

Canopy Climbers

Climbing trees isn't just for kids anymore BY KRISTA HARPER

As a kid, it feels like all moms are against you. You want to play in the mud, they scream, "You're getting your new clothes dirty!" You want candy, but they say, "Not until after dinner!" And you want to climb trees. "Get down from there!" the mothers of the world bellow in unison. "You'll break your neck!" But Rob Miron's passion for tree climbing wasn't something he ever had to fight about with his mom.

Miron and his mother, Teresa Damron, founded the Pacific Tree Climbing Institute (PTCI) together in 2003, hoping that their guided tree climbing experiences would convince participants that old-growth trees have greater value standing in the forest than they do as lumber.

These days, the 26-year-old spends all his time in trees. On his days off from PTCI, he's an arborist for Sperry Tree Care.

"You have a different perspective on life when you're climbing a tree," he says. "It makes you appreciate life a little more."

PTCI, which is now co-owned by Miron and fellow guide Jason Seppa, takes tree climbing a little further than backyards and treehouses. In their hands, the relatively tame activity has morphed into something much more extreme. PTCI's guides take people into public forests near Eugene, such as the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, where they climb — with ropes and harnesses — to the tops of Douglas firs hundreds of feet tall. You can even

stay overnight in "tree boats" located well above the forest floor.

PTCI led guided expeditions in National Forests before any other group, Miron says. They're the only local tree-climbing group to take customers up trees in the forest. PTCI's uniqueness has attracted attention from media such as *Sunset Magazine*, *National Geographic Explorer* and ABC's *Nightline*.

Private donors and REI have partnered with the UO's Environmental Leadership Program this month to support eight



Climbing a Doug fir

groups of middle school and high school-aged students on PTCI expeditions. Miron says that he likes working with educational groups most and that he wants to take PTCI in that direction more in the future. The experience seems to have the biggest impact on young people, he says.

Miron also wants to provide urban climbing experiences, he says, but it's something that literally hasn't gotten off the ground yet.

PTCI's day climbs in the forest, which include organic meals and a break in the tree boats, cost upwards of \$300 per person.

For those of us just looking for a quick taste of the all the climbing and belaying fun, Eugene's Outdoor Program offers an urban alternative: \$10 drop-in tree climbing in various city parks. Call Aimee Goglia, Eugene's Urban Outdoors Adventures program coordinator, for more information on dates and locations at 682-5329.

Some people use tree climbing for a different sort of education. Eugenean Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky spent four days in a white western pine near Oregon's Capitol building in November to raise awareness about the BLM's WOPR logging proposal. Though the WOPR was put into effect, Zimmer-Stucky says that she was happy with the amount of attention her tree-sit brought to the issue.

Zimmer-Stucky, whose tree-sitting stint was associated with environmental defense organization Cascadia Rising Tide, says her time in the tree was a positive experience even though at times she "got a little stir-crazy." But she says she's looking forward to being involved in more tree-sits in the future.

Experiencing the joys of the trees



Some people have maintained perches in the forest canopy for months or even years to save Northwest forests from logging.

In the meantime, Zimmer-Stucky is involved with UO's Environmental Leadership Program, which will be taking kids climbing with PTCI over the next few weeks. Like Miron, she says she's excited about getting young people interested in trees.

Though kids will probably always be the most avid tree climbers, Miron says climbing can be a fun and healthy activity for people of all ages.

"It's just a completely different feeling when you're exposed at the top of the tree," he says. "I don't know why people stop climbing trees." **EW**

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