

TREE CLIMBING EXTRAORDINAIRES!

Q What sort of tree did you climb when you started?

A As a kid I climbed pōhutukawa trees, and they're still my favourites to climb.

Q Does it take a long time to learn to climb big trees?

A Not too long, I trained for 3–4 months but it takes longer to become an expert.

Q What do you do when your hands get slippery?

A Most of the time we wear gloves, so it's not normally a problem. We have protective trousers (because we work with chainsaws) and boots too. There's plenty of grip on the boots, but it's soft enough to not damage the tree.

Q Is it hard and scary to go really high?

A Sometimes. I get a little nervous, but you trust your equipment and your ability. There are always some risks, but the equipment keeps you safe. Wind and rain make it more risky. It can be a lot of physical effort to reach the top, but the more you do it, the easier it becomes. We learn tricks to help us with our speed and agility.

Q What's the most difficult tree to climb?

A I have climbed a tōtara. They're difficult due to their flexible branches. They are not very grippy to work on.

Q Whats your biggest tip for kids climbing trees?

A Make sure you have someone watching and there to help you. Use safety equipment if you're going up high.

Harrison (age 11), **Xavier** (age 8.5), and **Zac** (age 8) went along to the Hilux Rural Games in Palmerston North in March.



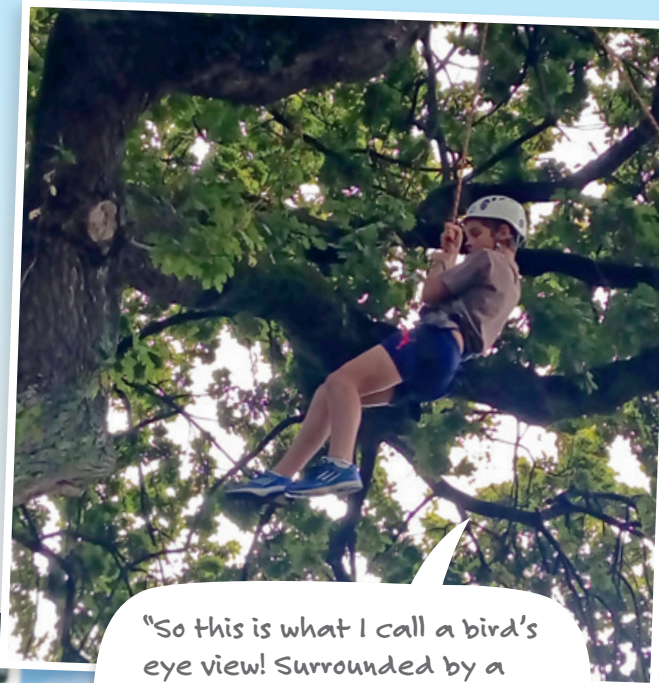
Xavier interviewed Martin – an arborist with the Wellington City Council. He was also competing in the Lower North Island Regional Tree Climbing Competition.

"I especially liked watching the fast tree climbers reach the top and hit the bell. They must go to the gym and do weights as they have very strong arms!" – Zac

"I learnt that we need to keep trees safe by not breaking their branches. They must be able to hold your weight. My favourite part was watching the tree climbers' swing from branch to branch to complete each task." – Xavier



With the help of the **New Zealand Arboricultural Association (NZ Arb)**, they interviewed some of the top tree climbers in New Zealand, and experienced climbing like an arborist (a "tree surgeon" who prunes and sometimes removes trees) at their special Kids Climb event!



"So this is what I call a bird's eye view! Surrounded by a canopy of leafy green, I'm supported by nothing but a harness and a sturdy rope." – Harrison



Harrison interviewed Josh – an arborist with the Wellington City Council. Josh was competing in the Lower North Island Regional Tree Climbing Competition.

Josh grew up rurally in the UK, spending a lot of time climbing trees for fun with friends. He loved the view from up in a tree, and he still does! Josh knew you could climb trees for a job because his friend's dad was an arborist, but he didn't start training as one until he was about 26 years old.

Josh likes all sorts of trees, but his favourite type of tree is an oak tree. "I love how they are always changing and how they live for ages," he said. Josh also likes the patterns of an oak's bark.

He loves the challenge of competitions, as well as climbing for work and for fun, but whenever he's climbing, he always thinks "safety first." He loves to challenge himself and likes the fact that tree climbing isn't just physical, it's also mental.

As well as keeping himself safe, tree safety is a big part of Josh's job as an arborist. One of the things arborists do to protect the tree when they're climbing is to make sure they don't damage the tree's vascular system. This is under the bark and carries water and nutrients throughout the tree. If they put a rope up and over a branch and then hang off it, it could put too much pressure on this system and the branch could die. So instead, arborists put a strap around the branch with two rings on it. Then, they put the rope that takes their weight through the rings so the rope doesn't rub on the branch.

Josh's tip – if you want to be safe climbing a tree, you should always look carefully at the tree first. If it is an evergreen tree, but it has lost its leaves, it is probably dead and not safe to climb. If a branch is dusty and flaky, the branch is probably rotten, especially if there are little holes in it. The little holes are from bugs that burrow into dead wood, because rotten wood is softer than living wood.

Harrison is from Eketahuna, Xavier is from Whanganui, and Zac is from Wellington – ka rawe!