
Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/12/2008 12:14pm

As I mentioned in a recent post, I am about to ask permission from the Tree Register to climb and accurately measure some of the tallest trees in Britain. To help convince them that this is a good idea, I've been trying to think of other things that can be gained from actually climbing the trees. For example: documenting lichens, mosses and other epiphytes, inspection of any damage or decay and a close-up assessment of the leader shoot.

These trees aren't nearing the limits of their lifespans or height for their species so maybe more advanced research like measuring leaf growth vs height or composition of sap, soil and climate data is pointless here (and I'm not a botanist anyway so the best I could do is pass on data to those who will understand it).

However if anyone has any suggestions I would be very grateful.

Michael

Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/15/2008 10:53am

... any suggestions at all guys? :unsure:

Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by moss - 03/15/2008 12:31pm

A few points to consider..

1. Does the Tree Registry have jurisdiction over each of these trees?

I'm asking this because it's likely that individual champion trees are in a variety of locations, including public and private land. It's more likely that you'd need to get access permission from public land managers or private landowners to climb individual trees rather than from the Tree Registry.

2. Are there scientists active in Great Britain studying canopy biology and related ecosystems?

If you would like to get involved gathering research data it would make sense to contact scientists who are already working in this field and offer to assist them.

3. What is the source for the current measurements?

Is there a uniform system for the current measurements or are they coming from a variety of sources using different methods? The Tree Registry may not think there is a problem with the current measurements, or they may welcome your offer to provide more accurate measurement, it could go either way. If you haven't done this already I'd take a close look at current ground-based and tree-based measuring techniques so you can be prepared to discuss measuring options and suggest improved techniques if outdated or inaccurate techniques have been used to determine champion trees.

In the U.S. the Eastern Native Tree Society has published high-quality information about tree measuring techniques: ENTS measuring guidelines

-moss

Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/17/2008 09:47am

Thanks for replying Moss. In answer to your points:

1. The Tree Register (TROBI) doesn't have jurisdiction over the trees. However TROBI is a recognised organisation and does have links with landowners, the Forestry Commission etc. on a professional and personal level (some of its patrons and members are themselves landowners) and so approaching these parties would best be done via TROBI.

2. To my knowledge there are no dedicated canopy researchers as such in Britain but I'm sure there must be some ecologists who have studied the canopy and may have even climbed into trees as a result. Thanks for the suggestion - I'll look into it.

3. The current height measurements were done with a sextant and more recently with laser clinometers. These methods have been found to be quite inaccurate with trees often needing remeasuring using the same method, coming up with results which differ, sometimes by a couple of metres!

As far as I know, only one company called Tree Dimension in north Wales has ever measured any of these trees by climbing it - the Lake Vyrnwy Douglas Fir, which is situated near them. They (as I'm sure any arborists in Britain are) didn't seem to be equipped for this kind of job - using a 60ft ladder to reach the first branches (scary!) I don't know how they climbed to the top from there but they dropped a length of rope from the top to measure the height (hardly accurate due to rope stretch). The result (62.5m) put this tree ahead of the 62m measured by laser for Dughall Mor in Scotland. A debate raged for 3 years over which country had the tallest tree until the Forestry Commission measured Dughall Mor by laser again, recording a height of 64m.

I'll take a look at the ENTS link now. Again, thanks for your help.

Michael

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Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by moss - 03/17/2008 08:37pm

Sounds like going through the Tree Registry make sense. It is a tricky business because no one likes their champion tree downgraded, you might need security backup :-). Looks like you'll be blazing a new trail to make this happen. Good luck!
-moss

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Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by Baker - 03/18/2008 01:18pm

Pertaining to reasons to climb for research: Something that is growing greatly in importance here in the US is the comparison of native species (of anything - insect, bird, plant, etc) vs. non-native/introduced/invasive species.

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Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/19/2008 09:22am

Good idea! Some of these champions grow in the grounds of stately homes where there are many species of tree, both native and introduced, growing side by side - so a comparison could be made.

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Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by bfree - 04/10/2008 12:52am

Michael,

I would like to chat with you about the champion tree programs there in the UK.

Please feel free to contact me at info@ascendingthegiants.com

Brian

Re:Measuring the tallest trees in Britain

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 07/01/2008 02:03pm

Here's an update on the British Champion Tree Climbing Project (there isn't an official name for it yet):

I met David Alderman of the Tree Register today and, after the hours spent retrieving a tangled throwbag from 30ft out on a limb on Friday 13th (I wasn't superstitious until then) and my poor aiming yesterday in practice, it went fine.

I learned the following: The best way to minimise risk of getting the shot bag tangled in the canopy is to take the shot from the more dense side of the tree so that on the way out it passes through the open side of the canopy. A 65ft shot needs the slingshot to be pulled down just past halfway. My Big Shot shoots to the right by about 2½ft.

The result: I got the branch I wanted inch perfect on the 2nd attempt. I measured the Scots Pine to be 32.14m. David meanwhile took a measurement with his laser clinometer and recorded approximately 32m.

He said there are 2 climbers from the Forestry Commission planning to climb trees on their land, plus one guy in Ireland, who climbs on private estates. Apparently the Irish landowners are very excited about the prospect of having their trees climbed, whereas the English/Scottish are more worried about damage occurring. However David says that the article and photos of my climb today will go in the next TROBI newsletter and he is confident that we will be able to measure potential champions of Europe (of various species) on private land in the near future.

I'll keep you updated on any more news as it happens.

Michael

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