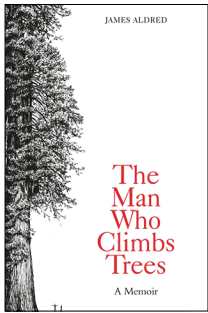


Life in the branches



The Man Who Climbs Trees

By James Aldred

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304 pp. £16.99

From ancient oak woodlands in England to ephemeral mountain ash forests in Australia, no tree is too high or too far for James Aldred, professional tree climber and cameraman. After 26 years of climbing and wildlife filmography, Aldred now recounts his most memorable adventures and provides a rare and valuable insight to life in the branches.

Raised on the outskirts of the New Forest, Aldred climbed his first tree, a 170-foot giant dubbed 'Goliath', at just 16 years

old. Since this initial immersive experience, which he likens to "entry into another realm", his love for climbing has taken him on countless adventures across the globe. He has been exposed to a dazzling array of flora and fauna, as well as extreme weather events and mysterious rashes and diseases. Aldred's exploits even led to a unique career moulding researchers into climbers and filming wildlife for the BBC and National Geographic.

Chapter by chapter, Aldred takes us through a number of tree types and locations, impressing and shocking readers with his stories. Included in these memoirs, for example, are the dipterocarps of Borneo, ozouga trees of Gabon, castaña trees of Peru and kapok trees of Venezuela. As well as vivid descriptions of the flora, we hear about encounters with harpy eagles, bull elephants, leopards and gorillas, and how he has fallen victim to honeybees, bullet ants, parasitic wasps and spine-covered maggots. Although some of these encounters may have been unpleasant, they highlight the sheer diversity

of life supported by trees and the ecosystems they sustain, much of which is concealed from the ground.

In addition to an outlandish hobby and unique career, Aldred has also discovered aspects of spirituality and philosophy during his tree-driven adventures. He has been privy to a multitude of different cultures, each of which demonstrate their own unique relationship with nature. By describing the dependence and feelings of affinity that exist between people and trees, as well as the graceful branches, arcs and symmetry of these "living obelisks", Aldred will inspire you to both admire and respect these living entities. His passion will pull you in and truly make you appreciate the natural world and its plant and animal inhabitants. □

Reviewed by Siobhan Sanford

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