Spur Climbing

Spur climbing is one of several methods for climbing trees and utility poles. This technique is named for the spurs used by the climber to gain purchase on the trunk. Spur climbing is perhaps the oldest and most well known technique for climbing trees, and has been the traditional method employed by tree service technicians as well as spar-pole climbers and other loggers. Over the years, the basic technique has changed very little, however
there have been several recent innovations and improvements in spur climbing equipment.

The following are all required pieces of equipment for spur climbing:

1. Spurs – also known as climbers, spikes, hooks, and gaffs. This is the piece that straps onto the climbers lower leg so that the gaff protrudes from the instep of the foot. There are several types of spurs on the market these days. The following is a list of the most common types categorized by the type of metal they are made of:
   - Steel – Buckingham and Klein both make an excellent steel spur.
   - Aluminum – Bashlin is probably the best known manufacturer of aluminum spurs, but US Rigging or Pelican
   also makes a good set.
   - Titanium – titanium spurs are a recent innovation by Buckingham, and have won the title of lightest spur, formerly claimed by Bashlin's aluminum spur.
2. Saddle – also called a harness. This is the piece worn by the climber around the hips and legs to provide a safe and comfortable way to connect to the flipline or climbing line.
3. Flipline – also known as the safety strap or scare strap. This is the piece that goes around the tree or pole in
   front of the climber and connects to metal d-rings on both sides of the climber's saddle. This is used to provide a way for the climber to lean back against the tree without falling. As the climber ascends, he/she flips this piece up the opposite side of the tree to keep it at the same height as his/her body, hence the name. Fliplines can be divided into two categories:
   - Steel-core – these are for use around chainsaws and have a steel aircraft cable in the center to keep the line from parting if the saw nicks it.

· Non-steel core – these are for use around power lines and do not have a steel cable in the center. This is to prevent the flipline from conducting electricity to the climber.

4. Flipline adjuster – this is the item that allows the climber to adjust the size of the flipline going around the tree as he/she ascends. This is necessary because trees change diameter with height, which forces the climber to gradually shorten the flipline as he/she climbs. The following is a list of the methods available for adjusting the flipline:

· Ascender – also called a rope grab, this device was originally invented to allow people to climb rope more easily, but has since been adapted for use as flipline adjuster. It uses a cam to pinch the rope and hold it in place when under tension. When not under tension, the flipline can be easily adjusted with one hand. Also, the metal construction of ascenders makes them safer for use around chainsaws.

· Prusik – like the ascender, the prusik was originally designed for climbing rope, but has been adapted for use as a flipline adjuster. Usually, this piece has a locking snap spliced onto a prusik loop, which is then tied onto the flipline using either a two-wrap/four coil or three-wrap/six coil prusik knot.

· Bend – usually a Becket Bend. Unlike the ascender and the prusik, this is not a piece of equipment, but a special knot tied with the flipline into the d-ring of the saddle. While this is the least equipment intensive method of adjusting the flipline, it is the hardest on the flipline because it forces the line around very tight bend-radiuses, which can damage the steel cable.

5. Connecting links – this is the piece used to connect the adjuster to the saddle. Usually these are carabiners, but quick links, rope snaps, and twisted clevises are also common. No matter what kind is used though, it is necessary that this piece be locking so that it cannot come open accidentally and cause the climber to fall.

6. OPE (Occupational Protective Equipment) – this includes things like gloves, eye protection, hearing protection, chain saw chaps, and a helmet. While it is sometimes (but not all the time!) possible to get the job done without these items, use of OPE will greatly enhance the safety and comfort of the job.