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# STOP PRESS – GEOFF CLIMBS TREE SHOCK!

In July and August 2007 Geoff and his wife Frankie spent 5 weeks in Australia. In West Australia Geoff climbed to the top platform of two of the three forest fire 'lookout trees' which, at 60 and 75m give a stupendous view above the surrounding forest canopy. And also, at least when done one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, somewhat sore legs the following day! These trees have



*Alex (left) and Geoff - note giant cavity*

metal pegs making climbing a doddle for an arborist, and thousands of people have done it, however a short while later in Victoria was something altogether different.



*Not a bad stick...*

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In Melbourne they met up with Alex Bicknell, an old friend of Geoff's from college days at Merrist Wood in Surrey where they had studied arboriculture in 1977/8. At the end of that year they both put in for a travel grant . . . Alex won, travelling overland to Australia where he has remained ever since, building up a unique tree care and planting operation, notably covering large estates in Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. During a road trip starting in Melbourne, via the Snowy Mountains and Canberra to Alex's home overlooking the Pacific Ocean about 100k up the coast from Sydney, they joined forces with ace arborist Pete Bateman to climb a tree. . . .



*Pete brings all the kit in*

**Extract from Geoff's email from Victoria state, Australia, August 2007:**

Ok here's the tree deal. A Mountain Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) in some forest at Dalamurla, about 200k SE of Melbourne, 20 minutes drive from Pete's house. No branches for 30m (all measurements approximate and measured by stick or with the ropes - I should have brought my clinometer!). So Pete used a Bigshot (giant 3m catapult) to put a single line over, after 4 or 5 attempts. Once he was up, I also went



*Pete prepares the Bigshot*



*The long view*

up the single line using an ascender (never done that before – a bit weird but definitely easier than pulling up on a prussic). Then continuing conventionally on 2 different ropes to my final height of around 50 – 52m. Having passed 2 massive cavities on the way (one big enough for Alex to climb into, which he duly did) and it being pretty windy, and out on a heavily angled stem, and head and shoulders above the surrounding forest canopy (ok enough of the excuses...) I declined the final few metres to where Pete and Alex were perched literally 2m from the very tips. Overall height we reckoned was 59m. Descended the single line using a gris-gris, kinda fun (provided you don't overdo it and it overheats with the friction). Trunk diameter measured as 2.82m – and still 1.78m at 30m up!!



*Spot Pete*

### **Postscript:**

At 193' tall, that's half as high again as any tree I have climbed in the UK, a 125' Lime in Gloucestershire. The 'gris-gris' is a rock climber's metal friction device that Pete considers 'counter-intuitive' - if you panic you instinctively pull on it and that makes you drop, whereas to actually stop you need to let go of it. He kindly explained that to me after we were down. Luckily I hadn't panicked. A great experience – and it has been getting me huuuge respect from the lads at work, who suspect that this 58-year old



*Alex traverses in from the right*

hasn't climbed anything bigger than an apple tree for years. So well worth the effort! Actually I may be imagining the huge respect... it goes without saying that I was entirely reliant on Pete and Alex getting the ropes up, so a bit of a cheat really.



*I'm enjoying this - honest!*



*Life is just sooooo boring*



*Way up over the other trees*