

# Climbing for Cones -- Not for everyone

by Cynthia Stowell

"It takes a certain kind of person to climb up a 75-80 foot tree," said Bill Donaghu who is heading up the BIA's first cone gathering program.

Two days of training with the professional Barnes Tree Improvement crew separated the climbers from the ground-huggers.

Not only physical agility and stamina are required but also a strong stomach since trees can sway dizzily in the wind and under a climber's weight.

After two weeks of climbing, forester Paul Brna still had sore muscles but raved about the peaceful experience of being poised in the top of a tree with a great view and no sound but the wind.

Brna was also enthusiastic about the overtime and hazard pay he was collecting along with the cones. He and several other Bureau foresters gave up two weekends, including Labor Day, to dangle from trees, and every time they climbed over 50 feet they received hazard pay for the whole day.

Pine and fir cones have traditionally been collected by enterprising but amateur gatherers, but increasingly forest managers are looking to professional

contractors to do the work, said Donaghu. The methods have naturally become more professional.

The local BIA spent \$1000 on specialized equipment, including spurs, ropes, harnesses and ladders; found suitable climbers among its own ranks and is now in the cone picking business.

Seven Warm Springs foresters "know the ropes," so to speak, but still leave the fancier footwork to the pro's.

A tree is relieved of its cones from top to bottom by a forester-turned lineman, who either leans a ladder against the trunk or straps on spurs and "walks" up as far as the first branches. Brna noted that the ladder often the shakiest part of a climb.

Protected from the sap and dense growth by coveralls and heavy gloves, the climber reverts to boyhood and scrambles up to the top. Once there he slings a rope around the tree and attaches it to an elaborate 8-10 lb. harness worn on his torso. He leans back gingerly and the picking begins.

One surprise for Brna was that the sorest parts of his body were his wrists, which were continuously twisting cones off branches. Another surprise was;

that even on crisp fall days, sweat poured freely, attesting to the amount of physical effort involved.

The climber descends slowly, filling his burlap bag with cones all the way. Maneuvering around and through branches becomes more difficult as the bag fills up. Often more than one bag can be filled in one tree, but rather than wrestle with two bags the first is dropped carefully to the ground.

Real "pro's" incorporate a mountain climbing technique into their tree climbing. Equipped with ropes, they can "repeal" down a long fir trunk, making fast work of the last part of the descent.

A good picker can collect about six bushels of cones a day. With 700 cones in a bushel sack, that means a daily harvest of 4200 cones per picker.

Climbers are not forced to tackle trees they don't feel they can handle, one reason for the infrequency of accidents, said Brna. There were no unfortunate incidents during the two weeks of B.I.A. picking, except for a few queazy stomachs and shaky knees as some foresters discovered they are better suited for horizontal travel.



HAPPY HARVESTER — Forester Paul Brna enjoyed the solitude and silence of cone-picking but only tolerated the sap, sweat and sore muscles.  
CDS Photo



SPURRED ON — One way of getting up a long tree trunk is to strap on spurs and walk up, a skill that takes time to master. The pain involved is not so much in the feet and calves but in the arms, which had to do a bit of hoisting. The rope dangling in the upper right is slung around the tree and attached to the forester's harness while he is picking cones.  
CDS Photo

## Cone Harvest, cont'd

been identified and trained. (see separate story above).

### The journey of the cone

Once collected, the cones are stored in a potato cellar in Culver where the atmosphere is held constant at a humid 60 degrees.

Processing is done in Cottage Grove. Dipped in a chemical solution, the cones are then air dried, reducing the moisture content from about 80 percent to 6 percent. At about 12 percent moisture, the cones begin to open and a thrashing machine separates the seeds from the cones.

Air blown through the seeds separates 10 percent of the lightest seed, leaving those more likely to contain embryos. Chemical and X-ray germination tests are administered and each seed lot is assigned a predicted success rate.

Seeds are then packaged and frozen, to be sent to the nursery for germination when needed.

Seeds collected this year will be sown next spring and planted

as seedlings in the spring of 1981.

The advance planning needed in reforestation programs can be thrown off by unexpected events such as fires or blowdowns. For instance, this past winter's excessive blowdown has produced an unanticipated 1300 acres of clearcut, creating a push for Douglas fir seed, noted Donaghu.

With a large inventory of native seed, B.I.A. Forestry should be ready for anything. A burn in Seekseequa will receive pine seed suited for an arid environment while a high country blowdown will be planted with high country fir seed.

In familiar soil and weather conditions, native seedlings are expected to have a better chance of surviving. Donaghu added that the replacement of poorer species with more ideal types should produce a healthier, more valuable forest.

# Disabled To Get Help From HUD-HEW

A study and demonstration project jointly financed by HUD and HEW will explore ways to house and care for Indians with limited disabilities in their home surroundings, Secretary Patricia Roberts Harris of Housing and Urban Development reported.

Noting that Indian persons with limited disabilities frequently are sent to institutions which often are far removed from their cultural and family base, Secretary Harris said the study and demonstration are an effort to halt that practice.

She called it "offensive to tribal traditions and values" to break up the family life of those

Indian persons. The practice applies to those who are disabled or retarded, elderly persons with infirmities, and abandoned or neglected children needing special care.

Preliminary to the demonstration project, HUD and HEW are funding up to \$63,945 of a study conducted by five southwestern tribes . . . the White Mountain Apache, the Hopi, Navajo, San Carlos, and Zuni . . . in collaboration with the Native American Research Institute, Inc., a non-profit firm in Lawrence, Kansas. The study will focus on these key needs:

- de-institutionalization of Indian people, including children, with limited disabilities
- examination of policies which constrain construction for groups with such disabilities
- the need to maintain and reinforce the natural family and extended family concept.

Through the study, the tribes will assess their needs themselves and will determine where to put their limited resources. This study is preparatory to the planning and construction of 50 specially designed housing units to be allocated among the five

tribes in a demonstration project.

The families developed by the demonstration will be owned and operated by tribal governmental or non-profit organizations. Federal assistance for developing and constructing these facilities will be shared by HUD and the Indian Health Service of HEW. The federal assistance for operating and maintaining the facilities, and for the provision of special care, also will be shared by HUD and HEW, with potential participation by other appropriate agencies.

The concept for the demonstration project was developed by Dr. Karl A. Menninger of the Menninger Foundation, who will continue to serve the project in an advisory capacity.

This is part of the ongoing effort by the Secretaries of HUD and HEW to promote nationally the objective of de-institutionalization of persons, including children, into alternate facilities with appropriate care.

HEW's Intra-Departmental Council on Indian Affairs is cooperating with HUD in oversight and administration of the project.