safe anchor to avoid impact on the tree or its inhabitants. That being said, we have found the big shot to be a good way to do this. We use a 6 or 8 oz bag and a 20 lbs. test braided fishing line, and are able to accurately hit shots in the 200' range. I am told that by modifying the big shot with extra tubing and using a 3 to 1 mechanical advantage to pull it back, one can hit up to 230'. Sure, if you climb redwoods every day a compound bow or crossbow makes sense, but we rarely climb trees more than 250' tall, so the big shot works for us. Also, in our experience the shot pouch is much less likely to get caught up in the canopy than an arrow.

Please, don't confuse what we are doing with some tree equivalent of "peak bagging." We are working with big tree registries to update badly outdated records, and hoping that through publicizing these amazing specimens we can get people excited about trees. So far we have had some encouraging success.

We put together a website to further this effort, it is at www.ascendingthegiants.com

If you have any questions, you can e-mail us at info@ascendingthegiants.com

Thanks for reading
-Will and Brian

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 02/23/2008 08:58pm

Hi Will & Brian. Thanks for clarifying that. It's not fair when you are judged by comments, which were taken out of context.

Also: your achievements with an (I'm assuming) unmodified Big Shot blow my theories out of the water :P The next chance I get I'm going to put my Big Shot to the test!

Coincidentally, I had been thinking of doing the very same project here in Britain. I'm about to approach the Tree Register of the British Isles (TROBI) and ask permission to climb and measure the increasing number of contenders for Britain's (and therefore Northern Europe's) tallest tree. Almost all of these have never been climbed and have only been measured by laser clinometer - with inconsistent results.

I've yet to visit your website and am intrigued about how and why the media got involved. The story of the rivalry between the Scottish champion and its rival at Lake Vyrnwy, Wales, and the eventual remeasurement of the Scottish tree with lasers was the subject of a BBC TV documentary. How much more interesting would it be if I climbed these trees with a

helmet camera to measure them and talked more about the history and ecology as I went? How would this actually help organisations such as TROBI and the Woodland Trust?

However, I am worried that sensationalising the climbing of these trees would lead to 'have-a-go' rock climbers etc. hacking their way up these trees and causing damage to them as well as themselves. What is your view on this?

Michael

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by treeman - 02/24/2008 09:46am

Michael,

I'll give my viewpoint on your question about others wanting to follow you in climbing the big trees you explore. I do not think "have a go" rock climbers are a threat to big trees, or any tree at that. Trees are an entirely different medium of vertical climbing that rock climbers have no clue in handling. I know this coming from that arena myself in the Rocky Mountains in the late 70's. Rock climbers have come to my tree climbing school and walk away unimpressed; not enough adrenaline factor to keep them interested (a big plus for tree climbers concerned about "conquer at any cost" mentalities that tend to wreck that which they "love").

Professional arborists? That is possibly a different kind of climber that might want to climb "the biggest and tallest." Their skill set will of course be elevated. More vigorous trimming of branches for route clearing purposes and rough foot work, kicking off moss mats and lichen, coupled with bare rope on wood climbing methods, might be employed for speed purposes (arborists tend to climb with speed in mind- a cultural imprint often due to economic persuasions).

I believe I was the first to take up champion tree climbing back in the mid 80's. That's when "American Forest" magazine printed TCI's first published article. It was published in their issue with the champion tree list that year and the first time they had ever considered climbing and measuring the champion trees by hand.

I had the concern for peak bag climbers coming behind me too. To circumvent that possibility, we kept the tree's location undisclosed. We did not give out maps or detailed directions, not even to the tree climbing enthusiasts we had developed through the sport we were pioneering. I returned a few times to climb the trees again, but it was purely on an invitational basis. I'm a picky chooser. My teams were small.

What I am seeing now is more detailed directions to the big tree's locations. Books are being published documenting more precise locations. To me, it's like an invitation card. It's upsetting to me personally.

After 25 years of developing recreational tree climbing, I have arrived at the conclusion it will never be a mainstream sport. I am consoled with the fact that rec tree climbing only seems to attract and hold a minute number of some of the finest folks I have ever met. These folks blow the doors off the hard core rock climbing segment that lust for challenge. These folks climbing trees have high character values, a remarkable concern and love for trees, and an easygoing personality that doesn't need high volumes of stimulation through risk challenges.

Having said all of this, I would like to ask the adventure climbers, canopy researchers, rec climbers, and arborists to not publicize the locations of specimen or special trees if for no other reason than soil compaction and ground disturbances. Take pictures, shoot footage, write a book, have a book written about you, get interviewed, go lecture, get grants, go blog, go podcast, but leave out the locations and directions.

These trees don't need to get visited by untrained folks that are not sensitive or skilled. If the trees are to be viewed, provide an established path and viewing platform. People, especially tree lovers, are generally fine in following directions (management) to limit impact. Forcing people to bushwhack to see a tree won't help the tree in the long run. Better to leave location information vague and possibly misleading.

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/24/2008 10:23am

Hi Will and Brian,

Thank you for clarifying your comment about tall-tree researchers.

I know from personal experience with the media that it is easy to have things taken out of context. I also know that there

is a very fine line between expressing enthusiasm for the trees and inviting others to want to climb them...
It's very cool that you guys are dedicated to updating the big tree registers, and to increasing awareness about how amazing some of these trees are.
All the best,
MEA

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by MEA - 02/24/2008 10:34am

Hi Treeman,
You are SO right on about the need to be more discreet with big/tall tree locations.
For the very reasons you cite below, our group has always attempted to be vague in location descriptions (I don't think any truly precise locations have been published, but please correct me if I'm mistaken here). That said, I know that we haven't been careful enough because a few people have contacted us saying 'hey, we found that tree...'
~MEA

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by treeman - 02/24/2008 10:34am

Nice piece Will and Brian,
Thanks for showing us the trees, minus the roadmap to them. Good content too. It kept my attention.

Many of the champion trees I visited in the 80's had died or had problems. The trees I visited with our team often had not been visited in years and were in bad shape (splits, cracks, etc). I did free corrective measures on some of them. We used to call them "Tree Restorations." Most of the people didn't have the money for tree work and were glad to preserve their cherished trees.

Awareness was the big issue back then and now concerning champion trees. Highlighting their existence is a good thing. People are generally interested in the subject. You might want to include a little bit of local history with each tree you visit if possible. Just a content suggestion. Who planted it? Was there a reason for planting it? Is it a grandfather tree (are other trees of same species sprouting near it)?

Might be a good idea to start another thread Will so you can get a more direct response to your piece from the community here. Place it "In The News" forum. Title it "Ascending the Giants" video. Ask for input and suggestions from the community. The TCI site gets over 9,000 visits a month and still gaining. Please feel free to use this site to communicate and gain exposure.

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by treeman - 02/24/2008 11:14am

Hi MEA,
I think some persistent rec climbers do the research and make forestry contacts to locate the champ trees. I had assistance from forestry groups and associations myself, but I was and still am a practicing certified arborist with a name.

General locations- like what state park they are located in, can often disclose a location with field work.

I have had reports from the rec community that they found the champ tree and were just happy with discovering it, leaving their ropes behind. The thrill of the hunt was enough.

I personally find these trees imposing (west coast trees). High blind anchor points (TIP) don't thrill me anymore. My reluctance is possibly the function of my age, a return to rational thinking, or a great wife.

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Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

The forum dates reveal this topic had very few entries and Love, Nick posted a call to canopy scientists in Nov 07 that resulted in no responses; now we have over 28 replies to just this one message. That's what I am talking about! Now we learn that in the UK there may be efforts to advance research by combining the layman and professional. We all can learn from one another and the sooner the better it will be.

It has been fun to follow this discussion and now I see a report from Oxman about the Spruce where Patty accepted Peter's proposal, I think I was crying as much as anyone else on the forest floor.

I was very glad to be a crew member on that climb but as I viewed the damaged I promised myself that I would not join anymore gangbangs. We picked up that last backpack and were walking out of the base area I was saddened by all the impact 10,000 foot prints made around the tree and on every limb as high as I could see. The rockhound hired by CBS to climb and shoot video aloft panned around and site for some B roll and was glad they didn't air that footage.

In the eyes of a scientist, arborist, amateur, rec climber, etc. with any concern on environmental impact we cannot allow that kind of damage to occur to the Champions! A small skilled recon team committed to "Leave not Trace" mindset with a long recovery period between climbs should be our protocol. We all should vow to not let damage like that occur during our watch.

Life is a two way street and I know that all of us rec climbers could learn a lot from the scientists and from what I have seen at our gatherings and Rendezvous' we have a few tricks in our bags that they should see also.

So they need a throw-weight on a string to pass over a limb 200 feet overhead? Maybe we need to have a contest. I guess we will have to raise the hula-hoop throwbag target just a wee bit higher this year.

(OK so standard Big Shots are not the King of the Forest. If I double the length of my 15" rubber weighted launch tubes and stretch them to 350% it will need a 10 foot pole to pass the 200 foot mark. But if I triple the length will I need a come-along to cock it and now dare I say it is the St. Louis Arch now on my radar. Last weekend in July?)

See you at the top,
Dan House

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by markf12 - 02/25/2008 05:46pm

I suspect that tree climbing researchers have historically had an extremely wide range of skill and ethics, depending on how they entered the activity. Scientists are often likely to view climbing as simply one of many possible routes to "access" the canopy, and they will be more or less thorough in finding out how to do it right.

Joe has definitely seen some pretty awful practice. So have I, both in my own doings (see below), in internet published photos of canopy researchers (people apparently working well above their TIP), and in stories I have heard about some researchers at Itasca State Park around here (climbing living trees with spikes!!).

Early in my canopy research about 4-5 years ago (measuring light in different locations in and above canopies with undergrads), we were using tree ladders and deer stands to work 30-40 feet off the ground. What we did was, frankly, pretty scary, and I still get the willies when I think about it. It was worrying about this that got me into rope access methods and rec tree climbing in the first place, and now I climb at least as much for fun as for research. The work I was doing on hydrologic stress in 120-140 foot white pines last summer and fall with a couple of grad students would have been well beyond my technical reach as recently as 2 years ago, and it was largely practice with rec climbing that enabled it.

None of this can possibly translate into a reliable generalization about research climbers; the worst of them are dangerous to themselves, their students, and their trees; and the best are exemplary on all fronts.

MEA, are you going to be at the ESA meetings in Milwaukee this year? I caught your talk at San Jose last year and liked it a lot.

Re:some canopy scientists do know how to climb...

Posted by wildbill - 02/26/2008 12:53pm

Hi Mea,

Here are a few comments:

First, I've been able to get an 8-ounce bag with ZingIt up to about 155 feet with a Rogue Sidewinder (a foldable slingshot similar to the Big Shot), and I've seen the Big Shot fired to about 190 feet (the rubber must have been new with no dry rot, and the person pulling it down must have been really, really straining).

Second, I've worked with quite a few researchers and forest resources people for the last few years in projects involving mountain longleaf pines, tulip poplars and American chestnuts (the chestnut canopies were accessed by traversing between taller hardwoods on each side of the target trees). I've found that some researchers have excellent wilderness ethics and will go out of their way to protect the target tree, while others are only interested in the "final results" and don't plan to use that particular tree again so they don't worry about harming it. Also, a few (10 percent or less is my best guess) of the younger Ph.D. types that I've worked with have an ego problem: They are always, always right, and no mere undergraduate knows anything that can be used by them (i.e. trying to teach them new climbing methods). The older researchers have lost a lot of that ego and seem more willing to learn new things from the younger generation.

Third, I think you can reach Joe Maher, who started this thread about four years ago, at jmaher@treeclimbercoalition.org. I think you'd gain a lot by communicating with him at the personal level.

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