

Going Out on a Limb

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Riverside Outfitters offering classes in tree climbing

In his line of work as a certified arborist and president of Truetimber Tree Service, Scott Turner happily goes out on a limb just about every day. Now he wants the rest of Richmond to join him. His new venture, Riverside Outfitters, offers the first recreational tree climbing opportunities in the area — a chance to hang out high in Richmond’s urban forest.

Classes meet at Riverside Outfitters’ wilderness-inspired headquarters in Stratford Hills or at designated locations. I took my introduction-to-tree-climbing class in my back yard. Turner and his assistant, David Tate, picked a tall white oak for my vertical voyage. Tate set up the 8,000-pound test-weight climbing ropes, hauling himself up the tree so nimbly he beat the squirrels to the top.

Using another tree, Turner taught me techniques that I’d use to get up and down. Turner, an experienced climber with a master’s in physics, explained how he wraps a rope strong enough to hold three SUVs around the tree and attaches it to a climber’s harness at both ends with foolproof knots and triple-locking carabiners. Helmeted and harnessed, practicing just above the ground, I liked the Batman-esque feel of walking up a tree, though I made more noise than Batman ever did.

Ready for more, we went to the base of the tree where Tate sat camouflaged up high, having looped my rope around a sturdy limb. Turner attached both ends to my harness and added another rope so he could belay me — controlling my movement if I got in trouble — from the ground.

Once treeborne, I was more sloth than squirrel. If climbing is a question of technique, as Turner had assured me, my answer wasn’t graceful, but the higher I went, the higher I wanted to go. The ascender, a handy metal handle attached to my rope, helped my hands pull, and the foot-attached ascender made my quads do the heavy lifting. I got a high-altitude workout. I climbed 70 feet into the tree canopy, perching on a branch like an overgrown woodpecker with a bird’s-eye view of my neighborhood. When it was time to rappel down, I didn’t want to leave, but the descent was pure play and easy on the muscles.

In addition to its tree-climbing lessons, Riverside Outfitters also rents canoes, inner tubes, inflatable boats, and mountain bikes so people can explore the nearby James River and James River Park. With classes, equipment, and activities geared toward children and adults, Riverside Outfitters is Turner’s attempt to rope others into living in and loving the natural world as much as he does. As he teased, “Anybody I can put my hands on is going up a tree.”

For more information, including pricing, which was still being determined at press time, contact Riverside Outfitters at 560-0068.