

# New Zealanders Take Both Men's and Women's Top Titles in 2013

The International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC), organized by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), and held this year on Toronto Island, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, hosted by the Ontario Chapter of ISA, is convened annually in conjunction with the ISA Annual International Conference. Several ISA chapters and associate organizations hold regional competitions around the world leading up to the championship, at which competitors earn the opportunity to represent their chapter at the international event.

Tree climbing competitions offer professional arborists a chance to showcase their talents for maneuvering in

the trees. Climbers demonstrate and develop their abilities, practice safe techniques, and join together in a fun and supportive community. This year, a total of 64 participants from 19 countries gathered to test their skills and contend for the top spots. The weather was beautiful, with an occasional breeze, in the picturesque setting of Toronto Island. Climbers had a good crowd to cheer them on, and everyone enjoyed the sights and sounds of the nearby ferry rolling in and out of dock. The relaxed atmosphere, enthusiastic spectators, and majestic willows (*Salix* spp.) ready for the climbs made for a two-day competition that was among the best in recent memory.

## NICKY WARD-ALLEN

Nicky Ward-Allen, the 2013 ITCC Women's Champion, can be found climbing most days. To prepare for competitions, she does aerobic work daily, either running, cycling, or on the rowing machine. She has multiple work climbs set up in trees in local parks where she climbs whenever the weather allows, and when the weather doesn't allow, she practices her footlocking. On road trips, she packs her gear in the car and she climbs different trees along the way whenever the opportunity presents itself. There is no prohibition on public climbing in New Zealand, so most parks are fair game.

When not competing, Ward-Allen works for her own company. She recently purchased her first tipper truck to complement her little 6" chipper, and the proud glow of driving her own truck around town hasn't yet lost its shine.

Nicky really values the patience, generosity, and supportive competitive spirit of her fellow climbers that drive her to do her best. She began competing in 2004, and met three-time ITCC Champion, Chrissy Spence, who gave Ward-Allen a "thrashing" in her first national competition that year. Spence, a fellow climber in the ISA New Zealand Chapter, became her friend and coach. "Seeing Chrissy's brilliance was what motivated me to train hard and try to improve. It has been a blessing being in the same Chapter as Chrissy because it has given me the chance to learn from the best."

This was not Nicky's first time climbing trees in Canada. She had the good fortune to spend a couple of days on Vancouver Island before traveling down to the ITCC last year in Portland, Oregon, where she enjoyed the hospitality of the ISA PNW Chapter climbers and went for a twilight recreational climb in a magnificent big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), the likes of which she doesn't see at home in New Zealand.



Of her thinking behind tackling the Master's Challenge and her continued domination in women's footlock event, in which she holds the world record (13.26 seconds), Nicky said, "I didn't have a grand plan for the Masters' Challenge climb, but the good thing about going last was that all the climbers before me had scuffed the bark up, so that the route through the tree was plain to see. Things didn't go perfectly, with a missed swing and setting off the limb walk plumb-bob, but it was enough! I don't take winning the footlock for granted. I work really hard on it. It is easy to miss a lock and blow your time, so it's a crucial balance between pushing for speed and also being deliberate in technique. I was very impressed with the Western Chapter's Jamilee Kempton's head-to-head footlock. Talent like that is going to push me hard."

Ward-Allen was up against two extremely strong climbers in the Women's Masters' Challenge; the returning 2012 ITCC Champion, Veronika Ericsson (Sweden) and the 2012 ETCC Champion, Anja Erni (Switzerland), which makes the victory all the sweeter.

# SCOTT FORREST

For Scott Forrest, the 2013 ITCC Men's Champion, every day is an adventure. Having made plenty of friends in the field of arboriculture in many regions of the world, he travels widely. He's always eager to spend time outdoors in a new place or close to home with family, particularly his four nephews. Forrest has worked as an arborist for 15 years in New Zealand, and has taken part in tree climbing competitions for 13 years. This year marked his sixth international competition, and his second championship win (his first was at the 2011 ITCC in Sydney, Australia).

"I began working for a tree company in Auckland at 17 years of age. I liked the teamwork environment. Some of the more experienced climbers were willing to show me a few new tricks and took time to answer my questions, which helps when you are learning. Sharing information and techniques has always been a part of our industry. I hope that doesn't change."

This wasn't Scott's first visit to Canada, but it was his first experience climbing trees there. In the months leading up to the ITCC, he finds climbing is the best form of training, whether during a typical work day or going to a park, throwing a line into a tree, and climbing around—making jumps, working on speed, agility, and body positioning. With this in mind, it's no surprise that the work climb is the event he always looks forward to at competitions. He took first place in Toronto, and enjoys being able to use his natural style and the challenge of climbing different tree species in different countries. The competition was fierce for the Men's Masters' Challenge; Forrest was



up against three-time ITCC Champion, Mark Chisolm (New Jersey Chapter), James Kilpatrick (New Zealand), Jonathon Turnbull (United Kingdom/Ireland), and Giovanni Ugo (Italy).

When asked about his approach to the Master's Challenge and his greatest challenges at competition, Scott replied, "After seeing the willow tree on Sunday morning, I had a few different plans in mind. We had some discussions with the judges about possible anchor points we could use, and I decided on what I thought was a good approach for this Masters' Challenge. I don't climb using both ends of my rope that often, but it does come in handy for some applications in everyday tree work, as long as the climbing rope is long enough to do so. I was happy to be able to complete the climb in the allocated time. Competing at an international level with such a high caliber of climbers from around the world, you need to be consistent through all five of the preliminary events. Each event is set to test our climbing ability and to show your skills under the pressure of time restrictions."



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*Photos courtesy of David Graham, Janesville, Wisconsin*

Nicky Allen-Ward