

THE NEW FaMILY TREE

REACHING FOR THE SKY AT CLIMBING SCHOOL

WHY BE TERRESTRIAL when you can be arboreal? Go out on a limb and spend your family vacation in the branches of an oak tree, waking to the sound of woodpeckers, the chattering of squirrels, and expansive views across the treetops. The new "sport" of recreational tree climbing draws on techniques used in rock climbing, caving, and mountaineering and offers all the physical challenges of a ropes course, minus the goal-oriented agenda: You climb at your own pace and only go as high as you want. With a little instruction, anyone can scale a tree.

Dancing With Trees, a recreational tree-climbing school 80 miles northeast of Atlanta, welcomes climbers as young as five. Strap on a harness and inch your way up ropes dangling from the thick branches of white oaks and tulip poplars. A self-belay system prevents you from slipping down, and once you reach the first branch you can make like a monkey and continue climbing limb by limb into the canopy.

Spend anywhere from three hours to a full

day exploring the trees, walking along branches (as if on a balance beam) and moving from tree to tree by sidestepping on cables or swinging across like Tarzan. Come nightfall, kids ten and older can bed down in canvas hammocks called tree boats and sleep ten stories above ground. Watch the moon rise, hear owls hoot, and wake up to breakfast "in bark"—bagels and cream cheese, hard-boiled eggs, bananas, and PowerBars—then rappel down.

Owner Genevieve Summers, a former chimney sweep, got into climbing 12 years ago, after she and her two sons, then ages six and ten, took a course at Tree Climbers International in Atlanta, where the sport was founded, and she's been aloft ever since. Says Summers, "I tell my students they haven't had a good climb unless they have bark in their underwear."

—KARI BODNARCHUK

DANCING WITH TREES

(706-778-8847, www.dancingwithtrees.com)

charges \$200 for groups of up to ten people for three hours, \$650 for a full day, and \$200 per person (maximum five people) for overnights. Classes run year-round, barring wet or stormy weather.

BRANCH OUT:
CLIMBERS CAN
SLEEP OVERNIGHT IN AN OAK
OR POPLAR

