



Wisconsin's champion trees: hunting for the big ones. Special report, [Vol. 10, No. 2]

[March-April 1986]

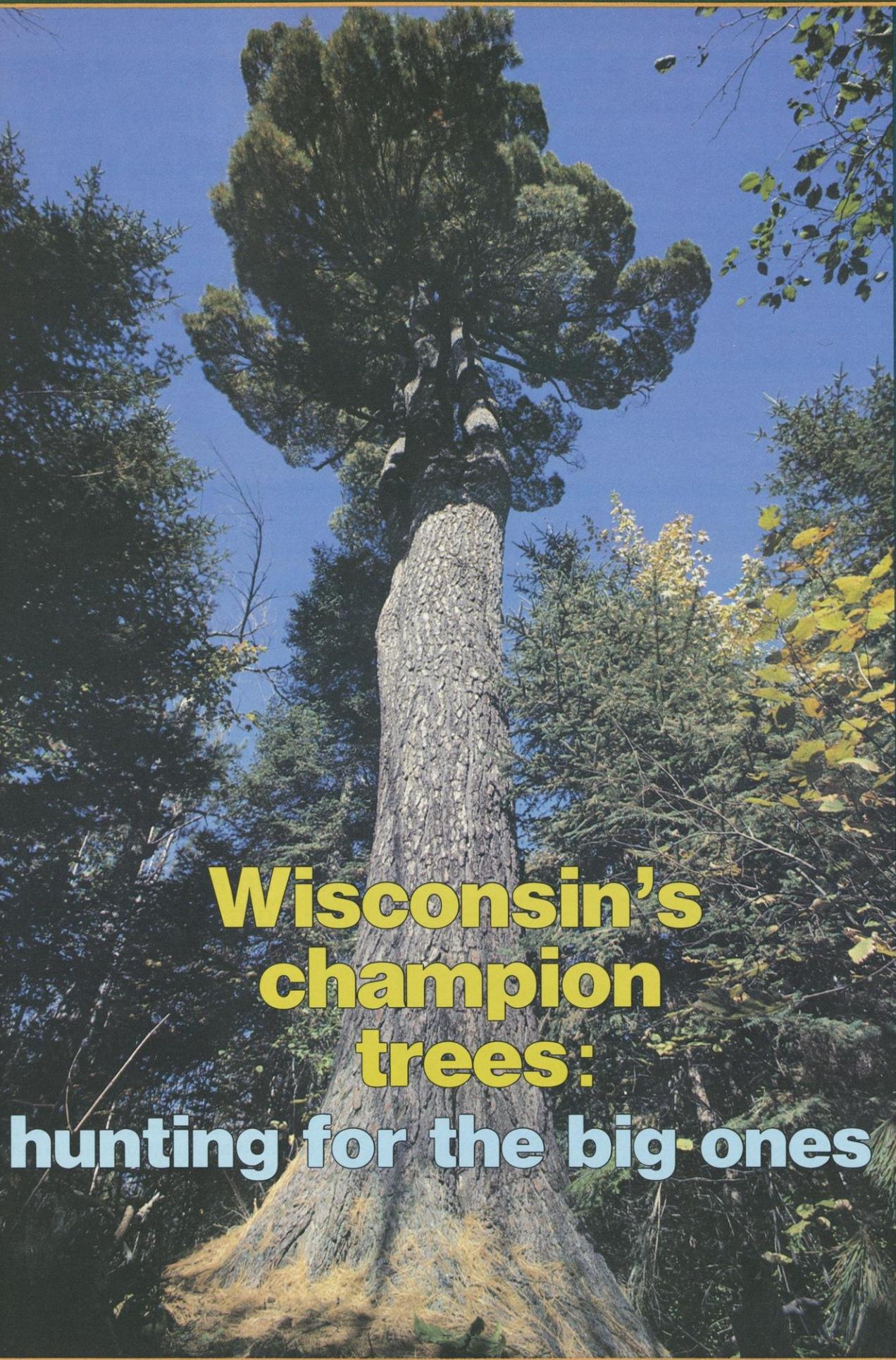
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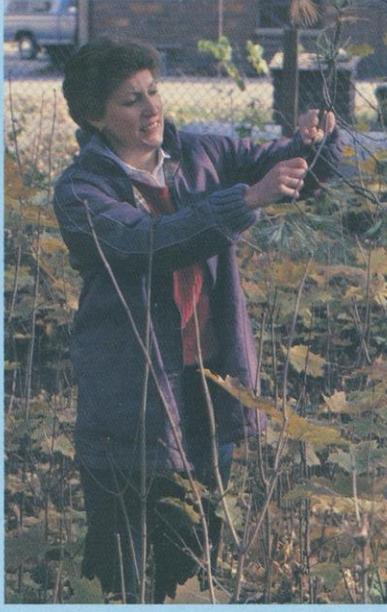
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Wisconsin's champion trees: hunting for the big ones

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Arbor Day April 25 is Arbor Day. Plant a tree. It may grow to be a champion.	
	
Publication prepared by Monica Nehm	
Cover: Wisconsin's record white pine before its demise. Photo by Scott Nielsen	

He Who Plants an Oak:

Scott received a Conservationist of the Year award from American Motors. Besides big trees, his interests covered the entire field of natural resources. He worked as assistant to the director of the old Conservation Department and was often referred to as the department's conscience.

■ I see him in his backyard arboretum planting yet another species or digging up a seedling as a gift for a favored guest.

■ When Walter Scott died in 1983, Wisconsin lost a true gentleman of the conservation movement. He especially loved trees—Wisconsin trees had a good friend in Walter. He unsparingly used his creative energy, his considerable speaking and writing skills, his position in the state Conservation Department and later DNR to advocate tree appreciation and protection. When I think of Walter, I see him cruising his urban neighborhood, wrapping his steel tape measure around big tree trunks, seeking not board feet

WALTER SCOTT— LOVER OF TREES

R. Bruce Allison



Walter Scott and his wife Trudy were given a distinguished service citation by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. Before his death, the two were co-editors of the Academy's publications for 10 years and Scott served as president in 1964. Photo courtesy of the Appleton Post-Crescent

but candidates for the record book. I see him producing articles and presenting speeches to encourage the preservation of significant Wisconsin trees. I see him perusing stacks of state history books for tidbits of information to distinguish a tree as famous or historic.

Such appreciation and advocacy for trees is remarkable and unusual but not unique. Walter had many precedents from which to draw inspiration. Consider Oliver Wendell Holmes conversing with fellow boarders in *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*:

"I wonder how my great trees are coming on this summer?"

"Where are your great trees, Sir?" said the divinity student.

"Oh, all around about New England. I call all trees mine that I have put my wedding ring on, and I have as many tree wives as Brigham Young has human ones."

"One set's as green as the other," exclaimed a boarder, who has never been identified.

"They're all Bloomers," said the young fellow called John.

(I should have rebuked this trifling with language, if our landlady's daughter had not asked me just then what I meant by putting my wedding ring on a tree.)

"Why, measuring it with my thirty-foot tape, my dear," said I. "I have worn a tape almost out on the rough barks of our old New England elms and other big trees."

Walter Scott began putting his "wedding ring" on Wisconsin trees forty years ago, to measure trunk circumferences and determine their eligibility for the big tree record book. It started in 1941 after the American Forestry Association initiated a big tree contest. At that time, Fred G. Wilson, the Wisconsin Conservation Department's chief of cooperative forestry, was put in charge of a program to collect information on record Wisconsin specimens. Walter enthusiastically measured them and submitted nominations until he was drafted into the army in 1943. On returning to WCD in 1946, he inherited the job of big tree record-book keeper and kept it for 28 years, until his retirement in 1974.

The purpose of the champion tree program is to focus attention on trees—their pleasantness, inspiration and worthy companionship in our environment. Again, Oliver Wendell Holmes expressed it this way:

"Don't you want to hear me talk trees a little now? That is one of my specialties."

(So they all agreed that they should like to hear me talk about trees.)

"I want you to understand, in the first place, that I have a most intense, passionate fondness for trees in general, and have had several romantic attachments to certain trees in particular. Now, if you expect me to hold forth in a scientific way about my tree lovers, to talk, for instance, of the *Ulmus Americana*, and describe the ciliated edges of the samara, and all that, you are an asinine

individual, and I must refer you to a dull friend who will discourse to you of such matters. What should you think of a lover who should describe the idol of his heart in the language of science.

'No, my friends, I shall speak of trees as we see them, love them, adore them in the fields, where they are alive. . . .'

Walter Scott heralded tree love stories like the one about the Dean Oak whose owner, Charles K. Dean of Boscobel, bequeathed his favorite tree and the land on which it grew so that no future owner could abuse it. But trees are often endangered by human expedience and Walter also mourned the tragic demise of magnificent trees that were cut down uncompromisingly. For example, a giant hackberry was felled in 1950 despite local residents' objections—in order to widen highway 30.

Yet overall, identifying historic trees and encouraging their preservation is a Wisconsin tradition. Increase Lapham, the state's earliest scientist and scholar, wrote in 1856:

"Trees, besides being useful, are ornamental; they enter largely into the material of the landscape-gardener. Desolate indeed would be our dwellings were their environs entirely treeless. They are associated with our early recollections and become in a great degree companions of our lives; and we unconsciously form strong attachments for such as grown near our homes, thus increasing our love of home, and improving our hearts."

Lapham, as chairman of Wisconsin's first forestry commission, in 1867 again counseled tree preservation in the "Report on the Disastrous Effects of the Destruction of Forest Trees, now going on so rapidly in the State of Wisconsin."

Ernest Brunken, secretary of the special forestry commission that drafted legislation to establish Wisconsin's original forestry program in 1898, also saw the importance of preserving trees. In an article about "Some Remarkable Trees in the Vicinity of Milwaukee," he writes of notable trees and suggests that "it would be well if a record of them was made by people interested in fine trees."

Walter did his share of recording such trees. In December 1974, school children studying the history of Walter's home neighborhood along the southwestern shore of Lake Mendota, asked his help in locating large oaks that might have "witnessed" the retreat of Black Hawk and his followers in July 1832. Walter went one step further and spent the Christmas-New Year's holiday conducting an extensive survey of all trees within a one-mile radius. He measured and recorded more than 700 trees, then compared his observations with those made in 1835 by government surveyors. Not only did he locate large and historic trees as requested, but he also came to some interesting conclusions about changes in vegetation that had occurred during the 140-year interval.

The year of the American Bicentennial, Walter conducted a survey of oak trees within an eight-mile radius of the state Capitol in search of 200-year-old and older oaks. His list upon completion included 365 of the great trees.

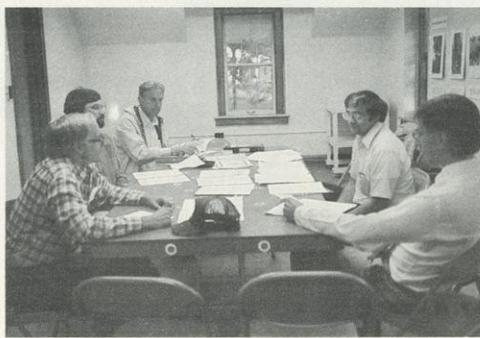
In fact, it is not surprising that Walter, when pressed by a newspaper reporter one Arbor Day, chose oak as his favorite Wisconsin tree. It wasn't that he neglected other species—his backyard arboretum at Hickory Hill House contained more than 100 different species. Nevertheless, I can believe that it was oak which he enjoyed planting most, for, as Washington Irving observed long ago in *Forest Trees*:

"He who plants an oak looks forward to future ages, and plants for posterity. Nothing can be less selfish than this. He cannot expect to sit in its shade, or enjoy its shelter: but he exults in the idea that the acorn which he has buried in the earth shall grow up into a lofty pile, and shall keep on flourishing, and increasing, and benefiting mankind, long after he shall have ceased to tread his paternal fields." ■

Wisconsin big tree society

■ "Hunting big trees is awe inspiring," says Chad McGrath, one of the founders of the recently organized Wisconsin Big Tree Society. "Standing next to a champion humbles anyone."

Six tree enthusiasts met last September in Wisconsin Dells to organize the society. "The purpose of the group is to bring together people interested in the history and heritage of Wisconsin's trees and forests," says Jerry Lapidakis, DNR private forestry specialist and keeper of the state champion tree records.



The Wisconsin Big Tree Society at its first meeting. On the left, from front to rear are Ted Pyrek, Fred Peter and Robert Mahotka. On the right, Tim Yanacheck and Jerry Lapidakis.

This group will cooperate with DNR's Bureau of Forestry in coordinating the Wisconsin champion tree program. Members will also promote the protection and wise use of Wisconsin's forests.

"We will inform the public about the importance of our trees by relating their history to our state's future," says McGrath. "That may help us put today into the framework of forever."

Other organizers of the group include Tim Yanacheck, Madison; Ted Pyrek, Horicon; Fred Peter, Marshfield; and Robert Mahotka, West Salem.

For more information on the group contact Jerry Lapidakis, DNR, Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707 (608-266-2289). ■

WISCONSIN'S RECORD TREES, NATIVE TO THE U.S.



Wisconsin's record white spruce.



State's biggest honey locust.

Photo by Mary Ann Kroehn



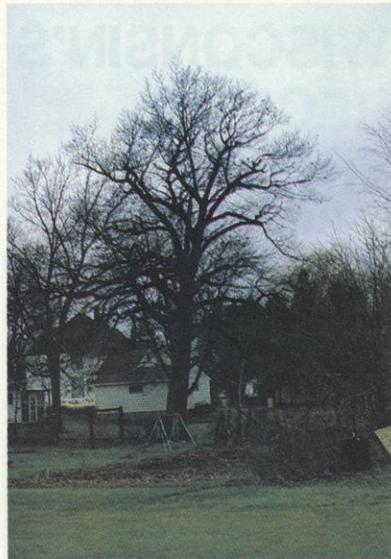
Record shagbark hickory.

Photo by Mary Ann Kroehn

	CIR. @ 4.5 (in)	CROWN HT. (ft)			SPREADPOINT (ft)	TOTAL	LOCATION	NOMINATOR	DATE NOMI- NATED
Alder	26.0	43	19		73.8		Green Bay	J. Krawczyk	3/25/80
Ash									
Black	80.0	105	38		194.5		Washburn Co.	J. Varro	7/16/81
Black	84.0	101	30		193.0		Washburn Co.	J. Varro	7/16/81
Blue	70.0	39	37		118.3		Madison	C. A. Lukas	12/7/84
Green	192.0	63	96		279.0		Rock Co.	T. J. Rausch	1979
White	133.0	90	82		243.5		Madison	B. Van Pelt	1/9/85
White	150	72	77		241.3		Milwaukee	D. E. Vogelsand	7/16/84
Aspen									
Big tooth	96.3	114	43		221.0		Chippewa Co.	B. Marinello	1/7/85
Quaking	95.0	104	43		209.8		Chippewa Co.	R. Lindberg	10/23/61
Baldcypress	129.5	46	41		184.8		Kenosha Co.	A. Schallock	1/19/62
Basswood									
American	227.0	55	100		307.0		Dane Co.	R. Van Pelt	2/20/75
American	182	112	49		306.3		Forest Co.	W. H. Dixon	10/19/84
Beech									
American	113.0	86	57		213.3		Milwaukee	M. Kreul	1/3/64
Blue	29.0	30	33		67.3		Outagamie Co.	R. Fischer	4/10/81
Birch									
Paper	157.0	77	36		242.4		Green Lake Co.	T. Eddy & T. Jankowski	4/10/81
River	136.0	63	90		221.5		Vernon Co.	J. Melton	4/84
Sweet	48.0	50	43		108.8		Poynette	K. W. Wood	9/26/85
Yellow	143.0	75	50		230.5		Vilas Co.	R. Redding	12/5/66
Boxelder	178.0	77	75		273.8		Waukesha	D. Faring	9/12/83
								(S. Binnie)	
Buckeye									
Ohio	99.0	67	46		177.5		Brown Co.	W. E. Scott	7/61
Yellow	47	51	31		106		Poynette	K. W. Wood	9/27/85
Yellow	148.0	49	29		104		Poynette	K. W. Wood	9/27/85
Butternut	112.0	86	66		214.5		Oconto Co.	R. W. Cook	4/3/74
Catalpa									
Northern	214.0	49	68		280.0		Walworth Co.	E. Hasselkus	7/18/78
Juniper									
E. red cedar	88.0	64	35		160.8		Grant Co.	C. Hollingsworth	2/18/83
Cedar									
N. white	149.0	92	28		248.0		Manitowoc Co.	K. D. Healy	6/17/66
Cherry									
Black	99.5	84	33				Madison	M. Kindschi	12/26/85
Choke	27.3	30	35		66.0		Milwaukee Co.	Unknown	10/18/81
Pin	36.0	34	27		76.3		Marathon Co.	B. Pearson	9/8/56
Chestnut									
American	136.0	76	68		229.0		LaCrosse Co.	J. Melton	7/1/83
Coffeetree									
Kentucky	61.0	81	42		152.5		Marathon Co.	C. McGrath	6/85
Cottonwood									
Eastern	322.0	106	85		449.3		Dodge Co.	T. Pyrek	9/15/83
Eastern	278	136	132		447.0		Marquette Co.	J. Kronschnabel	7/1/78
Eastern	296	126	91		445.0		Platteville	R. Camp	1/11/67
Cucumbertree	69.0	57	42		136.5		Spring Green	C. Winther	6/5/84
Elm									
American	216.0	75	100		316.0		LaCrosse Co.	J. Davis	8/84
Slippery	119.5	88	40		217.5		Iowa Co.	M. Kindschi	10/23/85
Fir									
Balsam	51.0	81	16		136.0		Marathon Co.	C. McGrath	6/1/85
Balsam	66.0	65	16		135.0		Price Co.	R. J. Prohaska	8/11/83
White	84.0	79	35		174.5		Madison		4/24/84
Douglas-fir	87.0	76	42		173.5		Walworth Co.	B. Thomas	7/18/78
Hackberry	210.0	82	76		311.0		Rock Co.	R. Camp	7/1/66
Hawthorne									
Downy	107.0	35	60		157.0		Milwaukee Co.	W. Scott	8/6/61
Hemlock									
Eastern	124.0	101	44		236.0		Door Co.	R. Van Pelt	5/1/84
Hickory									
Bitternut	124.0	80	71		221.8		Madison	M. Cisewski	6/19/84
Shagbark	145.0	82	60		242.0		Dane Co.	B. Van Pelt	3/12/84
Shellbark	64.0	46	50		122.5		Dane Co.	Mrs. R. Pauli	3/25/84
Honeylocust									

	CIR. @ 4.5 (in)	CROWN SPREADPOINT				LOCATION	NOMINATOR	DATE NOMI- NATED
	HT. (ft)	(ft)	(ft)	TOTAL				
Common	134.0	60	80	214.0	Dane Co.	W. E. Scott	9/7/70	
Thornless	151.0	60	55	224.8	Madison	W. E. Scott	8/1/65	
Ironwood	71.0	49	43	130.8	Kewaunee Co.	D. Marsh	10/12/64	
Locust								
Black	176.0	60	40	246.0	Milwaukee Co.	R. Thuron	12/2/83	
Maple								
Black	152.0	69	61	236.3	Washington Co.	H. Wachsmith	6/62	
Red	127.0	93	42	230.5	Langlade Co.	G. Francisco	2/5/79	
Silver	252.0	96	76	366.5	Jefferson Co.	W. Seybold	6/3/66	
Sugar	165.0	104	76	288.0	Waupaca Co.	B. Carlson	11/10/81	
Mountain Ash	35	29	26	70	Portage Co.	M. Kindschi	2/5/86	
Mulberry								
Red	112.0	45	40	167.0	Buffalo Co.	E. D. Godel	6/24/70	
Oak								
Basket	46.0	50	34	104.5	Poynette	K. W. Wood	9/27/85	
Black	166.0	82	91	270.89	Iowa Co.	J. Widder	6/9/83	
Bur	227.0	68	88	317.0	Waukesha Co.		1/9/85	
Chinkapin	118.0	80	51	210.3	Waukesha Co.	P. Buckley, J. Buehlke & M. Kiehert	2/21/83	
N. pin	165.5	73	61	253.8	Sauk Co.	G. F. Schulter	6/20/84	
N. Red	182.0	86	80	288.0	Shawano Co.	M. Freberg	7/1/83	
Pin	101.0	86	81	207.3	Dane Co.	R. Van Pelt	1/1/84	
Shingle	30.0	37	31		Poynette	M. Bozttger and K. Wood	9/27/85	
Swamp white	174.0	60	71	251.8	Rock Co.	T. Rausch	10/18/60	
White	175.0	98	84	294.0	Sheboygan Co.		9/1/83	
Osage-orange	116	38	40	164	Poynette	K. W. Wood	9/26/85	
Persimmon								
Common	30.0	30	16	64.0	Milwaukee	E. Hasselkus	12/2/83	
Pine								
E. white	210.0	148	56	372.0	Forest Co.	A. J. Gumberg	4/1/65	
Jack	69.5	97	34	174.5	Douglas Co.	S. Nielson	10/31/85	
Limber	52.0	50	35	110.8	Madison	B. Van Pelt	3/1/84	
Limber	54.0	52	33	114	Poynette	K. Wood	9/26/85	
Pitch	59.0	57	27	122.8	Sauk Co.	H. F. Williams	5/25/60	
Ponderosa	70.0	63	32	141.0	Madison	B. Van Pelt	3/1/84	
Red	103.2	135	37	247.0	Douglas Co.	Dr. S. Nielsen	10/3/84	
Red	109	127	35	244.8	Douglas Co.	Dr. S. Nielsen	6/2/85	
Red	116	118	35	243.0	Douglas Co.	Dr. S. Nielsen	10/3/84	
Poplar								
Balsam	95.0	100	38	204.5	Langlade Co.	G. Francisco	6/1/76	
White	251.0	96	79	366.6	Fond du Lac Co.	T. Pyrek	9/83	
Eastern Redbud								
Eastern redbud	68.0	28	40	106.0	Columbia Co.	E. Hasselkus	8/10/66	
Serviceberry	46.0	51	26	103.5	Jefferson Co.	E. Hasselkus	5/84	
Spruce								
Black	55	65	18.5	125.0	Douglas Co.	Dr. S. Nielsen	10/31/85	
Col. blue	71.0	71	26	148.5	Shawano Co.	E. Godel	6/27/61	
Norway	141.0	84	66	241.5	Richland Co.	R. Nigl	1/8/73	
White	103.5	109	32	220.0	Douglas Co.	Dr. S. Nielsen	6/20/85	
Sumac	30.0	25	25	61.3	Rock Co.	M. J. Williams	5/1/81	
Sycamore								
American	167.0	115	73	300.3	Waupun	T. Pyrek	9/13/83	
Tamarack	121.0	71	36	201.0	Price Co.	R. F. Wendt	1954	
Tree of Heaven	66.0	48	42	124.5	Kenosha	P. Sander	7/3/65	
Walnut								
Black	146.0	92	78	257.5	Kenosha Co.	P. Ramonowski	12/1/81	
Willow								
Black	264.0	76	94	363.5	Fond du Lac Co.	T. Pyrek	2/17/84	
Yellowwood								
American	127.0	54	51	193.8	Madison	M. Cisewski	6/19/84	
Yellow-Poplar	61.0	57	31	125.8	Dodge Co.	T. Pyrek	1/1/80	

*Trees within five points of the champion are listed as co-champions.

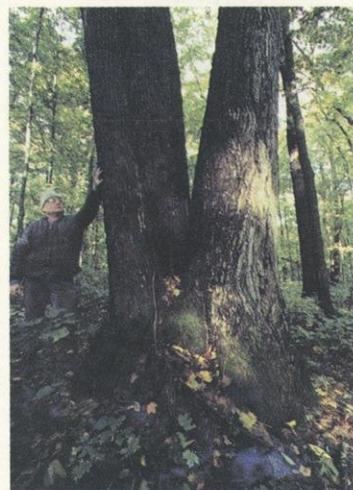


This record Wisconsin northern pin oak has a 67-foot crown.



State's largest black walnut measures over 13-feet in circumference. Photo by Ellen Pederson

A list of records waiting to be broken. Tree hunters are searching.



Fourth largest Wisconsin basswood.

Compiled by Jerry Lapidakis, DNR Private Forestry Specialist

■ People who stalk champion trees often find unexpected rewards. Instead of a trophy, tree hunters' prizes are excitement, satisfaction and, if they're lucky, a champion tree certificate.

Ted Pyrek of Horicon discovered that good things sometimes come in pairs. He trekked out to Taycheedah to measure one champion and ended up with two. The Fred Hansen property in the town of Taycheedah, near Fond du Lac, boasts the National Record white poplar. This mighty tree is currently a National Champion. "When I went out to measure the poplar, I discovered the state record black willow," says Pyrek.

When Tom Eddy of Green Lake wandered the woods southeast of his home town, he came upon a magnificent paper birch tree. "To completely encircle the trunk would require three people with my arm span," recalls Eddy. With his friend Tim Jankowski, he returned in fall to measure the tree. "Not understanding the growth rate of birch trees, we speculated this birch may have been a young sapling when the first European traveled through the region." The following fall, Eddy and his advanced biology students measured the tree. Jankowski and Eddy nominated the tree, which became the state champion paper birch.

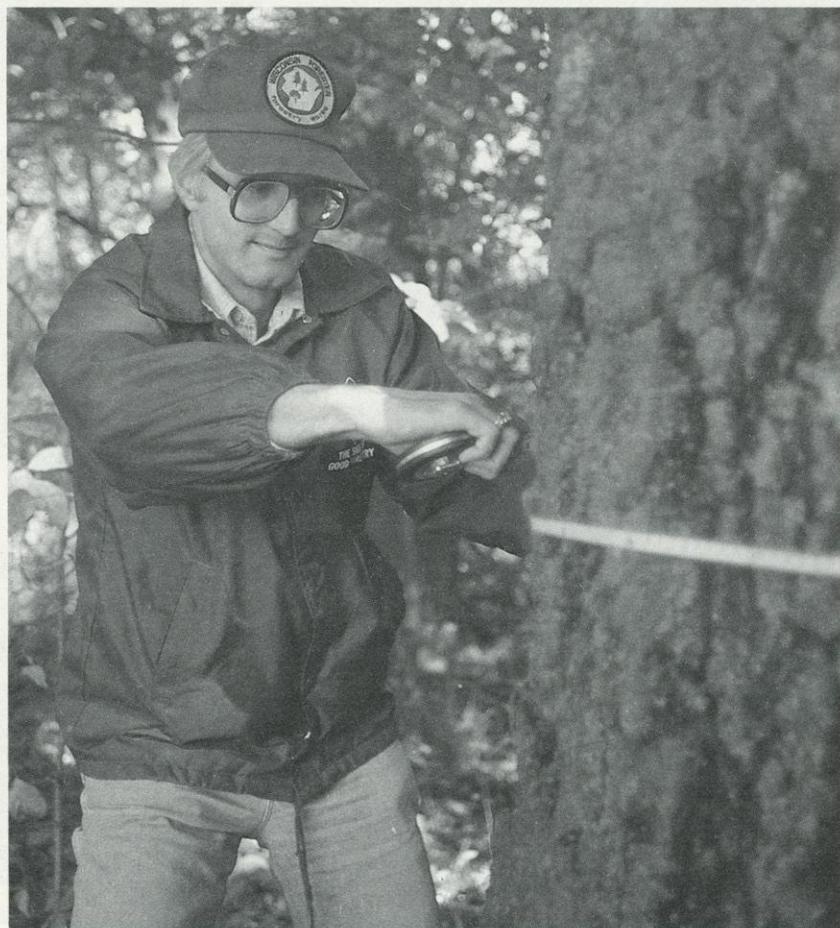
When DNR asked Brian Marinello of Chippewa Falls to re-measure the state record quaking aspen, he decided to do more than that. He set out to find his own champion.

The forester measured a red maple near Chippewa Falls that beat the old record by more than 40 points. "I lived with my glory for 24 hours," says Marinello, believing he had found his champion until he called Madison and discovered that a new champion red maple in Richland County scored over a 100 points more than his tree. Later, the misidentified "red maple" of Richland County turned out to be a silver maple.

"The current champion red maple is still in Langlade county,"

BIG TREE HUNTERS

Monica Nehm,
editorial assistant



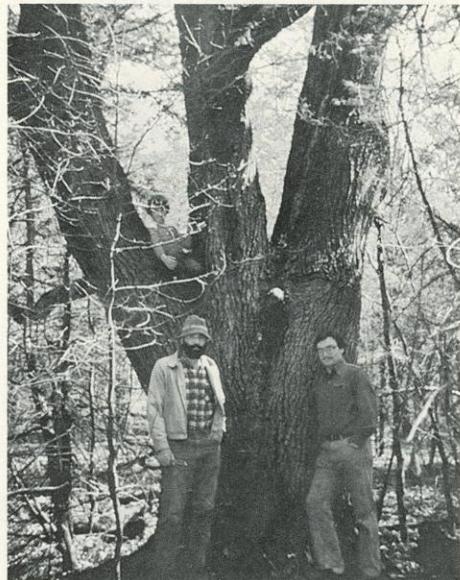
says a hopeful Marinello, "and I think my tree, with closer measurement, can beat the current champion."

Dr. Scott Nielsen of Superior became attracted to big trees while working with bald eagle habitat requirements. "Large, mature trees provide nesting and denning sites for numerous animals and birds," says Nielsen. "I look at trees as a barometer of our long term environmental health. Just as the eagles and other top-of-the-food-chain rap-

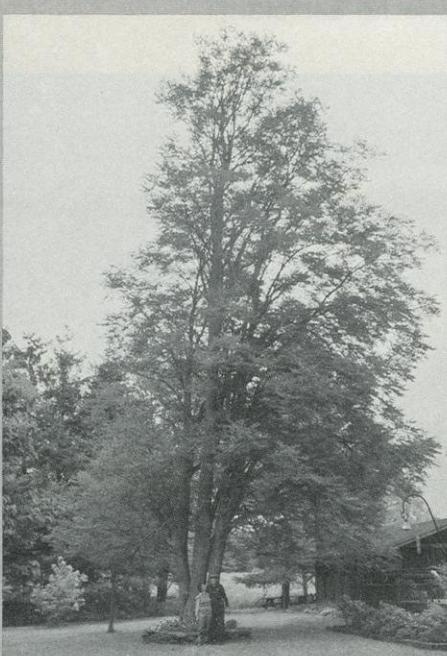
Tree hunter Ted Pyrek at the moment of truth. So far, Pyrek has discovered two champions.

tors alerted researchers to the harmful effects of pesticides before severe damage was done to us, so hopefully watching the trees will alert us to any longer-term, slower-acting, but just as potentially damaging environmental factors." While Nielsen has nominated three champion trees and four co-champions, he considers himself more a documentor of habitat than a big

tree hunter. But he says the two tasks have a distinct affinity for each other.



Downtown or in the backyard



Kentucky coffee tree, a backyard champion at the home of Clyde and Nancy Wynia in Marshfield. Photo by Chad McGrath.

Chad McGrath, tree hunter

Marshfield, hardly a name that elicits thoughts of big trees. Ducks come to mind because the area has some excellent duck and goose hunting. And medicine because one of the state's best known clinics is located here. But big trees? The Marshfield area happens to have two identified state champions. One is an "exotic," or non-native, European Mountain Ash. Located in town, on the corner of Arnold and Oak Streets, this tree was a national champion for a couple of years before one in Montana hit the record books. The tree has a chest height circumference of 73 inches, a height of 33 feet and a crown spread of 28 feet.

The other Marshfield area champion tree lives on the former estate of Benjamin Franklin MacMillan. MacMillan was a lumberman and figures prominently in the logging history of central Wisconsin. In 1873 he built a large and lovely house about five miles north of town, a house that has been the home of the Clyde and Nancy Wynia family for the past 19 years. Clyde and Nancy are renaissance folks. Given their inquisitiveness, it's logical that they would eventually identify most of the flora on their land. This inquisitiveness led to eventual identification of their Kentucky coffee tree as a state champion. It measures 61 inches in circumference and is 81 feet high.

The state's second biggest black oak and the hunters who found it, Tom Eddy, on the left, and Tim Jankowski. Tim's son, Ethan is in the branches.

The big city may seem an unlikely place to find a tree hunter, but Brian Barney stalks potential champions in Milwaukee and its suburbs. He began this pursuit in 1981 after reading an article about tree-hunter Walter Scott. "I like looking at a group of small trees and imagining how magnificent they'll be when mature, their huge trunks rising towards the clouds. These big trees," Barney says, "inspired me to pursue a career as an arborist or a forester."

Barney likes to prowl the Milwaukee River bottoms in search of his record book candidate. Not long ago he found an American Elm there that seemed to fill the bill. He sent in the data, but it was no go. Barney isn't discouraged though.

"I like the historical value of big trees," he says. "When I look at a grove of tall trees, I feel I'm experiencing the same awe Thoreau and Aldo Leopold must have felt as they viewed those magnificent trees. In that sense, it's almost like going back in time."

Barney says he'll keep looking. He knows there's a record somewhere in that river bottom. ■

■ Recently an acquaintance asked what I had planned for the weekend. My reply: "I'm going tree hunting." Her look was so puzzled, I knew I was talking to yet another of the uninitiated.

"I'm going to look for the biggest tree in the state, or even the nation," I explained.

"Where do you do that?" she asked, still puzzled.

"In the woods," I answered, unable to resist stating the obvious.

My mistake! Now she thought I was kidding, so she asked again.

"What *are* you doing this weekend?"

"Honest, I'm going up to the Nicolet to try to find a great big black spruce that I remember seeing years ago while I was hunting. If I find it I'll measure its height, circumference and spread and see if it's bigger than the one in the National Register of Big Trees. If it is, I'll send the measurements to the folks in Washington, D. C. who keep the records."

We talked a little longer, and when we parted, I think she had a better idea of what big tree hunters do. But she never did understand why. That's the usual reception for those of us who explore with tape measure and hypsometer. None of us has exactly the same motive, yet there are common threads.

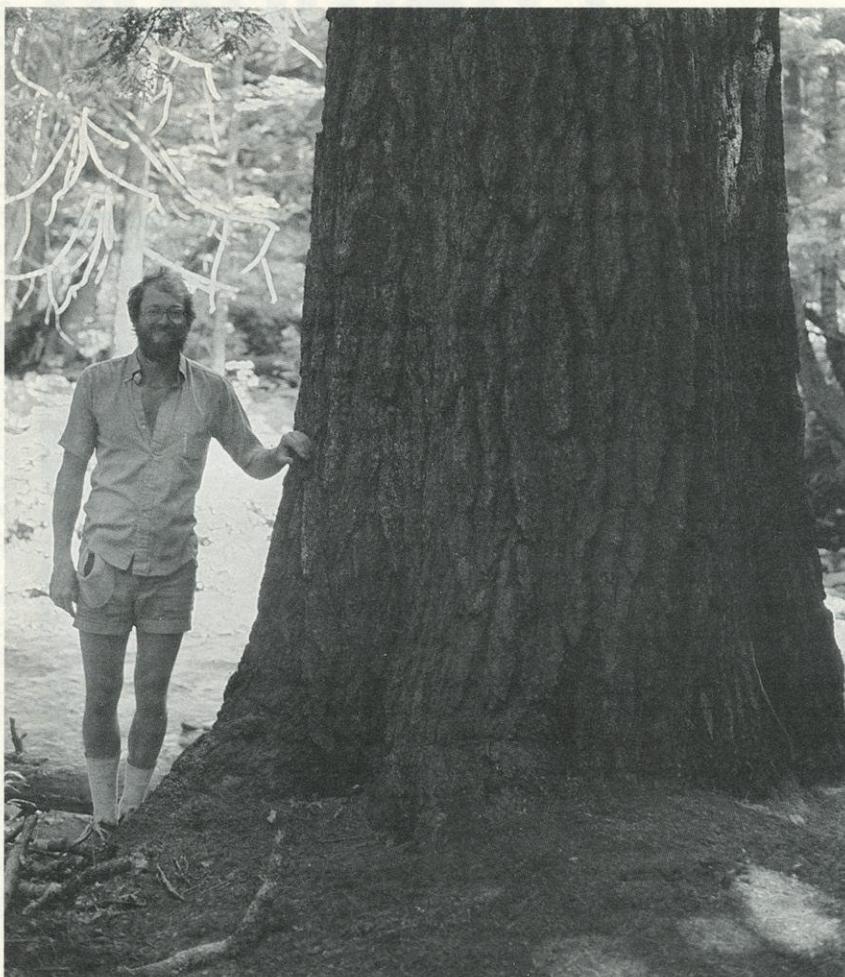
Mostly, there's a sense of fascination and discovery. I've talked to several seekers who describe the same excitement—those butterflies in the stomach—when they gaze on a newly-spotted tree that seems to hold promise as a champion. Their pace quickens as they close the yards to the trunk, their hands fumble for the tape measure; they frequently stumble hurrying to wrap the tape around the trunk. Satisfaction or disappointment wells as they read the numbers.

Notoriety is also a part of it. Ego is involved and competition. Just as anglers are disinclined to disclose their special section of trout stream, so too, do tree hunters have certain secrets.

There is also a scientific motive. Biologists, dendrologists, and ecologists are all interested in the range of plant communities and specific plants. They study where each grows best. Records of where the biggest trees grow can tell scientists a great deal about the soils and climate of a particular

THE IMMEASURABLE DIMENSION

Chad McGrath, tree hunter



Chad McGrath and red pine: "a feeling of awe."

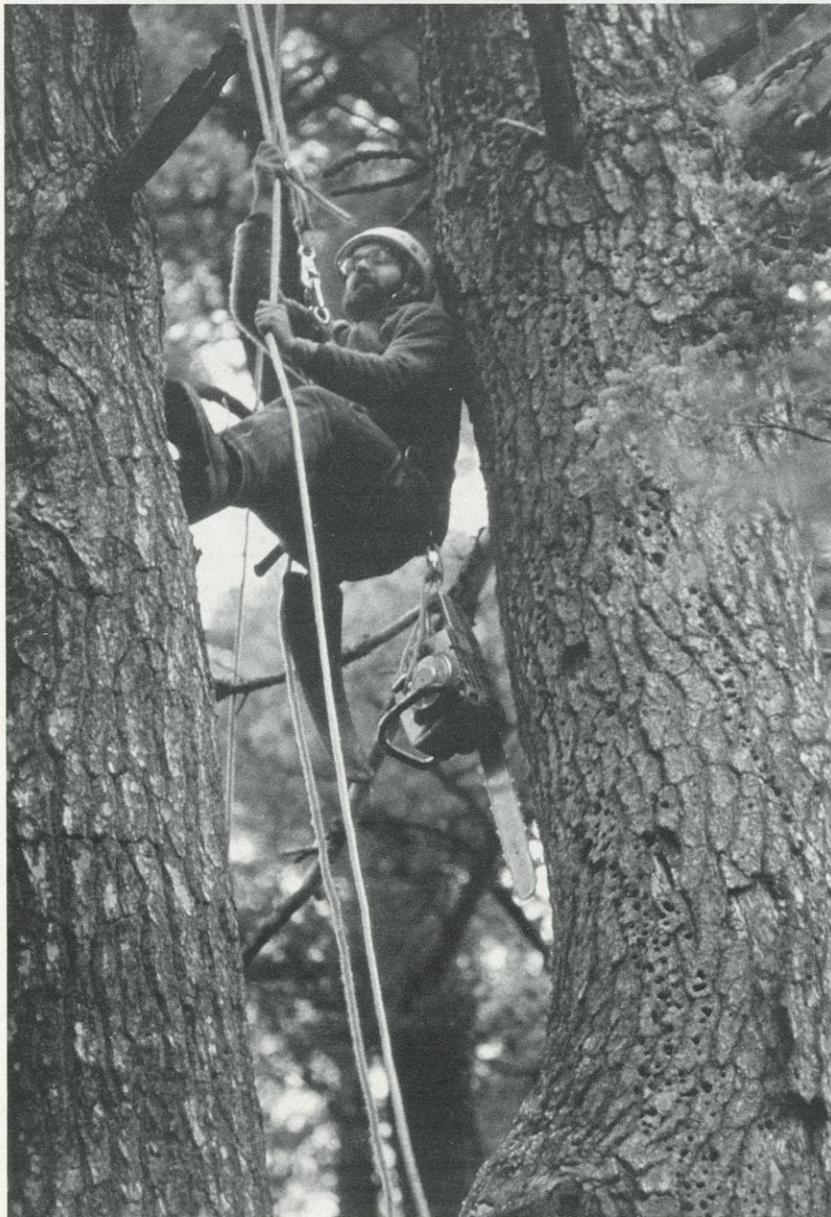
area. Historians are interested too. Trees and people are never too far apart and their histories intertwine like shade and sunlight under an old maple.

The feeling of awe our quarry arouses is the overriding sensation for big tree hunters. The setting where we search is invariably lovely, be it deep woods or suburban lawn. Framed by such settings, our subject is often a unique, massive living thing of considerable age. The history it has seen! Old oaks have witnessed Indian and

wagon train, prairie fire and sod busters, Model T's and airplanes. Nothing else alive spans such time, reaches higher, nor weighs more. Standing next to such a tree humbles anyone and maybe helps us put today into the framework of forever. That which is precise and noted in feet and inches, to be compared with black and white numbers on a list; all this provides sharp contrast to these feelings of awe and thoughts of the immeasurable. ■

The kindest cut: Wisconsin's world champion white pine . . .

R. Bruce Allison, Madison arborist



Tree expert Gregory Good begins his climb to the top of the champion, tools dangling.

John Muir when expressing his affinity for nature would love to say, "We all travel the Milky Way together—men and trees."

Some men are bigger than others and some trees are much bigger than others. This one was in danger.

■ The biggest tree I ever met was the champion white pine on the Brule River. When I first saw it in September of 1982, it was 160 feet tall, more than 18 and one-half feet in circumference and had an average crown spread of 55 feet. It was a champion tree, the biggest white pine in the world, but it was a champion in trouble. After five hundred years of lifting wood upward, some of that tree was starting to fall back down.

In the condition that I found it, the tree posed an unacceptable threat to a fish hatchery building nearby and to those who worked there. It was doomed to be cut down—unless someone climbed the tree and pruned out the dead wood—a prospect that seemed impossibly difficult.

As owner of a tree service in Madison, I have been involved in countless limb removals, but never in my wildest fantasies did I ever imagine working on a tree that was four times the height of most urban trees. The first limb was higher than our tallest ladders. I wasn't even sure we had ropes long enough to do the job. Dead limbs would have to be lowered piece by piece, because of the nearby building.

But then, I reminded myself, this tree is a champion that has survived innumerable challenges, living longer and rising taller than all others of its kind. Wasn't the message of the champion tree program, at least in part, to laud such living examples of excellence as an inspiration for all to rise above the average?

That it was a demanding situation was all too obvious, but it was also an opportunity. In fact, a once in a lifetime opportunity. As a professional arborist, I had the expertise and tools to try and save that tree. Did I have the courage and tenacity to overcome the obstacles? I contracted with the landowner and

caretaker (they also wanted to save the tree) to return in autumn and do what I could.

In October, I returned with expert tree climber Gregory Good and groundsman Mark Eggleson. We arrived on site about daybreak. As I walked up to the mammoth white pine, craning my neck to get a good look at the towering crown, I quietly said to myself, "Now is the time, Allison. . ." This is a photographic chronicle of what happened. ■

In Memoriam: Death of a Champion

It was in 1983 that Bruce Allison and his crew worked to save Wisconsin's magnificent champion white pine. But despite the effort, the ravages of time and old age finally won out. This winter the tree was reported completely dead.

It now stands as a stark reminder of the inevitable. The eventual fate of its giant skeleton is still undecided, but its loss reminds us of one common law of nature: every living thing has its time, a beginning and an end. While the big white pine lived, we were able to recognize it as a national champion and marvel at its majesty, history and mystery. Now another tree, located in Michigan, replaces it as the national record holder. And another replaces it in Wisconsin too. Once again the MacArthur Pine in Forest County reigns as a state record. Ironically, it was the previous champion before the Douglas County tree was registered.

Photos by Mark Eggleson

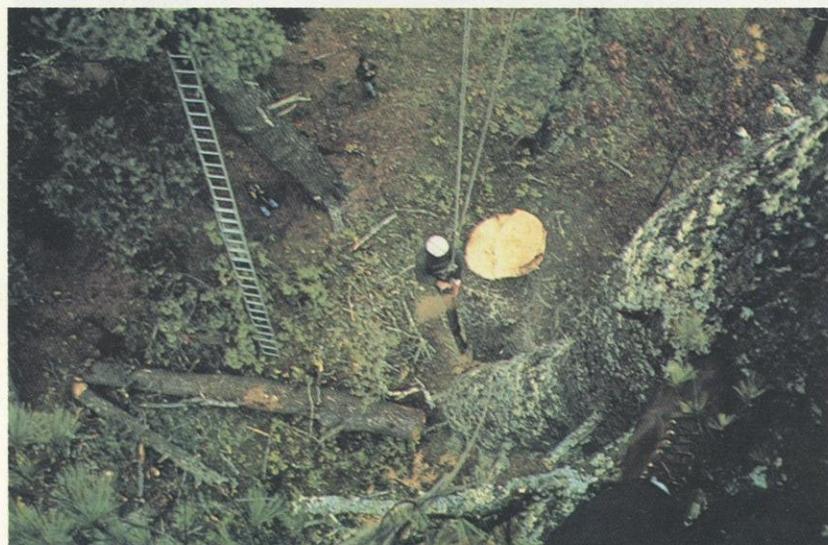


Upper left: The 160 foot high white pine dwarfs arborist R. Bruce Allison as he ascends on a conventional-sized ladder.

Upper right: Secured with ropes, Good saws branches from the top to make room for later cuts.



Balanced between the forks, Good saws off a 10-foot chunk.



Within four hours, the attempted rescue was nearly finished. The fish hatchery below was no longer threatened.

TAPE AND RULER: MEASURING WISCONSIN'S BIGGEST TREES

Jerry Lapidakis, DNR Private Forestry Specialist



Verifying tree measurements. Photo by Scott Nielsen

Send nominations for native trees (those listed in *Check List of Native and Naturalized Trees of the United States* (US Department of Agriculture Handbook No. 41) to Jerry Lapidakis at the Department of Natural Resources, Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. For non-native (exotic) trees, send nominations to Professor Edward R. Hasselkus, Department of Horticulture, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1575 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706.

Once you have sighted a potential champion, it's time to see if the giant measures up to your expectations. With a flexible tape measure and 12-inch ruler, you can take three vital statistics:

1—CIRCUMFERENCE MEASUREMENT

METHOD—Using a flexible tape, measure to the nearest inch the distance around the trunk of the tree at a point four-and-one-half-feet above ground level. If the tree is on a slope, measure from the ground at the midpoint of the tree base. In the case of a growth or a branch on the trunk at the four-and-one-half foot level, measure the circumference just below and report



A certified tree inspector makes an official circumference measurement four and one-half feet above ground level. Photo by Scott Nielsen

the height at which the measurement was taken. For multi-trunked trees that branch below the four-and-one-half foot level, report the circumference of the largest trunk at four-and-one-half feet.

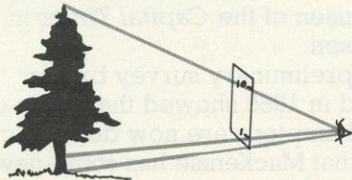
2—CROWN SPREAD—Set a stake directly under the outside edge of the crown farthest from the trunk and another directly opposite it, again at the outer edge of the crown, on a line passing through the center of the tree. Next, set stakes marking the shortest diameter of the crown, also on a line



Crown spread is determined by setting out stakes at points of greatest and smallest spread, measuring the distance between them, and taking an average.

passing through the center of the tree. Measure both diameters to the nearest foot with a tape measure. Add the two measurements together and divide the sum by two to obtain the average crown spread.

3—HEIGHT—Stand far enough away from the tree so that you can sight both the base and the top of the tree between the sighting marks on a 12-inch ruler held vertically in an outstretched arm at eye level. When this is accomplished, move the ruler forward or backward until the base of the tree appears across the zero gradation and the tip of the crown appears across the 10-inch gradation. Then, sight across the one-inch gradation and have a companion mark the corresponding point on the tree. The distance from this point to the base of the tree, when measured to the nearest foot and multiplied by ten, gives a tree height estimate. A height measuring instrument is more accurate and its use is preferred. Be sure to report your method of measurement and have someone else verify your results.



The height of a tree can be determined by sighting with a 10-inch ruler and making some measurements plus a mathematical calculation. Official inspectors are trained in these methods.

These measurements add up to a point total using a system set up by the American Forestry Association: circumference in inches + one-quarter the crown spread in feet + height in feet = total points. Check the current list of record native trees on page 5. If a tree you've measured seems like a champion contender, you'll need the following additional information to nominate it:

Identification—both common and scientific names, including species, variety or cultivar designation. Refer to a good tree identification book and if necessary, take a twig and leaf specimen to an authority for confirmation.

Exact location—county, township or municipality. In rural areas, report the section number, quarter section and location in relationship to highways, farmsteads, woodlots or other geographic features. In urban areas, report the street address and an indication of the tree's location on the property such as backyard or street tree.

Name and address of owner.

Name and address of nominator.

Date of measurement.

Include comments on the tree's condition, age, history and other relevant information. ■

Big tree program history

Trees have long been close companions of humankind, standing strong through the rise and fall of governments. Some trees have grown to majestic heights and girths as living monuments to a distant past.

In 1941, the Wisconsin Conservation Department, DNR's predecessor, began a state register patterned after the American Forestry Association's national program to record the largest tree of each native and naturalized American species. Since then, the register has added many new champions to its list.

The program, now run by DNR, works to preserve these gentle giants by recording the tree's name, rank and location while informing the public of new discoveries.

Anyone can nominate a tree and the public is encouraged to participate. Merely submit the species name, exact location and measurements of the tree's girth, height and crown spread. (See page 12.)

Become a certified inspector

The appeal of Wisconsin's majestic big trees seems unlimited, but people qualified to verify their measurements are not. To correct this, DNR has launched a new volunteer program to verify champion tree nominations.

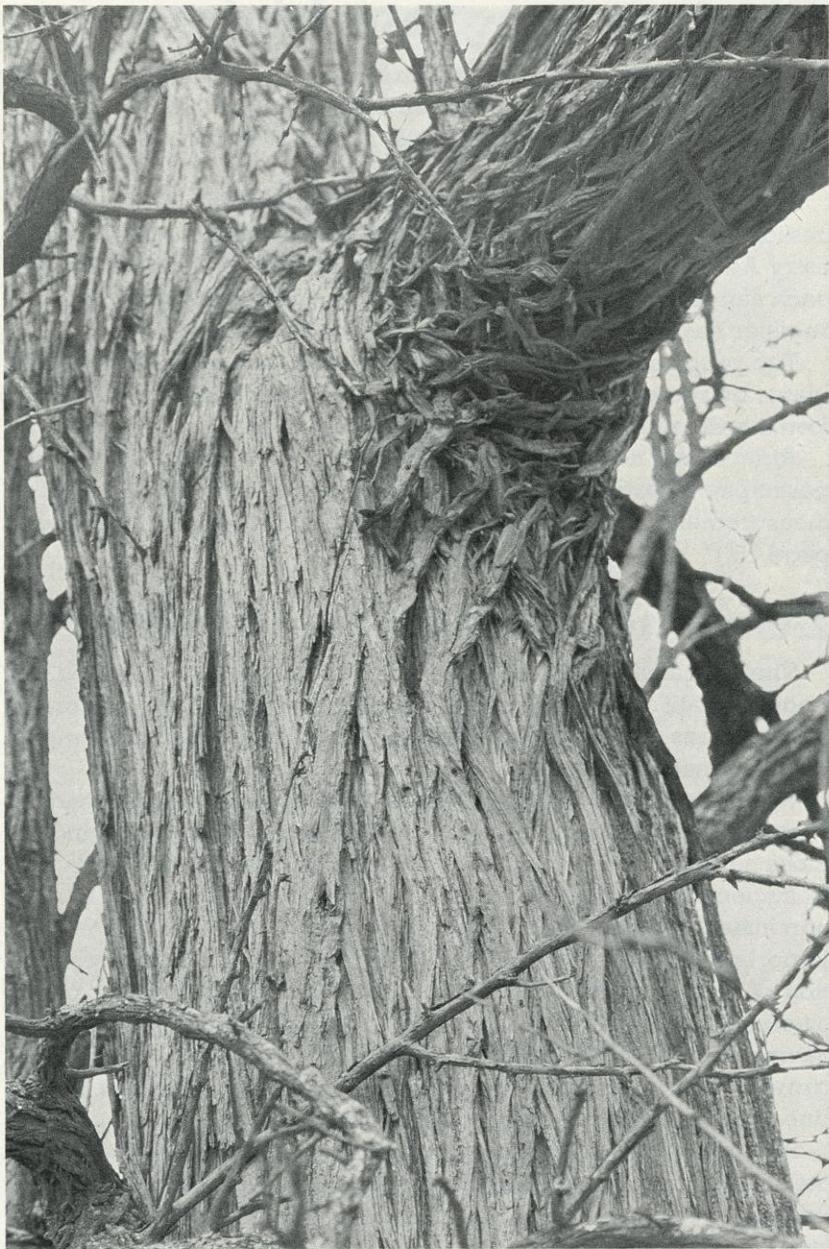
Applicants should have an interest in trees and the ability to measure and identify them accurately. DNR will provide training for those selected and certify them as Big Tree Inspectors.

Inspectors will identify species and verify measurements of trees nominated for state championships in their area. Verification is an important part of the record tree program. It helps insure preservation of unique specimens and at the same time promotes public awareness of forestry and its place in our social and economic life. Saving big trees for study is important to scientists who look at growth rates, longevity and soil types for clues about how to produce similar giants through management.

Persons interested in becoming Big Tree Inspectors should send their name, address and telephone number to Jerry Lapidakis, DNR Bureau of Forestry, Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. Include a brief summary of why you are interested, your qualifications and the locality in which you would be willing to verify nominations.

The MacKenzie Center's Big Trees

Robert Wallen, Program Specialist



Champion osage orange, a Wisconsin native.

■ Harley MacKenzie, head of the Wisconsin Conservation Department from 1934 through 1942, loved trees. During his term as department director, he had more than 700 species and varieties of trees and shrubs from around the world planted on the grounds of the state game farm near Poynette. Those plantings—for demonstration, educational and landscape purposes—have resulted in a significant number of champion trees in a small area.

According to measurements taken in the early 1970s by M. Böttger and Ken Wood, the arboretum contained 15 exotic Wisconsin champion trees. When planted, some were so rare in Wisconsin that just by surviving they have become the largest of their kind in the state.

The MacKenzie Environmental Education Center, formerly part of the state game farm, is now updating the records of its champion trees as well as the other trees in the arboretum. Assistance for this project has come from the Friends of the MacKenzie Center and the Evjue Foundation, Inc., a charitable extension of the *Capital Times* in Madison.

A preliminary survey by Ken Wood in 1985 showed that some of the champions are now dead, but also that MacKenzie has some new ones that were not measured earlier.

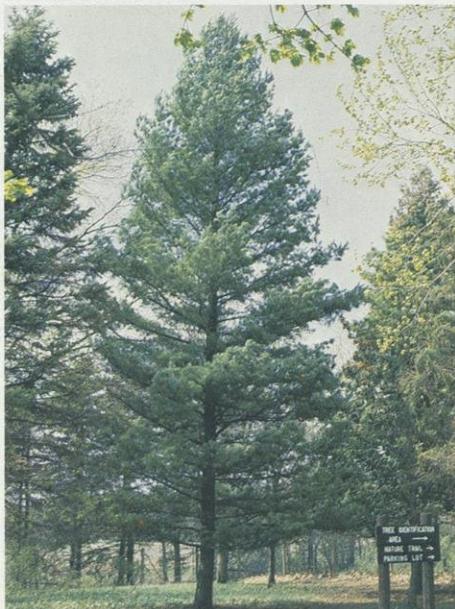
After completing the MacKenzie arboretum survey, the center plans to permanently mark the trees, highlighting the champions. Then an updated arboretum guidebook will be prepared. And of course, some new trees may be planted. For more information, contact the MacKenzie Environmental Education Center, Route 2, Box 825, Poynette, WI 53955; (608) 635-4498.

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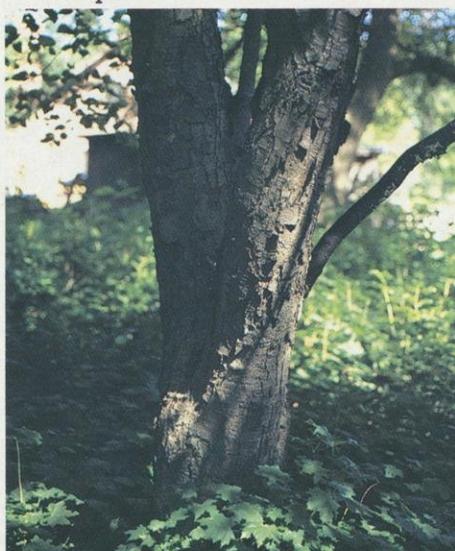
Photos by author



Nikko fir



Korean pine



Sweet birch



Under the boughs of a limber pine. The MacKenzie Center is the home of 10 champion native and non-native trees.

MacKenzie's known champions

Native:

Chestnut oak
Limber pine
Osage orange
Shingle oak
Sweet birch
Yellow buckeye

Non-native:

Black Hills spruce
Korean pine
Lacebark pine
Nikko fir

Big trees are part of the forest

Milton Reinke, Chief State Forester (retired)

The inspiring presence of a champion tree heralds more than beauty and historic significance. The champions stand tall as watchtowers over Wisconsin's forests. They remind us not to forget the trees and, thus, not to forget the forest.

The forest can live forever, if we allow it to. But trees cannot. Just as individual cells in our body die, we continue to live as new cells are formed. So it is with the forest. Trees age and die, new ones grow to replace the old, and the forest continues to live.

The forest is a place where hikers pause to admire serene natural beauty. The forest also supplies wood for our homes and pulp for our paper. The forest is home for wildlife and an area for recreation. These multiple uses may appear to conflict, but the science of forestry brings them together in an equation that provides for the health and continuity of the forest.

Remember, trees are just part of the forest. While the forest may be immortal, a tree is not. The forest is a dynamic living unit—individual trees come and go. Not all trees will reach majestic heights. That makes the ones that do all the more special. When a champion dies, as it inevitably will, we realize that forests cannot be stockpiled forever. Harvest plays a natural part in the growth and maturity of a tree.

