

# 2016 ITCC San Antonio - Interview with James Kilpatrick

By Sonia Garth

## ***What does it mean to you to be able to participate in the ITCC and climbing competitions in general?***

For me being part of tree climbing competitions has made such an impact on not just my career as an arborist, but to my life overall to such an extent that I couldn't imagine how life would have been without it. I'm so thankful for all the cool people I have met over the years and the life long friendships I have made through climbing competitions.



*Photo credit; David Graham*

## ***Was there someone or something that influenced you to become a climber and to compete?***

The initial spark came from my old man John, he told me about Arboriculture and what it's about while we were working together in our family farm forestry block at home in New Zealand. Andrew Harrison (yes the Mr Harrison Rocket), he had already been to ITCC 3 times as the New Zealand chapter champion by that stage. He encouraged us as students to participate in a regional climbing event and even though I did terribly, I never gave in. Paul Kenny, another NZTCC champion just got back from Europe and he and Beddes Strasser ran a series of workshops around New Zealand which was a massive inspiration just to be face to face with these guys and see them climbing. I often worked with Paul and even though we seldom did nice pruning jobs, he would always unselfishly encourage me to climb. Scott Forrest and I quickly became good friends after we first competed together in 2006, we also worked overseas a lot together and he took the lead in organising competitions for us to climb in. Traveling and climbing as we did was challenging but very rewarding, getting to meet so many influential people along the way was a true gift, unfortunately I could never manage to name everyone in this article! What I can say is, although we have quite different styles, I definitely wouldn't be the same climber as I am today without Scotty.

## ***As an arborist, how do feel you benefit from your participation in climbing competitions? Do you think it helps you on the job?***

Early in my career, competition climbing for me changed the way I worked in trees. It gave me the opportunity to see top climbers showing what could be done, I saw where I could also go in trees like they did. In the end, competition climbing gave me somewhere to aspire to as a climbing arborist. I never cared so much about being the best competition climber, what I really cared about being able to do good tree care. It didn't take long to workout that the better you can climb, the better job you are able to do especially when it came to crown reductions.

Older experienced climbers I spoke to earlier on, were quick to point out the benefits of using the latest equipment and climbing techniques that were often developed in one way or another through competition climbing. These benefits include at work productivity and of

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course, extending ones climbing career. The amount of times I heard about ruined joints as a result of climbing without cambium savers and persisting to do things the same old way made it clear for me to avoid making the same mistakes.

From my experience working and competing around the world, climbers participating in competitions tend to optimise the way they work from what they learn in climbing competitions. Finally, I found that working day in day out my productivity and passion for climbing would tend to plateau, after a competition as soon as I was back working again (after removing the protective tape from my handsaw blade), it felt like I jumped up a level and I was as happy as ever to be back at work.

***Is there anything, besides your daily work routine, that you do train and prepare for the event?***

No not really. I might swing around a tree with some friends in a quiet park just to enjoy climbing without a chainsaw for a change haha.

***What benefits do you think ITCC brings to the industry? Do you think it represents the industry well?***

The benefits ITCC brings to the industry are vast and wide, more so that I think most of us realise. I think the majority of these benefits actually come from the people involved in running the event behind the scenes. Those involved in the rules committee, head judges and head technician positions really represent us well and look for positive industry progress.

***Are there any particular techniques or equipment you prefer to use?***

I have a toolbox which is my climbing bag. The tools inside that bag are my climbing gear. The particular tool required to get the job done right depends on the job. No one particular tool does every job right.

The other point here is that no matter how good your hammer is for example, if you can't hit the nail with it, it's useless. In other words, you need to know how to use all the tools in the toolbox.

Throughout my career, I gather gear and attempt to learn how to use it properly so that whatever the situation, I have the right equipment and technique to make the best out of the situation at hand.

***Do you use these every day when working or just for competition?***

Yea I carry the same climbing bag with me to work as I do in the competitions. Oh apart from I have earmuffs on my helmet at work!

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***Did you learn anything new during the competition this year? (New technique, see a new device, etc.)***

I learnt loads from the competition this year the same as I do in every competition that I'm a part of. Seldom does what I've learnt have much to do with climbing gear though. I'm constantly reminded how tree climbers are a special breed, this year I truly learnt what great sportsmanship means. Last years champ, James Earhart was one of many climbers who had a bad preliminary round event, missing out on a masters spot but instead of being down and out about it, he casts it aside moving on with a smile. Barton Allen-Hall who was the masters challenge runner up, he had an amazing climb and on any other day could have won the title but this time he unselfishly set the bar being happy for someone else's success. I was truly humbled by acts of sportsmanship like this from Barton and many other friends at ITCC.



*Photo credit; David Graham*

***This is your 4<sup>th</sup> time in the ITCC Masters' Challenge. How does it feel to now win the ITCC championship? Did you do anything differently this time than in previous Masters' climbs?***

The ITCC world title has been an ultimate goal for a while now. The challenge is not just a physical but mentally tough one. Just knowing that the masters challenge finals climb was over for me was a relief in itself, but knowing that this time I had represented my family, my friends and fellow competitors well by performing as they knew I could, that was the best feeling for me. I never thought about winning, in the beginning I was focused and went about my business and in the end, it was just about climbing and having some fun. For some reason as soon as I was in the tree, I felt like - today it's just going to work. There were of course moments where something could go wrong but then I thought once again that this time, it's just going to work! Being with the kiwi team together in an apartment was a great build up where we even had our own team chief Kerry, maybe that was the difference or was it the magical peanut slab chocolate bar? Who knows... What I do know is I went into the event with no expectations so win or loose I was going to enjoy it.