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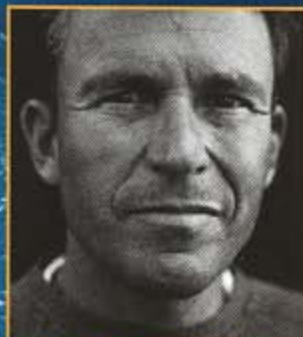
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HANG TIME: A tree climber in a Douglas fir on the Oregon coast



THE GURU

PETER LIMMER

If you've never considered the hiking boot as art, you may want to consult Peter Limmer. The third-generation cobbler crafts custom boots tailored from a single piece of full-grain leather (\$600; www.limmerboot.com). "My goal," says Limmer, "is to make a boot that fits within two millimeters of the client's foot." A worthy aspiration, and one highly sought; the wait for a Limmer boot is a year and a half.



THE JACKET Waterproof jackets are functional but rarely comfortable. Not the Patagonia Spraymaster Stretch Hardshell (\$249; www.patagonia.com). The breathable nylon knit stretches like a yoga master and drapes nicely over the body in a trim, athletic cut.

Out of the Woods

Looks like the final frontier isn't under the ocean; it's up in the trees

STARE UP AT A TREE long enough and the mind inevitably wanders. Who hasn't imagined sitting in the lofty crown, taking in the view up in the crisp, freshly oxygenated air? Perhaps then, the only thing surprising about the nascent sport of tree climbing is that it's taken this long to, um, get off the ground.

Bad puns aside, in recent years tree-climbing facilities have opened around the U.S.—two in the Northwest in 2005—bringing the national total to 13. Outfitters have gained permits to climb and operate on federal land and are filling their schedules. And one of the leading gear suppliers to professional arborists, Sherrill Tree & Climbing Supply, printed its first sport-climbing catalog this past fall.

One clarification: This is not your childhood tree climbing. The scaling is done on a network of fixed ropes that have been slung over branches using projectiles (usually a well-tossed weighted throw bag or an arrow shot from a compound bow) tied to pilot lines. At altitude, climbers relax in La-Z-Boy-like climbing harnesses or in giant hammocks called "tree boats."

The birth of recreational tree climbing is credited to Peter Jenkins, an Atlanta-based arborist who took folks into the Eastern hardwoods in the early 1980s. "The idea of climbing for adventure, climbing without

cutting, was completely new," Jenkins says. Today he and his wife, Patty, run Tree Climbers International, a school for new climbers and instructors and the de facto nexus for the small tree-climbing community. And while the core of this movement is still very small, climbing opportunities are growing: Outfitters such as Pacific Tree Climbing Institute in Eugene, Oregon, take novices 150 feet into Douglas firs for \$250 a day or \$500 a night, and Tree Climbing USA runs a trip each year to the Panamanian rain forest.

Why tree climbing now? The reasons for its growth are less manifest than the reasons for its appeal. Perhaps it's simply a new frontier or a fresh take on a familiar place. "When the breeze comes up in the canopy," says Sophia Sparks of New Tribe, makers of gold-standard tree boats and harnesses, "each tree moves with its own rhythm. I become part of the forest, a tiny part of the forest."