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DECEMBER 21, 2017 BY CHRIS KALOUS

Episode 142: John Middendorf - Build It and They Will Go.



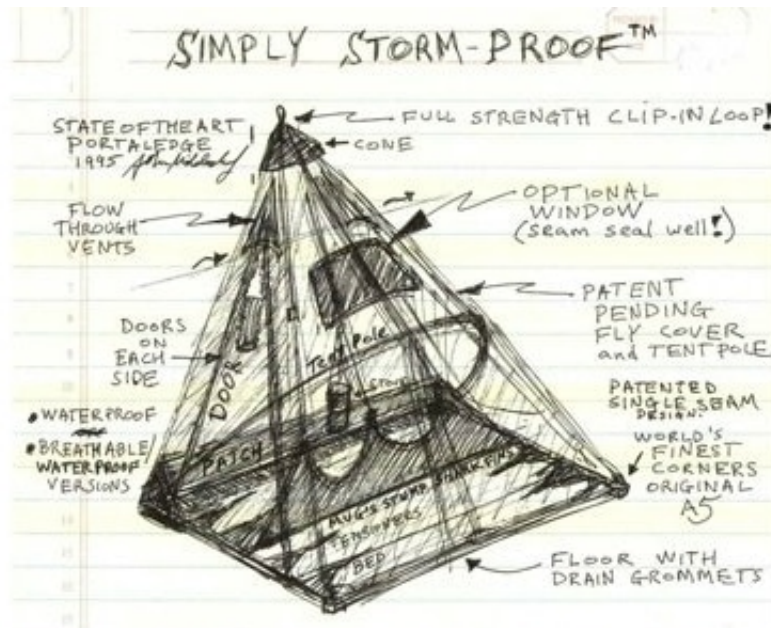
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Big wall climbing being reinvented in John Middendorf's Tasmanian shed

Mon 27 Feb 2017 at 1:48pm

ABC News



John Middendorf has reinvented the A5 portable to be lighter, stronger and more portable.

Supplied: John Middendorf

Legend of big wall climbing John Middendorf is making somewhat of a comeback into the world of extreme climbing by reinventing the portaledge, all from his shed in southern Tasmania.

In the 1980s and '90s, Mr Middendorf pushed the boundaries of mountain

climbing, scaling previously unscaleable big walls thanks largely to his portaledge design.

A portaledge is a hanging tent system that climbers can assemble on the sides of cliffs and climbing walls.



John Middendorf now lives in Cremorne and has started to make portaledges again.

ABC Radio Hobart: Carol Rääbus

The Stanford engineering graduate spent four years living in a tent in Yosemite National Park in the US, climbing the big walls of El Capitan and Half Dome.

But a near-death experience on the cliff face of Half Dome inspired him to use his engineering to improve his climbing.

"We spent three days in really quite cold conditions and the portaledges of the day back then, the structural frame collapsed and the fabric shredded in the storms we were in," he told Helen Shield on [ABC Radio Hobart](#).

"We all thought we were going to die of hyperthermia, but we got pulled off by a helicopter. Saved our lives."

Mr Middendorf spent the next 10 years making and testing different designs of the portaledge until he was satisfied he had the lightest, strongest design possible.

"I would go out with each version of my portaledge and climb a wall somewhere and over the 10 years I'd say we really created a good product."

His A5 Portaledge design was put through its toughest test in 1992 when he and fellow climber Xaver Bongard tackled the largest cliff face ever climbed, the Great Trango Tower in Karakoram, Pakistan.

The climb took them 15 days to get to the top and three days to descend, and they remain the only climbers to have made the trip and survived.

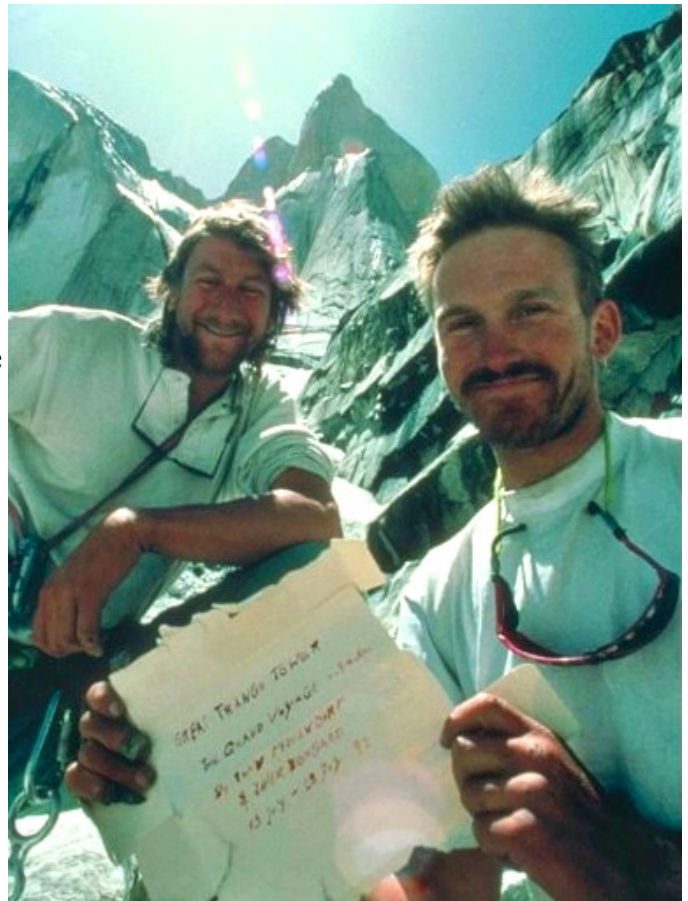
It was after that climb that Mr Middendorf stepped back from extreme climbs.

"I realised that doing risky things out in the mountains of the world was probably not a long-term good career move," he said.

Chance encounter sparks reinvention

In 2003, Mr Middendorf came to Australia to study a masters in engineering in Sydney and decided Australia was where he wanted to stay.

"We had come [to Tasmania] to visit my friend [Paul Pritchard](#), another climber, and once we saw Tasmania we realised it's an amazing place and we just love it here.



It took John Middendorf and Xaver Bongard 15 days to climb the Great Trango Tower.(

Supplied: John Middendorf

)

The family found a property in Cremorne, south east of Hobart, and Mr Middendorf took to teaching after he got interested in how his son was learning.

But a chat with a keen climber got him thinking about his portaledge design and how it could be improved.

Since he sold the design to an outdoor adventure company, the A5 had blown out from the original six-kilogram design to 14kg.



John Middendorf says a key to his new lighter frame is the bend of the corners, getting rid of the heavy welded corners. (

ABC Radio Hobart: Carol Rääbus

"I've actually been able to make one in my shed that was 6.5kg and it's going to be just as strong and weatherproof and rigid as the older ones," Mr Middendorf said.

"It's quite exciting because it really is a tool that might bring a new standard of big wall climbs around the world.

"It's lighter, stronger and more compact, it ticks all the boxes in terms of what a big wall climber needs."

Mr Middendorf makes the frame of his new portaledge design — called D4 — in his shed in Cremorne, while an old climbing friend in the US sews the strong, lightweight fabric and ships it to Tasmania.



A D4 portaledge ready to assemble, with the fabric lighter and stronger than before. (

ABC Radio Hobart: Carol Rääbus

To get the D4 up and running, Mr Middendorf has launched a Kickstarter campaign and said he could make about 28 portaledges in his shed by September.

If the Kickstarter goes nuts and demand outstrips supply, he said he would think about working with a company again.

But his main focus for the time being was to just make a product climbers can use for more extreme climbs.



Editors' Choice 2019: D4 Full Portaledge Review

Our top climbing gear picks of 2019

MAY 15, 2019

[ANDY HOECKEL \(HTTPS://WWW.CLIMBING.COM/BYLINE/ANDY-HOECKEL/\)](https://www.climbing.com/byline/andy-hoeckel/)





The D4 Full Portaledge.

In late December, I took the new D4 Full-Size up Yosemite's Washington Column. After designing the iconic A5 ledge 30 years ago, John Middendorf has crafted a welcome upgrade. Made of 6061-T6 aircraft aluminum, the D4 packs into a 31.5" x 15" x 8" oval that fits nicely in a haulbag and weighs only 18.8lbs—the lightest double ledge on the market. The newly designed bullet connectors make setup and breakdown a breeze, while the unique curved corners add rigidity, eliminating the need for a spreader bar, reducing weight and eliminating tangles. At 6'6", I fit comfortably in the 82" x 47.5" platform, enjoying solid back support. The seamless fly is made from diamond ripstop polyester—the ledge fits snugly into abrasion-resistant Cordura pockets in the fly, and six tensioning straps secure the fly to the ledge; meanwhile, a tentpole tightens the fly to create a stormproof bivy.

(<https://www.climbing.com/gear/2019-climbing-gear-guide-editors-choice-awards>)

\$1,250, durangosewingsolutions.com (<https://durangosewingsolutions.com/>)

D4 Octapod: A unique portaledge that is lightweight, low-profile and easy to set up



Before I fell deeply in love with the Octapod portaledge—made by visionary climber John Deucey ("Deuce") Middendorf for his company, D4—I was beginning to hate it. I'll explain, but first some background....

I acquired the Octapod to tackle an unclimbed big wall in Cochamo, Chile, that I had been dreaming of for years. Why the Octapod? Because few people know portaledges as well as Deuce does. After all, he invented the classic A5 Portaledge that facilitated multiday big-wall ascents in such harsh environments as Polar Sun Spire on Baffin Island, the North Face of Trango Tower in Pakistan, and Cerro Escudo in Patagonia, among other big walls around the world, including his own route in 1992 with Xaver Bongard, The Grand Voyage on Great Trango Tower using an experimental A5 titanium two-person portaledge. The [A5 and Deucey](#) were so ahead of the technological curve that the company was bought by The North Face in the late 1990s. But after a few years and a company-wide restructuring, Deucey and A5 were out.

"I had a non-compete so I couldn't continue my dream of creating even better ledges," Deuce told me, "so I moved on."

Fortunately for adventurous climbers, he was back at it by 2015. Together with his friend Chris Trull (and based out of Australia now), he started designing a

new line of D4 portaledges. It was immediately obvious to me that these were state of the art: the ledges include lightweight materials and ball joints, as well as shock cords for seamless self-assembly; and there are no finicky spreader bars. And they were even making these funky unconventional designs such as the octagonal-shaped Octapod.



Chris Kalman enjoying the comfort of the D4 Octapod portaledge at the top of the third pitch of Moonlight Buttress (V 5.12+) in Zion National Park. [Photo] Nelson Klein

"The new 'weird' shapes," Deuce told me, "are driven by seeking maximum ergonomics with minimal packed size. The whole concept of a continuously shock-corded, eight-piece frame with all frame sections the same overall length [that] fold compactly took some discovery...and it is the key to the D4 design."

I lugged the Octapod all the way to Southern Chile, up into the Cochamo Valley, through some of the densest forest I'd ever braved, and a few pitches up a slab. My friend Neha Khurana carried it on her back (along with food, water, and sleeping gear for a few days) while following those pitches of 5.7 friction. We made it one pitch higher before wet conditions and unprotectable stone made bailing the only sane option.

For the next few months, the ledge sat in my camp in Cochamo, and then my

garage, reminding me of a mounting debt of promises. Promises I had made to *Alpinist* and Deuce to review it; promises I made to myself to use it. I was pretty bummed to leave Cochamo not having made good on those.

In early June, I found myself with a rare opportunity to disappear off the grid for an entire three-day weekend. So I planned a trip to Zion with my friend Nelson Klein, to establish a new route in the Kolob Canyon area. Kolob seemed to be a trove of potential new lines. But after Nelson, his girlfriend Coral, and I dragged our *first* load of gear (ledge not included) through a four-hour approach—a steep hill of unrelenting scrub oak toward a beautiful-looking line—we were stunned to see bolts glistening in the sun high up on the headwall. Who in god's name had been up there and climbed it already, I have no idea. Might have been Deuce himself. Even if the line had been untouched, the approach was so gnarly that the idea of returning with the ledge, food and water was almost unthinkable.

This was the time at which I was hating that ledge. All responsibility. No fun. I was sick of carrying it around, both physically and emotionally. I'd never used a ledge on any of the 20 or so Grade III, IV, and V first ascents I'd done over the years. Probably because I'm a free climber, not an aid climber, which lends itself to the kind of terrain a person prefers not to haul on. "Fast and light" had always been my preferred style in the mountains. And even though I had my hands on one of the fastest and lightest portaledges in the world (this was before G7 launched their Kickstarter campaign for an inflatable portaledge), it still felt awfully slow and heavy compared to my typical new-routing kit. This, I would argue, is a salient point.

As light and easy as the D4 is, I wouldn't recommend it for an alpine-style push meant to last two, three, or even four days. Unless you are climbing an incredibly sheer face with no natural ledges at all—and if you're climbing something like that, you're probably aid climbing anyway, so who cares about an extra ten pounds?—just suffer through the night(s). You'll move much faster, and have better chances at success.



Neha Khurana following the opening slabs with a haul bag and portaledge on her back on an attempted new route in Cochamo with Kalman. Wet, vegetated, unprotectable rock eventually forced them to bail. [Photo] Chris Kalman

IT WAS NELSON'S IDEA, I think, that we climb Moonlight Buttress as a backup plan. I had always wanted to try Moonlight, but not until I felt that I was in very good Indian Creek shape. With six consecutive 5.12 pitches, I didn't expect to have the stamina to go ground-up on it in a day. Nelson suggested that by spending two days on the route, I might stand a better chance, and also get the ledge review off my back. Kill two birds with one stone. Brilliant!

And now, for the part of the review where I fall in love with the D4 Octapod. How do I love the Octapod? Let me count the ways.

First, the Octapod is so small that it fit *into* a medium-size haulbag, along with a double rack and personal climbing and sleeping gear.

Second, it was light enough that I could carry that haul bag without buckling the waist or chest belts. Both these points were crucial for crossing the swollen Virgin River, which was running about five times higher than usual. I very nearly fell into the rushing water during that crossing.

Third, the Octapod is incredibly easy to set up. Nelson and I started climbing around two in the afternoon. We hauled to the top of Pitch 3 (Pitch 4 of the free line). Since I knew what cinch it was to assemble the Octapod, we didn't pause there, but instead rode our momentum two pitches higher. I onsighted the first 12a, and almost onsighted the crux pitch. Too exhausted to fancy another burn that night (again, key point here), we rapped back down to Pitch 3, put the Octapod together in a jiffy, and settled in for a long and comfortable night.

Fourth, the Octapod is really comfortable! It's super short (I'm 5-foot-5 and my feet hung off the end), and with no spreader bar or center partition, I expected Nelson (who is 5-foot-8) and I to be spooning in the middle. But I couldn't have been more wrong. We slept head to foot, and both had plenty of room. We brought inflatable pads, which were crucial for head and feet (these otherwise would rest directly on the aluminum frame). I was more comfortable on the Octapod than I have been on any previous wall bivy. To be honest, it was even more comfortable than the previous night in the back of my Subaru Outback.

Fifth, I have to credit the Octapod (and Nelson, who selflessly carried all the food and water on the second day), for my send of Moonlight Buttress. Literally. No faux climber humility here. Had we been trying to climb the route in a day, that first fall would have completely annihilated any hopes I had of sending. But the ledge gave me a huge surplus of time and comfort to recover—something I had never experienced when trying hard multi-pitches. On the second day, after a good night's sleep, I sent the crux pitch, and then onsighted the rest of the route. Nelson, who started the day following the crux with three liters of water, a heavy camera, and all of our food, also climbed exceptionally well. I am certain I wouldn't have sent if I'd carried my own fair share of water and food.



Kalman crossing a swollen Virgin River after climbing Moonlight Butte. The Octapod fit neatly inside the medium-size haul bag seen here, along with sleeping gear, personal climbing gear, a rack, helmet and poo bag. [Photo] Nelson Klein

I GOT THE OCTAPOD for big backcountry first ascents. I still think it would be a great tool for those. But you have to find a steep wall, and if you're hauling and carrying a ledge, you'll go slow, which means more food and water, which means (probably) multiple carries to the base, which means slower still. All of these variables and logistical concerns make the margin for using the Octapod for the

purpose I had intended very slim. You need a lot of time, a lot of patience, and a little bit of luck, too. The issue is not so much with the Octapod, but with the external variables—variables I have limited time and patience for as I grow older.

But weekend warriors looking for a portaledge for big wall trade routes close to the road would do well to consider the Octapod. Both set-up and take-down are easier than any other ledge I've seen, and the weight and size leave no room for comparison. For platonic partners under 5-foot-9, the ledge (which appears tiny at first) was plenty big. For spooning partners, it would undoubtedly be downright dreamy.

Kalman is a former Alpinist intern, an editor for the American Alpine Journal, and the author of [As Above, So Below: A Climbing Story](#). You can find more information about his work and climbing endeavors at chriskalman.com. He has been climbing since 2000.



Kalman settling in for a long comfy night on the D4 Octapod portaledge. You can see that, at 5-foot-5, Kalman's feet are hanging off the end. While short, the unique shape of the ledge accommodates "spooning mode." [Photo] Nelson Klein

Pros

Super light (3.5kg w/o fly, just under 5kg with)

Super small (packs down to about 24 inches tall by 6 inches in diameter)

Super comfortable, Easy to set up. Rating: 5 stars.

The secret to conquering the toughest climb in the Himalayas may lie in a shed in Tasmania

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[Peter Farquhar](#) Feb 20, 2017, 6:11 PM

John Middendorf knows this is a completely safe, even comfortable, way to sleep:



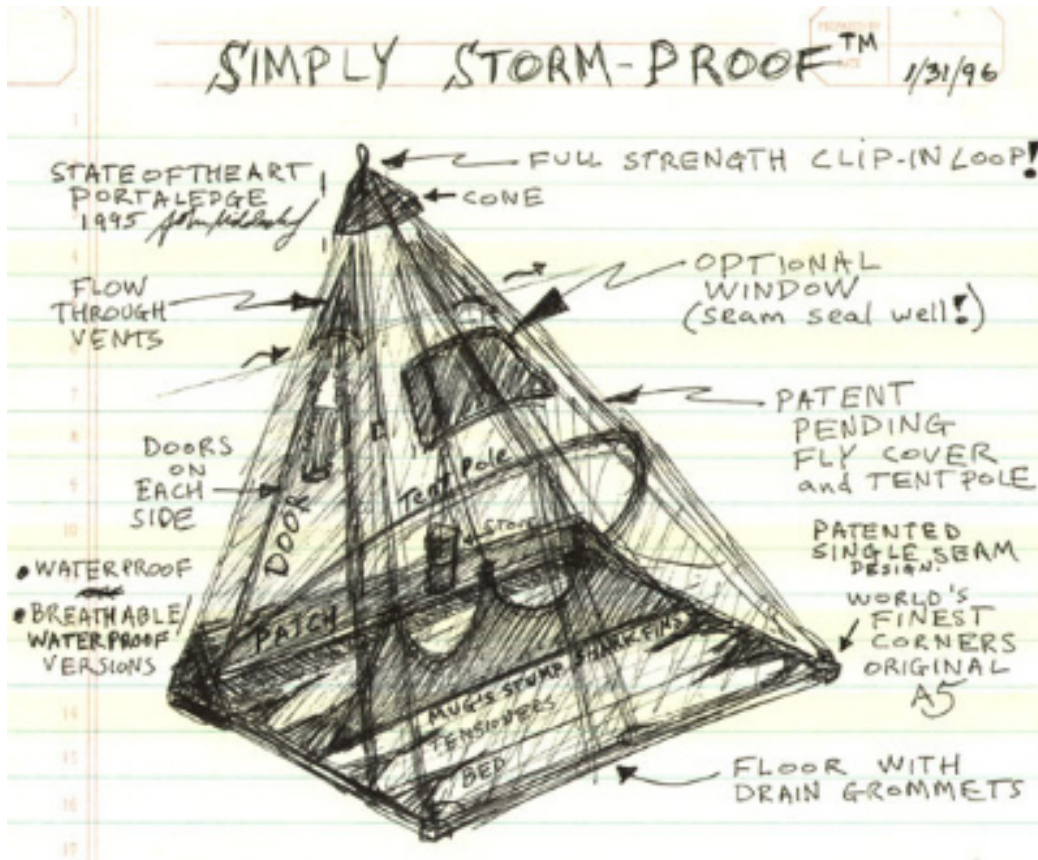
Picture: Charlie Fowler

He knows, because he's spent "at least a year and half" pinned to a cliffside somewhere snoozing in a portaledge.

He also knows because he invented the modern day portaledge, after nearly dying when the model he was using collapsed in 1986 during a snowstorm, five days into an eight-day climb up the classic white granite

south face of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park.

Following his helicopter rescue, Middendorf, then a 25-year-old Stanford-trained mechanical engineer, founded A5 Adventures.



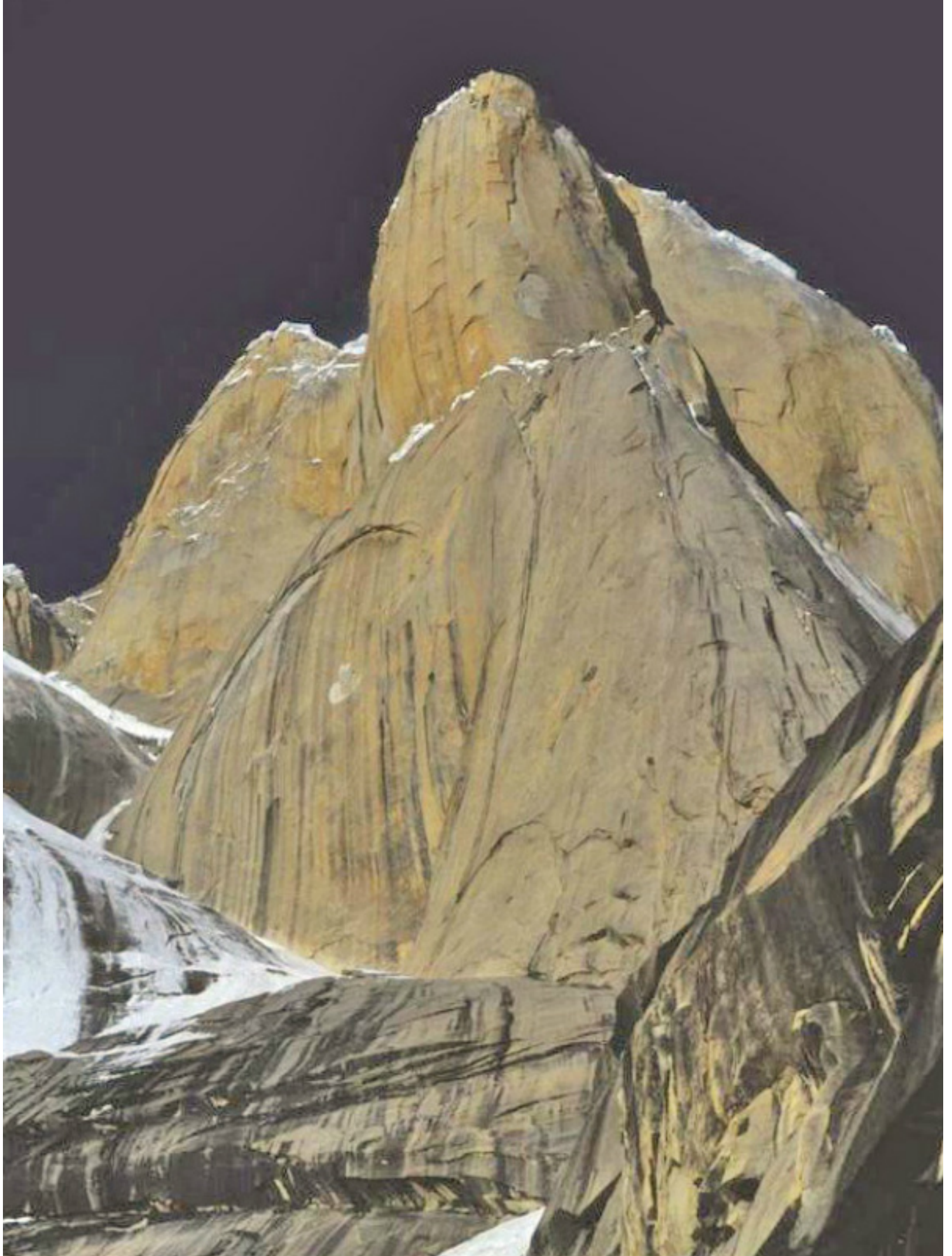
Picture: John Middendorf

It wasn't the first ledge invented that a climber could clip to a cliff-face, but Middendorf's A5 quickly became the industry standard.

A5 Portaledges were the first to be able to withstand Himalayan conditions. They were light, strong and to this day have played a key role in helping the sport explode in both popularity and levels of daring.

It gave climbers access to unprecedented challenges offered by "Alpine style" climbing, which involves carrying all your equipment, food and crucially, shelter if you're planning on staying overnight. Or in some cases, a month or two.

Middendorf himself gave it the ultimate test in 1992, when he and Xavier Bonnard became the first climbers to conquer and return from the east summit of the Great Trango Tower in Pakistan.



Picture: John Middendorf

It's not for the faint-hearted, if any climb ever is. At 1350m, the Great Trango Tower also happens to be the world's longest vertical drop.

It took Middendorf and Bonnard *15 days* to make the

summit:



Picture: John Middendorf

Back in the 80s, Middendorf was a pioneer. He became widely acknowledged as a genuine climbing legend, one of the first to actually get sponsored to climb, and at one stage spent four years camped in Yosemite National Park getting to know and claiming several records on its iconic rock, El Capitan.

For most of the past decade, his greatest challenge has been facing down schoolchildren in his day job as a high school teacher in southern Tasmania.

Middendorf, now 57, moved to Australia's island state in 2007. It's unlikely most of the children he's taught since are aware of how much of a rebel Mr Middendorf was, and to some extent, still is.

He dropped teaching six months ago, after a climbing trip in Arapiles, Victoria with his family last year. A climber old enough to remember had asked Middendorf why "no one made the nice, strong, stormproof, and

lightweight ledges like A5 used to make" any more.

Middendorf sold A5 Adventures and the A5 Portaledge to The North Face in 1998, and the design still lives on as a Black Diamond product.

In the 30 years since he unveiled a 6kg version of the A5, the overall design has barely changed. Except with all the new features that have been added, it now weighs around 14kg.

Middendorf accepted the challenge to bring back the lightweight version.

A concept was born, and Middendorf went to work in his shed.



He doesn't want to give away too many secrets, but...



Six months later, result:



Middendorf says his new design, which he calls the D4 portaledge, is “lighter, stronger, more rigid, easier to set up, and just as roomy and ‘bomber’ (weatherproof) as the ones available today”.

It fits into a daypack, and most importantly, it weighs 6kg complete with fly cover and haulsack. That’s *8kg less* than the current version of his old A5.

In a nutshell, it’s all down to lighter, stronger materials and doing away with a lot of “unnecessary” gimmicks which have been tacked on to the A5 over time.

And just like the A5 enabled climbers to go further, longer than they'd ever done before, Middendorf believes the D4 will usher in a new wave of extreme challenges ahead.

The greatest challenge

This is Jannu:



Picture: Carsten.nebel/Wikimedia Commons

Climbers know the north face of Jannu as “The Wall of Shadows”.

If you conquer The Wall of Shadows, you’ve overcome what many consider [the greatest Himalayan challenge of all](#).

The final face alone is 3000m – three times higher than El Capitan, and rising to 7700m.

Nobody had made it up the centre line until 2004, when it took a team of 11 Russians 49 days to get from base camp to summit. At 7000m, they were moving at a torturous 100m a day.

“The Russians were there for the whole season, like three months, fixing ropes, this continual changing of a team,” Middendorf says. “It’s called ‘siege tactics’.

There’s no arguing it was still an incredible achievement. But Middendorf says it’s possible to get to the top in less than half the time.

“There’s no tool for a climber to go up to the base and just leave the ground and climb for 15-20 days,” he says.

Keep it secret

A one-in-30-year update to a crucial, lifesaving piece of extreme sport equipment? Check. Designed and branded by an industry legend? Check.

Here’s the real challenge immediately facing Middendorf – he’s chosen Kickstarter as the platform for the D4 launch.

He’ll start taking orders around the end of February. He expects his next 6 months will involve working on “28” products, in time for Yosemite’s September wall season.

On one hand, that seems a little conservative. But that might be a good thing, because there are no factories involved, just Middendorf working with some aluminium tubing in his garage, and an accomplice in the US doing the stitching.

But has he [not heard of the FlowHive](#)? The Aussie beehive that set a \$75,000 goal but ended up with \$12 million in orders to fill? And then there’s the problem of someone stealing his design.



They're welcome to it. Middendorf is a strong non-believer in patents.

"I got a couple of patents and frankly, I found patents to be a complete waste of time," he says. "The amount of time you spend on patents just took away from all the innovation."

It's remains one of the biggest problem with putting your radical new design on the internet for all to see. The Australian makers of the FlowHive, the honey on tap beehive that took the world by storm in 2014, were seeing examples of knock-off products on the market even before they'd reached the end of their campaign.

Of course, a beehive isn't going to save you from a 1000m drop. *Caveat emptor.*

Middendorf prefers to "out-innovate".

"Out-innovate the best because they're only going to copy the previous design and by the time they've produced that design, you're already on something more advanced," he says.

"I'm very confident this will change the whole game. All the other companies, once they see this new design, are going to switch into the way I'm making it now."

If it proves successful, Middendorf says he's already talking to an outdoor manufacturer in California who'll take over manufacturing. He'd just "get a royalty or something like that", but his ultimate goal "is to bring back a tool to help these new generation climbers see what's possible."

"That's my motivation, to make some new tools no one else is making that help push teams out there and help people achieve their dreams."

Keep it safe

The world's first D4 is on its way to a friend of Middendorf's in the Canadian Arctic, who has put their hand up to test it on Baffin island at the end of the month. The climber, a reknowned Polish soloist named Marek Raganowicz, will hitch it on some of the world's biggest walls in the most extreme winter conditions.

"I've probably made a couple of thousand back in the US," Middendorf says. "But this is the very first time I've sent out a Portaledge of my design that I hadn't personally tested myself first."

"I admit it makes me nervous, because there's lots of new features, new fabrics and he's going to go to a place where the conditions are quite severe."

"I'm pretty confident everything will work out, but..."

Middendorf says he's unaware of anyone dying due to a failed portaledge. A company in Wales [even rents them out for a night](#):

"My dad asked me that too because he's worried. But no. The misconception often is that even though you're sleeping on these things, it's never the primary life support system for you

"First of all, they don't fail, but even if you fell out, you're still going to be

tied on with a rope.”

He wants his Kickstarter campaign running before he tests it himself at Mt Buffalo, so he can show it off with “live updates of climbing the 300m wall in Australia”.

“We’re testing our portaledge and everything’s looking,” he says. “Maybe we can get a storm or something.”

And yes, he sleeps just fine.

Middendorf has climbed El Capitan around 30 times, each climb longer than a week. And, he says, “maybe another 30 climbs” around the world, all the while sleeping in a portaledge.

That’s more than 400 nights pinned to a wall hundreds or thousands of metres above the ground.

“It’s sort of like sleeping on a trampoline,” he says. “You actually have to make an effort to roll off the edge because you sag. It really cradles you.”

“They’re very comfortable.”

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HOME > GEAR

New D4 Trapezium Portaledge Good for Working Projects



GRIPPED MARCH 27, 2018

Big Wall Gear, LLC has announced the new multi-purpose D4 Trapezium, a whole new paradigm in foldable platform technology built for climbers.

The D4 Trapezium is light and fits into a daypack and has already opened new vistas for adventure, uses include ultra-light big-wall solo climbing storm shelter, BASE jumping platform, stealth tree-activist perch and instant tree-cubbie for kids on family camping trips.

It could also be used for projecting big-wall style free climbs, from The Chief and Yamnuska to Cap Trinite. The D4 Trapezium is the first of its kind, the “1.5 ledge” inspired from input by climbers and BASE jumpers such as Rob Miller, Regan Raganowicz, Ivo Ninov, Joshua G., Robbie Brown and Andy Kirkpatrick.

D4’s new patent-pending 8-piece, hybrid-diameter, curved-corner, Bullet Frame™ is the most compact folding, largest deploying, lightest and strongest folding platform ever designed, and virtually self-assembles thanks to the exclusive D4 Bullet Joiners™.

The D4 Trapezium joins the line of D4 branded equipment, including the D4 full-size Portaledge manufactured by Durango Sewing Solutions and the D4 MiniMe, available soon from Tufa Climbing. For more information, visit [here](#).

Ripping Yarns of the **TRAPEZIUM**

compact, lightweight
quick-rig, go anywhere
multi-purpose ledge



Illustration by
Simon Mentz



Lightest Portaledge

Climbers can stop to rest (and sleep) in the D4, the "lightest and most compact full-size portaledge." The whole system weighs 14 pounds and measures 46.5" x 80" when deployed. The brand claims its patented folding design is the most compact on the market, at 10.5" x 32". The \$1,200 portaledge is **available on Kickstarter** with early-bird discounts.

THE ENORMOCAST

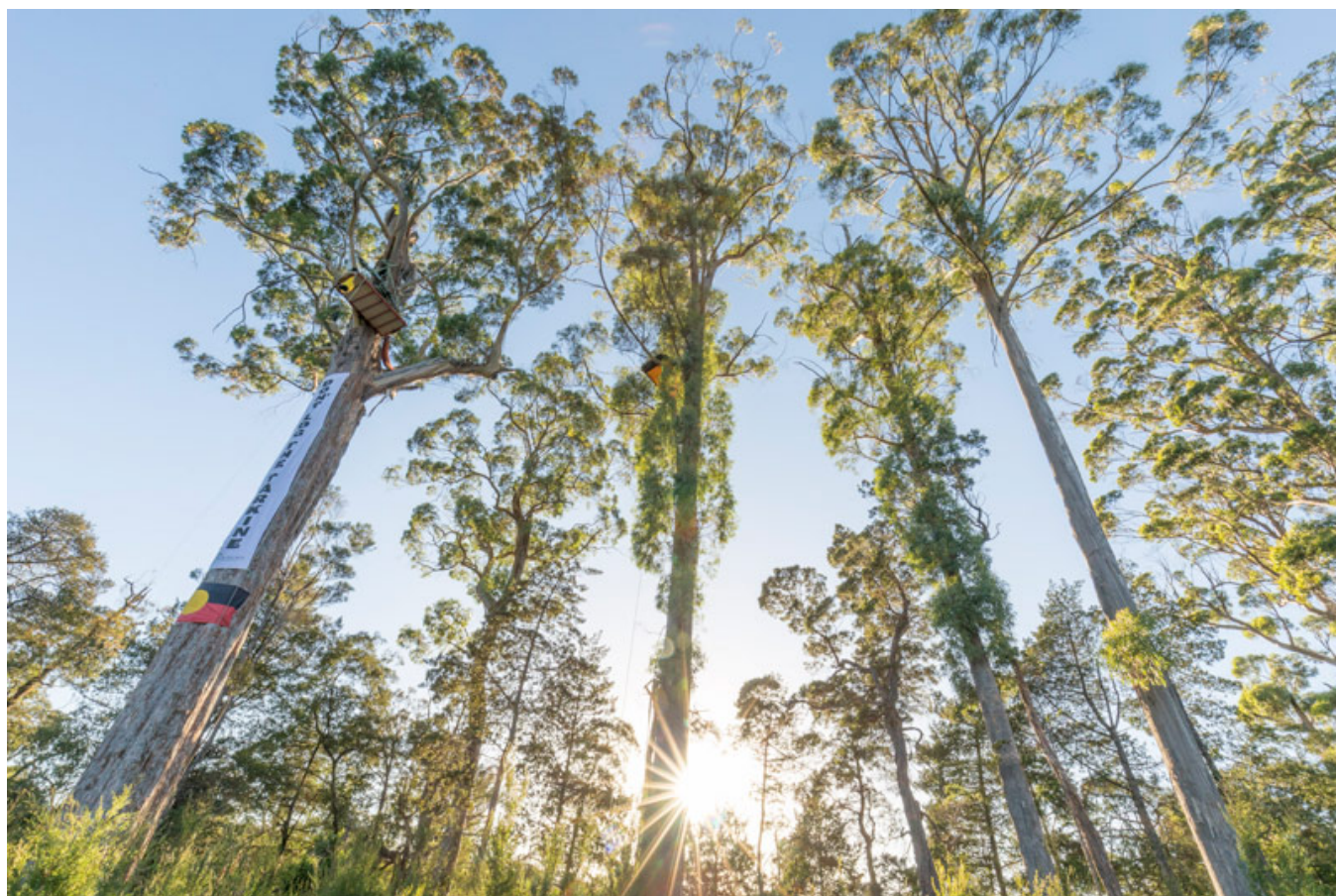
a climbing podcast

DECEMBER 21, 2017 BY CHRIS KALOUS

Episode 142: John Middendorf – Build It and They Will Go.



Steve Pearce and Jen Sanger - The Tree Projects - in the Tarkine



We're not, I have to say, protestors. We love trees and have been working hard over the last 2 years to raise awareness of the world's big trees but we're quite moderate in our approach. However, though our love of forests and our work promoting significant trees we felt personally compelled to visit the camp, if only to lend our skills to the campaign and make a contribution to saving this forest.

While we were there, we did have a few goals in mind. [The Tree Projects](#), the organisation that we run, is all about communicating the true scale of trees and promoting canopy exploration. We have been wanting to test out our new drone for weeks now. We wanted to document a Myrtle with the aim of testing out our gear but also to give the resulting image to the BBF to use as a campaign tool. We also wanted to test out a new portaledge for sleeping in the trees. This was a particularly exciting prospect as we had never slept in a tree before.



Thanks to Erik who found the Myrtle, we didn't really have to do any searching. Erik found a magnificent individual just 250m from the road and yes inside the logging coup. Getting our equipment to the tree, even though it was only 250m, took an extraordinary effort. 45 minutes of tumbling, falling and plunging our way through the incredibly thick understory was a trying experience especially with our delicate equipment. As if from a Hollywood film we struggled towards an invisible GPS point thought this tangle 200m to go, then 100m.... 50m..... 25m.... and at 15m we still couldn't see the tree. Then it was revealed: a very tall Myrtle in its absolute prime situated at the very edge of a lush gully and glowing in the morning sun.

We quickly set about surveying the surrounding forest checking for its suitability. Our style of image building requires a gap in the canopy big enough to fly the drone. Success! We couldn't have hoped for a more perfect situation for our subject to be in. We setup the equipment with much excitement and anticipation and within 3 hours we had recorded all we needed. There were a few exciting moments when strong gusts of wind pushed our drone dangerously close to a

nearby tree. Also, we had frustrating issues with clouds blocking and revealing the sun at quite inopportune times, resulting in having to hover the drone in position waiting for the light to return, wasting many precious minutes of battery life. All we could do now is hope that once we got the images back to the computer we had all the pieces of this giant puzzle.

With this task complete and our batteries empty we struggled once again back to the road and back to camp ready for a strong cup of tea before our next goal of setting up the portaledge. We have been climbing into the trees for 4 years now, but never had slept in one. This was until we were contacted by John Middendorf at Big Wall Gear who offered us the use of one of his new designs. A portaledge is basically a tent for rock climbers who have to spend more than one day climbing and need to sleep overnight on the wall.



For our purposes, it seemed perfect a quick and easy setup in the canopy and a comfortable place to sleep. It was an extraordinary opportunity for us and although the wind was blowing a strong easterly, flexing the tree and branches, we couldn't

pass it up. I won't lie, it was a rough night as are most new experiences. The wind did not let up all night and a few gusts really did throw around the platform and more scarily, push the tree around which is quite the experience when trying to sleep. But, as if to contrast this the sunrise, the following day made it all worthwhile.



Dawn over the top of the forest brought a chorus of birdsong with green rosellas, superb wrens and strong billed honeyeaters all staring in the show on this brisk pre dawn. In just a few seconds the sun rose over the distant horizon and the steel blue hues were transformed into a burning orange. The tree that had held me all night now blazed with warmth as did the entire canopy landscape of the proposed logging coup. I've always thought that the hardest experiences result in the greatest experiences and on this occasion that was very true.



As our third morning dawned then progressed it was apparent that our time was up, again.

Steve & Jen

[The Tree Projects](https://www.bobbrown.org.au/the-tree-projects)



Bob Brown Foundation

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Innovative engineer John Middendorf has revolutionised tree sitting in Tasmania and our tree climbing forest defenders are taking defiant action in the threatened takayna / Tarkine.

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