
Guided conifer climb

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/26/2008 08:14am

On Monday I climbed a 100ft Grand Fir with my friend Jackie, who is also the sister of my climbing partner Dave. She has recently started learning tree climbing with double rope technique as part of her college horticulture course. I wanted to show her something different - climbing a tall conifer and the experience of actually climbing a tree, not a rope. To minimise impact on the tree I only climb it about twice a year.

The tree is in Penn Wood, a large ancient wood near my home, which dates back to Roman times. A few years ago the Woodland Trust with the help of local residents raised enough money to buy the wood and save it from becoming a golf course. Few areas around here are as diverse as Penn Wood, with Beeches, Oaks (some veterans), many types of native and foreign conifers, a grove of young Californian trees (Sitka Spruce, Coast Redwoods Western Hemlocks etc.) long avenues of Grand and Douglas Firs, stunning Rhodedendons as big as houses, deer, cows, woodland art projects and so on...

Anyway, I digress. I came up with a way for Jackie to climb to the top in complete safety with me climbing just below offering encouragement. It's most probably been done many times before but I thought I'd share it with you:

First I climbed the tree with the static rope dangling from my harness so that the rope followed the climbing route. My route was fairly straight so there was very little rope drag. Once at the top I double-wrapped a sling around the trunk and clipped a carabiner on. I then pulled half the rope through, tied a double figure-of-8 in the rope and clipped this into the biner. Then I abseiled down the other side of the rope.

On the ground, I put an ascender on the rope and attached it to Jackie's harness. She then climbed to the top following my initial route, with the ascender advancing itself up the rope as she climbed. Afterwards, she simply switched to the other side of the rope and abseiled down.

The whole thing worked extremely well and was completely safe. Jackie obviously enjoyed the climb because she wants to do more. I would never have believed this a year ago!

Michael

<http://www.treeclimbing.com/images/fbfiles/images/1.JPG>

Tie-in point

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/26/2008 08:18am

<http://www.treeclimbing.com/images/fbfiles/images/2.JPG>

Jackie starting to climb

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/26/2008 08:20am

<http://www.treeclimbing.com/images/fbfiles/images/3.JPG>

Definitely worth the effort!

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by Baker - 03/26/2008 09:50am

Your description of the ascent could have been about a ROCK climb! Did you place any protection for your self on the way up? Slings, flip line, etc.? We would call your knot a fig. 8 on a bite. A double fig. 8 (to us) would have had 2 loops, like rabbit ears.

I'm asking because there are some really nice conifers (not as tall) where I live, and I've thought about doing a similar setup for my wife.

How did you remove your rope? Same thing in reverse?

Great pics too. Nice perspective from the top.

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/26/2008 11:13am

You're right of course, it is a fig-8 in a bight!

The difference between this and a rock climb is that I was using adjustable lanyards while climbing (slings have no stretch and can't be adjusted to eliminate slack), and not climbing above them (because the shock load of taking a fall onto your lanyard could easily snap a branch). Also the rope was static - fixed at the top, instead of running through the carabiner with a belayer taking in the rope, which would happen in rock climbing.

If you do try this then make sure your route to the top is as straight as possible. If not then should a person decide to hang on the rope then it could bend and flick past a branch and she will go for a swing :ohmy:

For the attachment point, double wrap the sling around the trunk or go a girth hitch so that the sling grips the trunk rather than loading the thin conifer branches.

To remove the rope I untied the knot and put the rope back into the carabiner. then I got Jackie to slowly pull the rope through from the abseil end. When the end passed through the biner it fell straight to the ground under its own weight because the abseil route was completely vertical - no tangles!

There are only 3 conifers in the vicinity, the rest are shorter beeches and larches so there is a clear view across the treetops with a few other tall conifers as distant landmarks (I've been up most of those too!)

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by Baker - 03/26/2008 06:17pm

To remove the rope I untied the knot and put the rope back into the carabiner. then I got Jackie to slowly pull the rope through from the abseil end. When the end passed through the biner it fell straight to the ground under its own weight because the abseil route was completely vertical - no tangles!

You down climbed?

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by moss - 03/26/2008 08:04pm

Baker wrote:You down climbed?

I'd guess alternate lanyard technique going down, just like going up. For a quicker descent the rope could be wrapped around the trunk like so, rappel with an ATC or F8 then pull the rope out from the ground. Would be a little challenging to drop both legs to the ground cleanly to set it up but if there was a clear path as suggested it would work.

<http://www.47custer.com/firStaticDescent/doubledRopeOnFir2.jpg>

Could be done a few different ways going up and down. Guiding an unskilled climber you want to have a way to get to them quickly if they have any problems.

-moss

Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by scottdb - 03/26/2008 08:45pm

Nice pictures of the vista from the top.

Moss' rope retrieval would likely leave a rub mark where your method did not.

I love to climb the branches of a tree rather than climb a rope.

Climbing big trees above the set where there are adequate branches it is fast to have the leader belay the second rather than set a line and ascend the only problem is that the second must follow the same line as the rope.

I've dragged a lot of rock climbers and non climbers up trees (conifers) that I climb often by free climbing while dragging a belay line. I tie in and belay them up and down. I always love it when the rock jocks get gripped!

Your climb made me itch to get out!

Scott

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by moss - 03/26/2008 10:26pm

scottdb wrote:

Moss' rope retrieval would likely leave a rub mark where your method did not.

I love to climb the branches of a tree rather than climb a rope.

Agree on both points. I was brainstorming an easy out with ground rope removal, I've never set a rope that way. For all my SRT rope settings on conifers I'm using cambium protection since I noticed branch damage on a climb. Damage is more likely to occur on ascent than descent because of greater dynamic loading. For the fir in the photos I would down climb with 2 lanyards or a single lanyard and a sling until I reached a branch that I could hang a DdRT rope on with cambium protection to go the rest of the way to the ground. If the first solid branch on the tree is over 60 ft. from the ground then I'd have a ground anchored SRT setting that I'd downclimb to then rappel out on the single rope. We don't have heavy epiphyte load on east coast conifers that I climb so branch climbing isn't an issue as far as disturbing canopy ecosystems.

-moss

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Re:Guided conifer climb

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 03/29/2008 10:15am

Yes, I could have done a retrievable abseil with cambium protection for when I pulled the rope down from the top, but this way, if there was any issue of the rope getting tangled as it fell then I could sort it out on the way down. (Besides, I like down-climbing in trees. Rocks are a different story as by the time you get to the top your arms are like jelly!)

There are 2 advantages of the fixed rope setup as opposed to leaving the rope running through the tie-in point and belaying from the ground or the top.

1) the rope is not being pulled through the branches with a person's weight on it on occasions, leading to abrasion.

2) because I don't have to belay the climber I can climb with them, giving instruction if required.

(Here's me making light work of a large overhang on El Capitan :woohoo:

<http://www.treeclimbing.com/images/fbfiles/images/S8300432.JPG>

....no, I'm not fooling anyone am I? It was just a kid's climbing wall at our village festival!)

Michael

