

New Zealand to host International Tree Climbing Championship for first time

ATLANTA, Ga., U.S. — Get ready for some steep competition at this year's International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC).

ITCC will be coming to Christchurch, New Zealand, from 17-19 October, hosted by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and the New Zealand Arboricultural Association (NZ Arb).

ITCC will platform the talents and skills of professional tree climbers from around the world. Competitive tree climbing is designed to simulate arborist working conditions for professionals to showcase their skills. Competitions involve events including Aerial Rescue, Work Climb, Ascent, Belayed Speed Climb and Throwline.

With this being the first time ITCC will be hosted in New Zealand, NZ Arb immediate past president Richie Hill said they couldn't be more excited.

"New Zealand Arb Association proudly welcomes the world to Aotearoa for the International Tree Climbing Championship," he said, "with our reigning world champion Steph Dryfhout leading the charge."

Current female ITCC champion Dryfhout has been participating in tree climbing competitions for the past eight years.

"I got into tree climbing competitions in 2017 in my first year of studying to become an arborist," Dryfhout said. "A few of my classmates were really keen on the competitions and strongly encouraged me to climb at a regional competition after three months of climbing."

Currently, Dryfhout trains all year round and then increases her training regimen a few months before a big competition.

"After coming second at my first ITCC in 2019, it had always been a goal of mine to win ITCC," Dryfhout said. "I was super happy and shocked when I first found out I had won (in 2024). In my opinion, competitions are important at all levels. At the international level specifically, they are important for connection, community and promoting best practice."

Dryfhout added they are all so excited for people to come to New Zealand for this year's ITCC.

Not too far over the Tasman Sea is also the current male ITCC champion, Barton Allen-Hall. Allen-Hall said he first got into tree climbing competitions after seeing the 2011 ITCC in Sydney, Australia. Like Dryfhout, he trains all year round to compete.

“I definitely never expect to win,” he said. “There are so many great climbers and so many opportunities to make a mistake. When I show up at ITCC and see all the other climbers, I always think that there is no way I will win. Although after winning three titles I do now have the belief that it is possible.”

Allen-Hall said when he arrives in Christchurch that belief might slip away again, and he’s OK with that since too much belief can turn into delusion. During the competition, Allen-Hall said he likes to just focus on what’s right in front of him. He added ITCC is always fun, and you get to build relationships with fellow climbers and volunteers.

“I am so grateful to have spent time with the people involved in these events and truly think of these people like family; tree people are the best people,” Allen-Hall said. “On a broader scale, these competitions are important for sharing ideas and promoting safety standards. I think it is also a useful tool to inform the public on how cool arboriculture is. I would like these competitions to be viewed by a wider audience so that more people would (a) appreciate the trees in the urban environment and (b) appreciate the arborists that care for them and their dedication to their craft.”

To help the public connect with arboriculture, there is also an Arbor Fair that will be held throughout ITCC. This fair is designed to be a fun and educational opportunity to learn more about environmental issues and tree care. During the fair, there will be a “Kids’ Climb,” Saturday and Sunday, for kids to try on arboriculture gear and climb a tree.

“We are excited to bring our International Tree Climbing Championship to this part of the world,” CEO and Executive Director of ISA Caitlyn Pollihan said. “This is a wonderful and free opportunity for the public to come out and learn more about the arboriculture industry. We hope everyone can come join us for this thrilling event.”

The ITCC opening ceremony will begin at 10:30 a.m. on 17 Oct. followed by the preliminary events. A full schedule can be found at itcc-isa.com/events/itcc. ITCC and the Arbor Fair will take place at Hagley Park.

ABOUT ISA

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., U.S., is a global nonprofit professional organization dedicated to promoting the importance of

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arboriculture and educating the public about the significance of trees and the value of their proper care. As part of ISA's advancing the arboriculture profession, it offers the only internationally recognized certification program in the industry, including ISA Certified Arborist[®]. For more information about ISA and Certified Arborists, visit www.isa-arbor.com.

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