

Wilderness Climber

The Online Newsletter For Those Who Like To Climb Wild Trees
In Wild Places

FEBRUARY, 2006

The TreeClimber Coalition

From Out In The Woods

Joe Maher

OK, so what's the difference between wilderness climbing and general recreational climbing for the fun of it? Climbing is climbing, right? No matter where you are doing it, it's still just climbing, right?

Wrong! Or, at least mostly wrong. Yes, the techniques are the same and are performed in much the same way, but it is not enough that some climbers subscribe to one technique while others use still another. No; in the realm of wilderness climbing all of the techniques must be available to each climber in order that whatever challenge be encountered be met with success. It is simply not enough that the climber be proficient at either double rope climbing or single rope climbing; the successful wilderness climber needs to be proficient at both, as well as having a lot of other tricks to be used in the course of any

one climb.

Wild trees in wilderness environments are not for the climber who is versed in only one style of climbing. A climber who is proficient in double rope technique but lacks expertise in single rope technique will discover that there are quite a few trees that are unclimbable due to the inability of the climber to achieve the clear isolated route necessary for a double rope climb. In such a situation, the climber must be ready to reach into her/his kitbag of skills and come up with a single rope style of climbing, or else keep moving through the forest until a tree offering the opportunity for a double rope climb is found.

And what about the issue of getting that all-important first line up into the canopy? While tossing a throwbag might be your preferred method of achieving this, it is more likely that in a wilderness environment there might not be a convenient window through which to throw to your target limb. Not only might there not be a convenient window, it might also be impossible to throw simply because of all the surrounding foliage preventing a good pendulum swing. The wilderness climber must be able

to call on a number of tricks to get that line up there. Instruments such as compound bows, slingshots, big shots, and crossbows may be necessary; Not necessarily because of the height of the target, but because of the impossibility of making an accurate throw, even to the lowest limbs.

Wilderness areas are usually remote and roadless. That means that the climber will need to do some walking to get to whatever tree is to be climbed. The climber who does not wish to suffer from carrying a heavy load would do well to look into the issue of minimalism. The urban climber can get by with having a huge variety of equipment always at hand; not so the wilderness climber. In order to minimize suffering under a heavy load the wilderness climber needs to be able to climb efficiently and safely with only a few items of lightweight equipment. The successful wilderness climber will have discovered ways of climbing that do not require great amounts of gear.

The wilderness climber will have rope and harness and whatever gear is necessary for basic single rope and double rope technique. The climber will also (Continued on page two)

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have gear necessary for getting that all-important first line up into the tree. Because these are wild trees there is a necessity for extra throwlines and at least one extra weight bag; bags and lines will become tangled and wedged and get themselves into any other trouble imaginable. In addition to all of this, the climber needs to have water and snack food, rain gear, and a few basic survival items.

When I climb wild my usual gear consists of a one-fifty piece of Sportline. Very light, very compact. Twelve foot length of one-inch tubular webbing for swiss seat harness. Four aluminum carabiners. One ascender with two footloops, one longer than the other. One Grigri. Two one-sixty lengths of Zing-It and two eight ounce throwbags. Big shot with four custom made two-foot fiberglass telescoping poles. Water bottle, rainjacket, snacks, pocket knife, matches and lighter.

My climbing style will usually consist of a mix with single rope technique for my entry pitch, switching over to basic double rope technique in the tree, and an occasional use of a "third rope" setting for positioning or short advancements. The SRT will be RADS because of the ability to quickly change from ascent to descent mode. The DRT will be basic without use of splittails. The third rope technique allows me to dispense with lanyards and such.

All of this applies to those situations where I am scouting for new climbs in the wild environment. If I know the tree I am going to, the gear load will vary with Fly replacing the Sportline, a harness replacing the swiss seat, a few more carabiners, and an extra throwline stored in a line mug with extra throw weight.

The bottom line is to make sure you have the gear you need without having more gear than you need. Also needed are the

skills necessary to make the climb while in possession of only the minimal amount of gear. In wilderness climbing the climber is being asked to do the most difficult and challenging climbs with only the least amount of equipment.

These, then, are just some of the things that make climbing trees in the wilderness environment different from those climbs done in an urban setting.

Matt Kull demonstrates minimalism by using a single piece of rope for three different styles of climbing, all at the same time. The setting at his center is a typical basic double rope technique configuration. The setting to his right is a RADS set-up with the free end of the rope anchored to himself. To his left is a "third rope" set-up that he is using to position himself in the center of his triple-anchored setting. To achieve this position it was necessary to be skilled at three different methods of climbing.



In The News

From The Internet

By **Daniel Enemark**, Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor

By going where no human had gone before, scientists have found 40 new species of life in Indonesia.

A giant rhododendron and a half-inch-long frog; a lost bird of paradise and a spiny, worm-eating, egg-laying mammal. Sound like creatures from another world? That's what the scientists who found them thought, too.

Twelve scientists from Indonesia, Australia, and the United States recently returned from a two-week trek through the Foja Mountains on the island of New Guinea. Their finds have yet to be evaluated and officially classified by experts around the world, but a preliminary count of new species includes one bird, four butterflies, five palms, one flower, four or five

mammals, and 20 frogs; close to 40 species in total.

To put that in context, scientists have named and classified 1.5 million species since the introduction of Linnaean taxonomy in 1735. That works out to more than 5,000 species a year for the last 271 years. Scientists estimate that Earth is home to anywhere from 5 million to 100 million species. So why are these 40 new ones such a big deal?

"There does seem to be an endemic biota here," says Bruce Beehler, the leader of the Foja expedition. "Forty species is not extraordinary in the raw sense, but they all came from one place, and we believe that's just the tip of the iceberg."

Beehler calls Foja an "island in the sky" - a biological community completely separated from its surroundings. Its unique and isolated community makes Foja a kind of natural experiment.

"There are probably hundreds of endemic species in the Foja

Mountains," Beehler continues. "The mountain range is very young, maybe 3 or 4 million years old. It was under the sea, then a low rain forest, and then got pushed up" to its present height of 7,218 feet. "It had to be physically colonized by creatures." But where did they come from?

Beehler's expedition was designed to answer that question, he says, "by looking at what's there and trying to find the closest relatives. The fact is, the species we've found seem to have close relatives on New Guinea. The new bird looks very similar to another on New Guinea."

Beehler infers from these similarities that existing flora and fauna on the island colonized the montane (cool, moist, elevated) environment of Foja and became an independent species quite recently in the evolutionary time scale. "We're seeing speciation at a very young age," Beehler says. What you can see is the evolution of life."

Wanna Write?

Are you tired of seeing the south get most of the tree climbing attention in the news? We agree that a more diverse input is necessary in order to display treeclimbing's true demographic spread around the world.

If you are one of those people out there who does not happen to be a southern climber, we want your input. Write up your climbs and send us your ideas. We will use them!

send to:

jmaher@treeclimbercoalition.org

About This Newsletter

The activity of recreational tree climbing has become more popular in the past few years. Within recreational climbing there is a growing number of participants who perceive climbing as a new venue for the experience of wilderness. Climbing in wilderness implies the necessity of climbing within the bounds of a strong foundation in wilderness ethics. Climbing in wilderness requires different techniques and a different approach than that necessary for climbing in metropolitan areas.

It is the intent of this newsletter to provide articles and information that will appeal to the climber who is interested in pursuing the activity of climbing in those places that exist beyond the impact of modern civilization. As the population of wilderness climbers grows it is hoped that a growing number of those climbers will contribute to this newsletter, making it more useful to those looking for ideas and techniques applicable to the wilderness experience.

Thoughts About the “New Find” In New Guinea

On page three of this newsletter we show an article from the internet, as published in the Christian Science Monitor, that tells of the exploration of a heretofore unexplored region in the Foja mountains on the island of New Guinea. The most important result of this new exploration was the discovery of several new species of living organisms and the finding of a number of other organisms previously thought to be very rare or possibly extinct.

So what does this have to do with climbing trees? According to scientists in the know, there are more different species of life in the treetop canopy than anywhere else on Earth. So, if these explorers in New Guinea were able to find forty new unusual species of life in two weeks just by walking around on the ground, imagine what they could have found had they ventured into the treetop canopy over their heads! As someone has already pointed out on the Tree Climber Coalition message forum, if any place is in need of canopy explorers, this is the place. I envy the climber who has the opportunity to be the first to ascend into the canopy of this newfound and pre-

viously unexplored valley. That person will surely have had the opportunity to be on a part of the leading edge of our activity.

And while there most certainly will be new and wonderful things to experience, there is also the possibility that dangers exist



New Guinea, located just north of Australia, is the world's second largest island having become separated from the Australian mainland when the area now known as the Torres Strait flooded around 5000 BC. Approximately half of the island is composed of Indonesian territory, while the other half forms the country of Papua New Guinea.

As a person who works quite often with those who explore and investigate the rainforest canopy I can really feel the excitement generated by the idea of climbing into the canopy in a place like this. It goes without saying that the first climbers are going to see a whole lot of new things that may never have been documented before. The rainforest canopy, even in the more explored parts of the world, is considered a new frontier for study. In a place of this sort the concept of exploring on a new frontier exists at a higher level.

there also. Remember that while all animals are wonderful, not all are nice. While all plants contribute to the diversity of life, there are some that might not be so nice to encounter. Of course it is that same possibility of danger and challenge that draws the explorer and the wilderness adventurer to be in such a place to begin with.

I sincerely hope, however, that while I would dearly love to visit and explore in such a place, that I won't see it portrayed in the next episode of "Survivor"!

The Word From J~Bird's Nest

By: J.R. Voronovitch
Welcome to J~birds Nest

In this edition of *Wilderness Climber* I would like to expound on a little gem I acquired this past holiday season, James Balog's book titled, Tree.

Many of you have probably seen The Sierra Club's excellent review in November/December 2005 from links at various tree forums on the web. They even give you a sneak peek at some of the amazing composite photography. I do not have an exclusive interview with the author, nor am I attaching images. I must say however, this is an excellent book, and you will be happy to have a copy of it.

I am inspired as I leaf through the pages. The photography is simply amazing. You do not need to be an artist to appreciate this natural beauty either. Every image resounds with the uniqueness of every tree everywhere. Not just the champion trees or the stereotypically "pretty" trees. If a picture is worth a thousand words, than how many words must it take to describe a picture made of hundreds of pictures? To try to fit an entire tree into one snapshot does

the tree no justice. The way Mr. Balog has approached the subject, we can see and feel so much more. Little details are emphasized and the grand scale is comprehensible.

Each tree tells it's story to you, and the narrative from the author is excellent as well. There are many facts about history, biology and ecology, presented in a non-pretentious manner, throughout the book. The text isn't diluted with climbing jargon or a machismo attitude. Sure there was climbing involved, but the tree has all the spotlight here, which is what was intended.

I think Mr. Balog has done the world a great favor by creating this work. It inspires on many levels, creativity, compassion, education, and preservation. The next time someone asks me, "why do you climb trees?" I can simply show them this book. If they don't understand after flipping through it a little bit, they never will.

I recommend you get a copy and share it with the people you know. It's not as expensive as you would think, either.

P.S. I'm not sure what happened on page 44, but you'll have to see the book to find out.

Image From "Tree", by James Balog



