
Rate of ascent - Curious about how fast (slow) am

Posted by rboreal - 02/29/2008 10:41am

Rate of ascent - Curious about how fast (slow) am I?

A big part of tree climbing for me is the physical fitness part. So I do push myself sometimes for the cardio.

I don't have videos of past tree competitions - I guess I should buy some online. I actually have seen very little climbing. I remember years ago, some guy booking up a tree in spikes on TV, and a few hatchet and saw competitions. That's about it.

Anyway, I was wondering about my physical condition, technique and overall performance, as compared to other climbers. I know, of course, that there's guys and gals who make me look like I'm standing still, but I'm interested to know just how bad they'll smoke me.

So the other day, for only the second time in 5 years, I actually timed myself during 2 ascents and descents.

*Texas-style climbing system

*Petzl paired ascenders.

*Saddle is kept on the heavy side on purpose, probably weighs 18 lbs.

*The line TIP is approx. 83 ft. (pic attached)

*Line is New England Safety Blue

*Knit gloves, rubber coated (but hell they do NOTHING for the cold!)

*Changeover to a Figure-8 descender and also carabiner below it clipped on my side ring with a Munter hitch.

I got up and down twice in about 19 mins. I don't know how long it takes me to complete my "changeover", but I'm guessing about a minute, or more, and maybe a little less than a minute to descend. I use a figure-8 descender and a Munter hitch both, so I'm not flying down way fast. I'm guessing I make it up to my Tarbuck knot (TIP) in about 7 minutes. So by my calculations I can do almost 12' a minute for two consecutive 83' climbs with no rests other than the changeover on both ends.

7 mins = 420 secs

83ft / 420 secs = .198 ft. per sec,

.198 X 60 secs = 11.88, so say almost 12ft. per minute

What I'm most interested in is other's technique. I think I am really inconvenienced by my build - short. When I do my Texas rig, I don't keep my hands fully gripping the handles the whole time. If I did my cycles would not be very productive. In order to push the handle that connects to the boot straps to its full 'throw', I twist up to that side and kind of finger push it as high as I can, while throwing both legs up in a very stiff caricature of a diver's pike position. My arms just aren't long enough to extend the boot-strap ascender the full strap length if I maintain a full grip.

And when I climb into a standing position, it's two motions, not one. As I begin to stand I advance the lead ascender once, and then again all the way after I'm fully upright. So, I can imagine how a lanky person who's all arms (Jimmy Page comes to mind, I'm a musician) would be able to work a Texas rig like a madman and probably do 2 or 3X the rate of ascent I can.

But I don't know that for sure. Which is why I'm curious.

And no matter how bad I suck by your standards, I was "King of Suckiness" back in the mid 1990's. I still remember the first time I ever clipped into my Texas rig. I was pudgy, and inexperienced, and I did maybe 5 cycles and was breathless. My kind next door neighbor, a gratis 1-man ground crew, just stood there waiting for me to get into position. After awhile he just said "Dude, I got stuff to do, call out to me or something when you're there. You should just put on spikes on and monkey up that tree."

Re:Rate of ascent - Curious about how fast (slow) am

Posted by oldtimer - 02/29/2008 12:49pm

I think Ron posted some of his results on this or the TCC web site. You may want to ask him by PM to see where that info was posted. Most of the other climbers were happy to just be up in the tree without worrying how long it took them to get there.

I am just happy to be able to climb!:laugh:

Edited: Just for comparison: A competition climb is around 19 seconds for 50 feet using secured foot-locking double rope and down to the ground again.

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Re:Rate of ascent - Curious about how fast (slow)

Posted by moss - 02/29/2008 02:41pm

rboreal wrote:

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This doesn't make sense. For a Texas system the ascender with the foot strap should be the lower ascender. The upper ascender should never be out of reach even when extended as high as it can go (limited by the tether to your harness). So when you're moving your lower ascender up it can never be pushed up to "fingertip reach" since it's under the upper ascender. More about your height and your climbing efficiency later.

rboreal wrote:

And when I climb into a standing position, it's two motions, not one. As I begin to stand I advance the lead ascender once, and then again all the way after I'm fully upright. So, I can imagine how a lanky person who's all arms (Jimmy Page comes to mind, I'm a musician) would be able to work a Texas rig like a madman and probably do 2 or 3X the rate of ascent I can.

I think that's typical for a Texas system. When I stand it's usually two motions though with more climbing experience you'll start to blend them more.

I've read somewhere that a short stroke on SRT ascent is more efficient than trying to maximize every push for as much distance as possible. It sounds like your ascender tether lengths are not tuned for your height. When your upper ascender is fully extended on its tether there should be a slight crook in your elbow. You lose a lot of strength if you straighten your arm out all the way when you're grabbing your upper ascender to stand up. For your lower ascender you want to be able to move it up high enough to raise your legs to a comfortable tuck that you can stand from without working too hard. If you're working too hard to stand up you might have raised your feet too high and are wasting energy trying to overcome that. For a Texas system you want to rely primarily on your legs for lift, your arms are basically helping you get into a crouching position over your feet, then let your legs do the work pushing you straight up, your arms are just pushing the ascender up.

Once you have your tethers tuned, and you've got your motion more efficient you'll find that the only thing that's limiting you is how much oxygen you can get to your muscles in relation to your climbing rate. A good SRT climber doesn't look like they're working hard, just smooth repetition and a calm rate of travel gets to the top most efficiently. And don't worry, you'll get plenty of workout without trying to push yourself faster.

-moss

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Re:Rate of ascent - Curious about how fast (slow)

Posted by rboreal - 05/07/2008 09:40am

Yeah, I'm reading your reply and nodding "yeah, yeah ..."

No, the top ascender, the one without the leg straps - it's not out of reach, but it is not tuned to my size either. They're straps, so there's not much I can do. It's not so far away as my fingertips, that was kind of an inaccurate description. It's more like I'm "three fingering" it when it's at the high point of advance. I have my first three fingers on the ascender, but not my whole hand gripping the handle and staying on it. I think part of the reason why I do it this way is also to give my hands a rest each time, to not be gripping this thing by the handle the whole time. After all, it is almost 85ft to the top of my SRT line.

And yes (read more in my other post, this section) I now have experience with pros in a competition situation, and I totally understand that it's not about trying to stretch out and reach the absolute maximum you can - it's about smooth, steady, fast progress in your comfortable range of motion.

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Re:Rate of ascent - Curious about how fast (slow) am

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 05/07/2008 11:14am

Rboreal, I timed myself ascending about 55ft to the first branch of a Scots Pine at the weekend. It took about 90 seconds. I used a Petzl ascender from my harness, which was just about head height (and a blake's hitch tied above it for a backup), and one foot ascender. each time I stood up on the foot ascender I held the rope just below the hand ascender with one hand while moving the ascender up with the other. Each movement gained me about 2ft in height.

I think the key is to keep yourself upright while climbing so that you are pushing along the rope rather than across it. Works for me anyway!

Michael

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