

"Trust The Tree"

"The roots of tree climbing can be traced back to some of our earliest cultures. Where there have been trees, there has been tree climbing. For some of our human ancestors, tree climbing offered hiding places, places for observation, entrance into tree houses in the canopy, and rich sources of food."

Abram Winters of www.treeclimbingusa.com



Chris Cooper

By Chris Cooper

Human beings seek trees for other reasons than food, shelter, and clothing. There is a spiritual content within the tree; particularly for those who believe in God. Panola Mountain State Park resident and volunteer Naomi Rice is one of those who gets a spiritual connection with trees – to the point that she likes to walk on trees and sleep in trees. Since a very early age she camped in the typical tent, but ever since she was thirteen, trees have held a spiritual oasis for her. Sometimes she'll put on her backpack, ropes, and climb in her tree boat, where she'll read her Bible and then go to sleep. Perhaps one could call this, as Rice likes to describe, tree camping.

"The idea of camping, for most people, brings to mind a tent tacked into the forest floor with a warm, cozy sleeping bag to snuggle in. Tree camping, however, is a completely new adventure that any person should experience. Sleeping in the tree is wonderful and amazing. In order to truly understand, you have to experience it for yourself."

"The tree boat, or tree bed, is essential to sleeping in a tree. It is totally open. It is made out of a sturdy canvas material and attached on four corners to the tree, giving it stability and comfort. It is, in my opinion, the most comfortable place to sleep. It is designed to dissipate the body's natural heat so you don't overheat, which is great for summer or tropical weather. In the winter or cooler nights, you may want to bring some extra insulation, such as a sleeping pad, top counteract that."

"The tree boat is open, not enclosed like a tent. You feel the breeze on your face, watch the moonlight dance through rustling leaves, listen to the grand chorus of cicadas and owls, and experience the entire forest awakening in the morning. Instead of being a mere observer, you feel like you are part of the process. As the sun begins to rise in the morning, the birds and squirrels begin to wake up and the sounds of morning surround you. The sun slowly reaches the tops of the trees and descends upon the forest as morning fully blossoms in its full glory. If you sleep in late, the insects will be sure to wake you up! Sometimes a curious squirrel will wander in for a closer investigation of the curious visitors in its tree. You never know what adventure may await!"

Rice, whose husband Jody Rice is the Resource Manager of PMSK, believes there are myths about sleeping in trees that need to be dispelled. There are those who believe individuals afraid of heights cannot participate in tree sleeping.

"Before night falls, there is plenty of time to practice climbing and to get comfortable with the technique. You will find your fears melt away as you learn to trust the tree, the equipment, and the

people around you."

Most individuals feel that they will be stuck in the tree, particularly when they have to go to the bathroom.

"At Panola Mountain State park, there is a facilitator both on the ground and in the tree, ready to assist you at any time of night. They will guide you through getting out of your tree boat, and the facilitator on the ground will be holding your rope to guide you safely to the ground. You'll then climb back up and resume your peaceful slumber."

Some believe that all trees can be hosts for climbers and sleepers. This is not the case, says Rice.

"In order for this tree to earn the right to be a host for climbers, it has to be inspected and cleaned out."

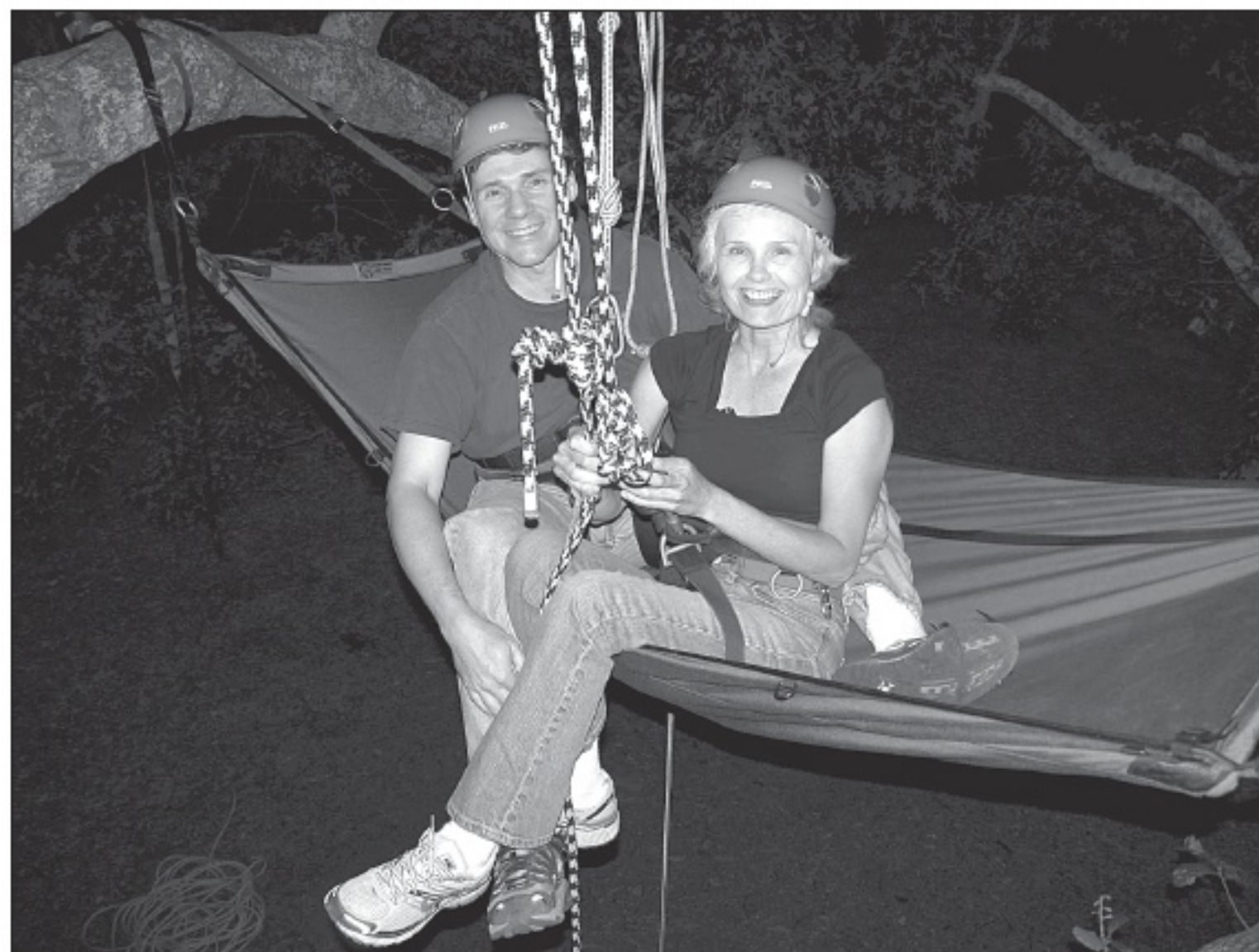
One of the trees on PMSK that had to be inspected and cleaned out was the Lanier tree, named after PMSK Volunteer, Brian Lanier. The tree, a poplar, is nestled in the forest near the base of the mountain, tucked away from all civilization.

Before the Lanier tree

branches of the tree.

"Climbing up into the thicket and cutting it out with a saw is a lot of hard, sweaty work, especially under the pounding of the hot, summer sun! The vines seemed to be branching out every direction. Pulling all that out of the tree takes a lot of dedicated time. Some volunteers willingly suffered outbreaks of poison ivy to prepare this tree to be presentable to the public."

When Forrest Buckner, WRD-Forest Management Inspector declared the Lanier Tree a host tree, PMSK scheduled its first climb on the Lanier Tree



A happy couple!
by Naomi Rice



Mom and daughter relax



Brian Lanier in the Lanier Tree
photo by Naomi Rice

Perhaps the greatest myth is that one could fall out of their tree boat while sleeping.

"In order to get out of the tree boat, you first have to climb up before climbing out. Your saddle stays on you at all times, so you are always on rope. Sleeping with a saddle on is not as uncomfortable as you may think. As an additional safety feature, while you are sleeping, you are secured from below. That means if you try to get out on your own, you won't be going anywhere until someone on the ground unhooks your rope."

could be labeled as a host tree, PMSK maintenance staff Riley Gaither, Gary Waites, and Rob Meeks cleared out the area around the base of the tree; which involved clearing out the dead parts of the tree and scraggly thorn bushes that encompass the forest floor surrounding the tree.

Volunteers Randy Rucker, Louis Bodin, Brian Lanier, and Naomi Rice assisted Jody Rice in cleaning out the canopy of the tree from dead limbs, poison ivy, small snags, muscadine, and poison ivy vines intertwined around the trunk and

then next day, in June 9, 2009. *"June was accompanied by hot, muggy weather and plenty of bugs. The day before the climb, a quick clean-up and inspection was done on the tree and camping area. Volunteers came out early to set the ropes in the trees as well as tying up each of the tree boats while the participants enjoyed dinner. Everyone had a chance to climb a few times while it was light outside in order to familiarize themselves with the method of climbing. They all brought some food and enjoyed a delicious potluck feast by a blazing campfire. Swatting mosquitoes and swapping stories, everyone was happy and content. Tummies full and darkness settling in, they headed back to the tree."*

"The final ascent into the trees brought climbers into the comfortable rest in their tree bivouac. Cicadas chirped loudly and a distant owl's hoot echoed through the forest. Once settled into their tree boats, the climbers were able to take off their helmets, wipe off their sweat, and relax. Brian Lanier, the facilitator in the tree, attended to everyone and made sure they were comfortable and well taken care of. The excited chatter of the day's adventure tuned down as night closed in and blanketed all the climbers. They each fell into a peaceful sleep among all the creatures of the night, sharing in the beauty of a summer night and held safely in the strong canopy of the towering poplar tree. What better way could a person end their evening?"