

We love rope swings.¹ We endorse unauthorized recreational amenities of all kinds. Build your own rides.

We stand in solidarity with the muddy bank as we contemplate the possibilities of flight. We take no position regarding the proper way to enter the water. There is no doctrine. Any style is good style as long as you get wet. However, the tendency to leap from cliff or bridge is undeveloped and retrograde. Don't jump, swing! Be a vector, not a projectile. Use gravity and momentum to make an arc of your progress.

We are for the temporary, the provisional, the ad hoc, the jerry-rigged, the impure, the ramshackle, the twice repaired, the one-off, the customized, the retrofitted, the half-assed, and the ersatz.

We seek the path of the young, the local, the daytime unemployed. Follow the sound of their splashes.

¹ Practical matters: In general, the best rope swing is the one you already know about. If one is not readily at hand and you wish to build one, or if you have the good fortune to stumble across one, we have accumulated some practical advice on the evaluation and operation of rope swings. Much of what follows are remarks about safety and technique though some relevant matters relating to sociology and the law are included as well.

If you do not own the land under the rope swing, you can safely assume that rope

swing use entails trespassing. Some swings do exist on public land, but local officials usually cut them down for liability reasons. If confronted by a land owner and unable to run, it's best to acknowledge the plain facts of the situation (that you are, in fact, trespassing) and leave. If the police or sheriff's deputies arrive, it's best not to run. They have already written down the license plate number on your car up the hill. In short, you're busted. Here we repeat some advice gleaned from our pot-smoking, countercultural-type friends who have discovered through trial and error that "Yes, Sir," "No, Sir," and "I apologize, Sir," are the only suitable responses to questions from law enforcement officials. In this case, politeness is strategic. If you deliver the above responses without a smirk, you will usually walk away with just a warning.

The safest rope swing is one currently in use. We don't mean in use yesterday, we mean in use *now*. When you walk up and see people launching themselves into the water with no ill results, that is a sign that you are in a

reasonable spot. Of course, the rope could snap or you might lose your grip, or the branch might break. Rope swings are dangerous.

The absolutely best rope swing is one currently in use by your friends. If you approach a rope swing in use by persons not known to you, realize that you may get a cool reception or worse. As we've seen, rope swings usually occur on private land. The swings themselves, however, are private in a way more profound than matters of real estate, surveying, probate, and taxes. Prior use conveys ownership. While the other rope swing users are no doubt trespassers just like you, they may feel that they are the true keepers of the swing, and you are an interloper. They will be right. As holders of local knowledge, and as people who have used the swing without getting caught in the past, they have every right to resent you, who by your very presence may call just enough attention to the swing to get it cut down.

There are things you can do to smooth your access to a new swing. Bring a few

friends, but don't bring all your friends. Note that the spot which seems incredibly remote, and perfect for a keg and 30 pals, may not be all that remote in the end. And note that local law enforcement were probably doing the same thing 20 years ago (with a remarkably similar soundtrack) and now have a sixth sense for the detection of new mayhem of a similar sort. If a swing is in use when you arrive, hang back and watch current users take a few turns, noting (silently) any points of technique good or ill. They will tire after a few tries, and you can then work yourself into the lineup.

At the beginning, we remarked that the best rope swing is the one you already know about. Prior use does convey ownership. You are the keeper of local knowledge and you have earned the right to coolly gaze upon newcomers. (Here we do ask that solidarity with all who seek to swing trump local resentment at least enough to dissuade you from assaulting newcomers verbally or otherwise. Remember, you have something in common.)

When returning to a familiar swing, don't assume that it is the same swing as before. Water levels change seasonally, and if there is a dam upstream, by the hour. Invisible underwater obstacles like logs and other debris can lodge in the landing area of an historically good spot. For these reasons, it's a good idea to swim the spot first to make sure there are no new snags. Obviously, check that the water is deep enough. How deep is deep enough? Here, our lawyers have advised us that the only suitable language is, "Really fucking deep." Keep in mind that it's a good idea to pre-swim the landing area even in lakes and ponds without currents to carry debris. You never know when someone is going to ruin a good spot with an old refrigerator or a few shopping carts.

If you are the enterprising sort and have the ambition to establish a new swing, follow all the scouting techniques described above, and extend your gaze to the bank with an eye towards suitable steepness and lack of obstructions. As far as materials are concerned,

you will need a rope. What kind? Here, our lawyers have advised us that the only language they will sign off on is, “Really fucking strong.” We like hemp ropes for various reasons. They provide good grip, stretch very little, and don’t cost much. They do rot over time, however. Avoid rock climbing ropes. They stretch, and as they stretch you will drag along the ground getting scratched everywhere. You may or may not need to climb the tree in question to position the rope. If it is impossible to climb, and too high to throw your rope, you should bring some lightweight string, tie a rock to the string, throw the rock over the limb, then use the string to pull your rope over. We’ve never actually had the forethought to bring the string/rock ensemble with us, though it does seem like it would work. We usually just figure something out on the spot.

Conveniently placed knots for added grip are a thoughtful refinement to the ensemble. Keep in mind that knots are always the weakest part of any rope (think of all those fibers bent at sharp angles) and that the

problem is compounded in a swing because the interior of the knot tends to stay wet and rots sooner. Look for wear immediately above and below the knot. Look also for wear up where the rope meets the tree. This is a site of friction. From the ground we've never been able to observe this with any confidence. On the whole, the problems with knots are outweighed by the added convenience obtained by their placement. Particularly as you tire, a knot to hang onto will extend your prime hours of rope swing use. It is generally a bad idea to tie a loop in the bottom of the rope. It is easy to place your instep into the loop on dry land and take off. It is nearly impossible to disengage your foot from the loop while at the peak of your arc in mid air. The result is easy to imagine: you fall towards the water as always, while your foot and the rope return back towards the tree.

The manifesto states plainly that, "Any style is good style as long as you get wet." Most would disagree. For it is not possible to simply enter the water; you do so always *in a*

specific manner. To proclaim that you have no stylistic aspirations is in itself an admission of a certain kind of style. Nonetheless, we simply cannot take sides in disputes about technique. (Though we have been known in the past to indulge in dry land conversations about the relative merits of the Cannonball, the Jackknife, the Pinafore, the Sweet Jesus, the Hamilton, the Blunderbuss, and the Broken Cracker.) Some prefer this talk on the bank. We think you are better off in flight.

Here's what to do: grasp the rope as high up as you can. Stretch, and if there is well-placed knot, use the knot. Step off the bank, and lift your knees to your chest. Get as compact as possible so you clear the ground which will now be sweeping by inches below you. Earlier we discussed underwater hazards and their detection. High speed encounters with the dry land can be equally catastrophic. Keep those legs up to avoid a "dry exit." Hold on as your momentum carries you up and out over the water.

If, at the top of your arc you manage a half rotation, in that brief moment of suspension, neither rising nor falling, you can see everything. You see your friends standing wet on the bank, you see the water dripping off of them, you see the trees, the river, the rope, even the texture of the rope as it falls slack. See all of this, and then let go.

Failure to let go is a common beginner's mistake. At the moment of truth, some mixture of rapture and panic, joy and trepidation can induce paralysis. Sometimes cold wet fingers just get stiff. Whatever the psychology or physiology of the moment, you need to find a way to get free of the rope while over the deep water. If you fail to do so, and are very, very lucky, you will swing right back to your starting point and miraculously dismount, unharmed. We've never seen anyone quite that lucky. At minimum, as you descend, you will not be quite so compact as before, and you will be dragged along the ground to a halt. (See "dry exit," remarks above.) Less likely, but still a distinct and frightening possibility, are

collisions with the tree supporting this endeavor, or friends now innocently rummaging around in the cooler. Is there any sort of mental preparation to help you avoid this outcome? We cannot recommend anything specific, except perhaps to try to think as little as possible when the time comes. See what you can, and heed the helpful shouts from the bank: Let go! Let go! Let go!