
Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 04/24/2008 12:22pm

I might be climbing a Giant Redwood in a few weeks time. The last time I did that was 8 years ago, before I had the sense and knowledge to use ropes. However, the lower branches on these trees often slope outwards so wouldn't this lead to ropes/lanyards rolling down them instead of sitting in the crotch?

Is there a way to ensure this doesn't happen? I thought of double-wrapping the lanyards so that they grip the branch when loaded. Perhaps the only way to achieve a similar thing with the static rope placement is to isolate the branch, put a bowline on the end and pull the other end through until the rope cinches up against the branch. However wouldn't the rope roll down the branch when pulling the rope through anyway?

Any suggestions would be most welcome.

Michael

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 05/03/2008 07:45am

We might climb this tree tomorrow so any suggestions would really be appreciated B)

Thanks,
Michael

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by moss - 05/05/2008 03:27pm

Here's one way DRT, you have to climb the trunk opposite the branch. Won't be able to get very close to the branch as the angle closes up, assuming you'll have another branch to throw to once you're up there.

I think that you can successfully cinch the sloping branch though without having to resort to the difficult method suggested in the sketch.

http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3245/2468816636_73fbc184fd.jpg

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 05/06/2008 07:57am

We climbed (and measured) that Giant Sequoia yesterday, before seeing your sketch. Double-wrapping the lanyards does grip the branches enough to support my weight even when hanging from an almost vertical branch. however it was a real struggle between 25 and 55 ft where the branches are at between 5 and 10 inches across, come out at -45° and almost immediately drop vertically - very hard not to slip off while setting each new lanyard (so sometimes I just hung from the other lanyard while doing it). I couldn't believe that we climbed this tree without ropes in 2000 (just before discovering TCI) :woohoo: . I would never take that kind of risk now.

The tree is 129 ft tall and therefore one of the tallest in the county. My camera batteries died so there are no photos.

Regarding your sketch: I think it could work but only if the branches weren't sloping too much or the trunk wasn't too thick otherwise getting the rope up there in the first place would not be possible. Fortunately the tree has branches to ground level so we used short lanyards all the way.

Michael

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by moss - 05/06/2008 12:21pm

Ok, now with a better description of the tree, sounds liker alternating two lanyards (one the main climbing rope w/split tail is the way to go (sounds like what you did). You could also girth two long slings alternately as protection while you ladder climb the tree, trailing your climbing rope for descent.

-moss

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 05/07/2008 07:35am

We didn't use a long climbing rope - the hard section was so difficult that I didn't want the added resistance and complication of having a rope dangling from my harness or sitting in my backpack, so we just had to climb back down the same way we ascended.

Slings can't be adjusted and also have no stretch, so if I had slipped then I would have taken a fall of several feet and come to an abrupt stop. The lanyards on the other hand can be adjusted to take up the slack and I use dynamic climbing rope for the short lanyards when climbing branches.

How do canopy researchers climb full-size giant sequoias? I'm guessing that they can fire a crossbow bolt high up into the canopy to where one of those huge limbs that has a vertical iteration and from there, either repeat the process or climb on branches, which at that point are more horizontal than drooping.

Michael

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by moss - 05/07/2008 10:35am

I agree that alternating lanyards is the best approach for close branched conifers. Slings can work, but you have to place them more frequently as you climb to shorten the potential fall distance, it's a labor intensive technique. I mentioned it as an option, it's better than free climbing.

I trail a long rope through the tightest branched conifers, never a problem. The top of the rope functions as a split tail lanyard, a second short lanyard completes the alternating lanyard technique. When I'm placing ropes for other climbers in conifers (or hardwoods) I'll trail several ropes behind me. It gets heavy as you go up but they thread through the tight branches just fine. I've been through some crazy bushwhacks in conifers, especially blue spruce. I've actually become stuck trying to squeeze through, the limiting factor was my harness, had to back out to escape.

-moss

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by moss - 05/07/2008 11:17am

michaeljspraggon wrote:

How do canopy researchers climb full-size giant sequoias? I'm guessing that they can fire a crossbow bolt high up into the canopy to where one of those huge limbs that has a vertical iteration and from there, either repeat the process or climb on branches, which at that point are more horizontal than drooping.

Or a compound bow, or a Big Shot with a fishing reel mounted on it. They don't have to trap the line behind a vertical iteration, there are enough horizontal limbs in the crown of a mature redwood. They SRT up and then switch to DRT to progress through the crown, throwing by hand in the tree to place new TIPS or using alt lanyard technique if the branches are close enough. It's basically the same technique used to climb a woods grown conifer with a high first tie-in, just scaled up for the monster trees.

-moss

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 05/07/2008 11:27am

I understand what you're saying about trailing ropes through the branches - I've done it myself - but it was so hard to keep from slipping off the sloping limbs on that tricky section that any extra resistance would have been too much! A challenging problem, but if we are to climb and measure some of the tallest Giant Sequoias in the UK then it's all good experience.

Michael

=====

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by treeman - 05/23/2008 10:57pm

Why are you not using techniques for high settings to get into the better branch systems? Are you going in with light gear? The redwood climbing I have experienced uses a lighter 3/8 static line (and longer rope) for the first high pitch and shorter traditional arborist ropes for DRT climbing.

Redwood by nature is weak and brittle. I nearly killed myself by trusting a smaller drooping branch as sole life support one time.

Beware "blind" anchor points where you can't see your rope clearly. Nothing like the thrill of climbing up to see your anchor resting across a dead stub. This is where a bright rope can help for verification of climbing route. Good binoculars and/or a high powered birding scope helps too.

Tell me about your climbing team. How many are on your climbing team?

What is your protocol for emergency situations? Do you GPS your target tree and give it to someone before venturing out on a climb? Do you use a check in and check out system (call home when you are done or send out a rescue team if you do not check in).

There is a lot of challenge and manly romance climbing these big trees. However, this kind of challenge isn't the most forgiving kind if error or weather isn't good. I'll bet there are lots of people reading this thread and thinking only on the "how to" lines of thought. What are your backup measures? Smart climbers want to know. Dumb climbers don't care and nature weeds them out; but a few get famous too and get wise (luck matters for them in a big way).

=====

Re:Climbing trees with outward sloping branches

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 05/26/2008 08:22am

Thanks for your advice, Treeman. However, can I remind you that this is not an old growth Redwood in California, it's a young tree in England, about 130ft tall with original (not weak, epicormic) branches to near ground level. The tree is very dense and surrounded by an understorey of succession-type trees about 30ft high, so getting a line over a branch higher up in the tree is not possible, nor was being able to sight it to be sure that the branch is strong and not sloping.

For this reason, we climbed from the ground using alternate lanyards. We found that double-wrapping these around any drooping branches successfully prevented the lanyards from slipping down. The branches I used were typically between 5" & 10" diameter and as near to the trunk as possible. We used stretchy climbing rope for the lanyards and any slack in the system was kept to an absolute minimum to avoid shock-loading branches, should we slip off.

It was just the two of us. The tree is near a road about 3 miles from Dave's parent's house. They knew where we were and were expecting us back for tea!

I don't have the gear to climb a 300ft old growth tree in America. (I'm only just starting to experiment with skywalking - low and slow between two beech trees whenever this rainy weather passes!)

Michael

=====