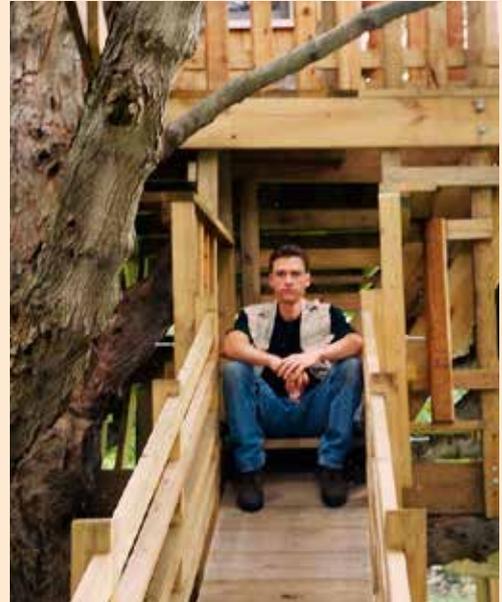


Tarzan of Central Park



Anybody visiting New York for the first time should take a room high up in one of the hotels at the southern end of Central Park. The view is extraordinary. The park extends northwards until it is lost from sight in a sea of treetops with enormous cliffs of stone and cement on each side.

Life among the treetops

During recent years legends have grown up among people who live near the park, legends of life among the treetops. One story was of a young, handsome man who had been spotted from time to time among the branches. This rumour turned out to be true. There was a handsome young man who had been living in the treetops for eight years until discovered by the city authorities.



‘I like the solitude.’

It is a touching tale. Bob Redman, brought up by his mother in a tiny Manhattan apartment, had always been addicted to trees. When he was 14 he went into the park and built himself a tree house. It was the first of 13 houses, each one more elaborate than the last. ‘I like to be in trees,’ Redman explained to a reporter from the New York Times. ‘I like to be up, away from everything. I like the solitude. I love most of all to look at the stars. The view at night of the city lights and stars is beyond description.’

A five-room split level home

His final house was the grandest of them all. Constructed at the top of a huge beech tree, it was what an estate agent would describe as a ‘five-room split level home commanding spectacular views of the city skyline and Central Park.’ It included ladders and rope bridges leading to an adjacent tree, as well as wooden benches and tables. Who can imagine what the rent might be for such a house?

Friends came to visit

Redman went to great pains to hide his tree houses, building them in neglected corners of the park and camouflaging them with branches and green paint. Friends used to come to visit him, sometimes as many as 12 people at a time, bringing sandwiches and radios and books and torches. Certain rules had to be obeyed: no breaking branches, no litter, no fires, and no loud noise – except his brother Bill, who sometimes brought a set of conga drums to the tree houses and played them very late at night, giving rise to rumours of a tree-dwelling tribe.



The party's over!

The park authorities quickly became aware of his activities. However, the houses were often not detected for long periods of time. Some lasted as long as a whole year before they were found and destroyed by officials, with a mournful Bob Redman watching from a distance. His magnificent final house went unnoticed for four months before Bob was awoken one morning with the words: 'Come down! The party's over!'

He climbed down and was met by Frank Serpe, Park Director, and ten officers of the Parks Enforcement Patrol. Mr Serpe had been hunting Redman for years. But he was generous in his praise for the houses. 'We marvelled at the spectacular workmanship,' he said. 'The floors were strong enough to hold a truck and not one nail was hammered into the tree.'

The perfect job!

Mr Serpe concluded that, rather than lock him up in jail, perhaps they should offer Redman a job. He is now a professional pruner and tree climber for the Central Park conservancy. However, he has had to promise not to build any more tree houses. He says he cannot believe that a job so perfect for him could possibly exist.

I suppose, this story just goes to prove that America is still a land of opportunity, where dreams can become reality. And, in our hectic, competitive world, it is comforting to know that a man like Bob Redman exists.