

Readers

Letters

Death wish?

The following comments and letters were triggered by an article we published online regarding some information and details of what on the surface looked to our correspondent like it would qualify as a Death Wish. We published the facts and asked what our readers thought, and it generated a stream of mostly excellent feedback which has in itself triggered us to start work on an article on the subject. The general feedback to the longer comments was highly supportive - in other words people generally thought it was a safe method of work - on the understanding that all of the safety checks and measures had been followed.

Here is the photographs of the job and the relevant correspondence on the opposite page.



Dear Sir,

I have been involved in tree work for 52 years and at one time employed over 50 Arborists with our own cranes and work platforms. This is one of the most heavily regulated industries I know, and the safety practices (used by professional companies) exceed most other industries. The photos show a commonly used method of removing trees in sections and is perfectly safe if used correctly. The climber is using a tree surgeon's harness (not a Bosuns chair) and a lifeline both of which will have breaking strains of about three tonnes so even allowing for wear and tear will still have a substantial safety margin. The standard practice is to be lifted into the tree and attach the crane's chain or sling before attaching their lifeline to the tree and detaching from the crane.

When safely attached to the tree, the section to be removed is cut before the tree surgeon uses his lifeline to descend safely out of the way. The crane can then safely lower the cut section to the ground. I know ill-informed people will say it's not safe lifting a person this way, but it is certainly much safer than someone climbing up a tree from the ground which is far from easy and a lot safer the being lifted in a man basket which is common in other industries. It is also exhausting and can compromise the tree surgeon's ability to carry on working safely. I'm sure the usual cry will go up to use an aerial work platform and most tree surgeons do if it is practical. Often, it is not because of access not only on to the site but also getting into the tree crown itself.

Finally, we should look at the figures for tree work injuries and fatalities using aerial work platforms as opposed to climbing equipment. You may be surprised.

A professional worker called Chief

This well thought out letter was followed by two short comments:

"A lot safer than being lifted in a Man Basket? I don't agree and would like to know why you would think it was not as safe."

No name given

"Safer than being lifted in a Man Basket ???. Come on Chief! A lot cheaper I would say as you'd need Two Cranes."

No name given.

Dear Sir,

Obviously, I have nothing to do with this job whatsoever, however I have had to deal with similar situations, as you say the guys look very professional for starters. I would say that I avoid using the Bockers for any tree work, purely as any estimated weights we are given I double then put an extra 20% safety factor on top!

Access to the tree is never easy, if they use a platform, they will need to climb out of it to access the tree especially whilst using a chainsaw. Then a bosuns chair means they can't tie themselves to the tree to sling it because they can't get out of it. So, the way that it is done, considering that these guys are fully trained and highly skilled is as you see and as you describe in equipment more than capable to support them. However, as they are lowered into the tree, they fix a rope to the top and climb down it. On route they sling the piece to be cut and are no longer then attached to the crane, they then loop a rope round the tree below the cut to support them, reposition the safety rope lean back, make the cut and the crane takes the piece away. I don't think it would be possible for them to ride the crane whilst the timber is attached! The one thing I would say as you have identified is the Crane would need to have been inspected and identified in a six-monthly scheme for lifting persons. Not just inspected in the last six months. And assuming a full risk assessment has been carried out It might well have been identified as both the safest and most practical way to do the job.

Name withheld on request

Dear Editor,

I check the Vertikal website every day to see what's going on in the crane and access industry in which we are very small players. Also, to read reports of incidents/accidents so that I may learn and pass on information to our staff and others hoping to prevent similar misfortune befalling them. I rarely make any comments but the 'On the hook' article immediately caught my eye and I felt compelled to respond.

I felt the writer had a less than expert knowledge of what the photos were about, and I certainly did not want to see an everyday part of the Arboricultural industry being classed as a 'Death wish'. I was heartened to see that the 'likes' quickly outnumbered the 'dislikes' showing that my comments had generated some interest and thankfully mostly supportive of my views. As three people have taken the trouble to respond to my comments, I would be grateful if you could publish my reply to them.

With all due respect and in response to both short comments re: man baskets, I would say that the respondents are probably involved in other industries and not professional tree workers, or they would know that it is virtually impossible to gain access to a tree crown from a man basket swinging from a crane.

Without getting close enough would the tree surgeon be expected to climb out of the basket to cut the tree? What if the falling cut section snags on the basket with the resultant dynamic forces throwing the person out or possibly damaging the basket or crane. This by the way is also a common cause of overturns with aerial work platforms used in tree work.

The tree surgeon's harness and climbing equipment is tested under LOLER and more importantly is carefully checked by the tree surgeon as he uses it throughout the day. Being lowered into the tree he can avoid branches etc and get to the exact location he needs to safely carry out his cuts. Also, all climbing systems now use two attachment points so that at no stage is the tree surgeon free or unsupported.

One respondent suggests it is a cost saving measure so that two cranes don't have to be used. We all know the increased risk of using two cranes close together particularly on a very restricted site which is often the case in tree surgery jobs. Of course there would still be the same problem of access to the crown and the risk of the cut section of tree snagging the basket which the tree surgeon is in. I can assure him or her that crane cost is very unlikely to be the main consideration by professional people carrying out this highly skilled work. While man baskets are really good for certain work, they are not ideal for tree work if there are safe alternate options to use.

Regarding the comment, I would reinforce that person's comment on estimated weights as once the tree is cut there is no letting go if it's too heavy! Probably the most common cause of crane overturns in tree work. Our rule of thumb is also to overestimate weights by a factor of two or three.

Michael Large
Managing Director
M.Large

Dear Leigh,

Thanks for publishing my comments and if you think it would be useful you can certainly put my name to them. I'm pleased to see the article has stimulated an interesting debate which is how we all learn.

I diverged a bit on to aerial work platforms, but I wanted to highlight the fact that they have their own inherent dangers if used incorrectly in tree work. Unfortunately, this was confirmed by your later article about a fatal accident (albeit on an old machine) which might turn out be a case of the last straw being a snagged branch.

To the best of my own knowledge of tree work in N Ireland at least three workers have been killed working from mobile aerial work platforms, and only one from failed climbing equipment in the last 50 years.

Our own company have used tracked, all terrain wheeled and truck mounted platforms for many years. Last year we decided with some trepidation to invest in two new spider lifts, a Ruthmann Bluelift SA18 delivered last year and an SA31 expected this month. My main concern with spider lifts was the danger of overturns while loading or traveling over uneven ground. You reported one fatality on the week we took delivery of the SA18, and this caused us to return the lift to Aherns to have the track width extension fitted before we used the machine. (this was a fixed track model which Aherns had in stock)

Perhaps you could do an article on the benefits and dangers of this type of lift as they become more popular.

Thanks again for all your articles in Vertikal and keep up the good work.

Kind regards

Michael Large

We totally agree that this a good subject to cover in a future issue and will be carrying out the required work to do justice to the subject matter. If anyone has a contribution to make, we would be very happy to hear from you.

Dear Leigh

I write to amplify the obituary in Cranes & Access following the sad loss of Geoff Marshall and his supportive wife Thelma.

Geoff was everything described in those words but also just so much more. In those exciting and challenging days at IPAF, when we were determined to achieve so much, so quickly in so many places with so few staff, Geoff came on the scene like one of the 'Knights of old on a Charger' and my seemingly impossible demands were always met with a smile, and he always delivered the goods. Nothing was ever too much trouble for Geoff and somehow, we always parted with a smile and a friendly handshake.

When we decided to participate at the Maastricht show all those years ago, we decided to set up a circus ring where IPAF Members' platforms could be demonstrated. Who volunteered to run this? Yes, Geoff and his lovely wife Thelma. Needless to say, they ran it splendidly and went on to repeat that function for IPAF at a number of shows thereafter.

In losing both Geoff and Thelma we have lost two lovely people who contributed so much to improving safety levels in our amazing industry.



Best wishes
Paul Adorian,
Former IPAF managing director

Recognition for the late Peter Oram

Dear Leigh

I hope you are well and thank you for adding me to your distribution list. After 15 years I have become an avid Cranes & Access reader again!

I read with interest your feature on rental rates and the everlasting issue of crane companies hiring out equipment at uncommercial rates. What also really stood out to me was the amount of contract lifts now being carried out, compared with pure crane hire. Not only are they much safer, but they should also be more profitable.

I think everyone in the crane industry owes a debt of gratitude to the late Peter Oram who was the author and instigator of contract lifting.

Peter was, for many years, the recognised crane expert within the Health & Safety Executive. He investigated many crane accidents and felt strongly that too much blame was being put on the crane operator. Often they were working under site management pressure and with people on site who had little or no experience of working with cranes. The customer usually made his own uncalculated decision on what size of crane was required and what the weight of the load was. Ground conditions and maximum radius were based on unscientific information.

During the 1990's Peter worked for the HSE and joined the CPA Crane committee under the stewardship of Colin Wood. Many of the crane company owners of the day were also on the committee including Ainscoughs and we met regularly to discuss and agree how we could introduce the concept of contract lifting instead of pure crane hire.

I know Peter would be amazed and delighted that nearly 40% of crane lifts are now carried out under contract lift conditions.

Peter, during his time at the health and safety executive, investigated many crane accidents with sadly fatalities of crane operators and the general public sometimes being the outcome.

In my opinion Peter's work on contract lifting has saved lives and he should be celebrated and honoured for that work.

During our ownership of Ainscough Crane Hire sadly we had two operators killed in accidents on site. Without doubt one of those fatalities would not have occurred if contract lift conditions were being used on that occasion.

I am sure that many of the older members of the crane hire industry would agree that Peter Oram's work should be honoured in some way within the modern crane hire industry of today.

Kind Regards

Martin Ainscough

We would completely agree with Martin Ainscough, and if we can play a part in this we most certainly will. We would welcome your comments on this subject.



Peter Oram

Mark Alan Hollister 1951-2022

US crane industry veteran Mark Hollister passed away on February 8th at home with his wife Theresa by his side, following a short battle with cancer, he was 70.

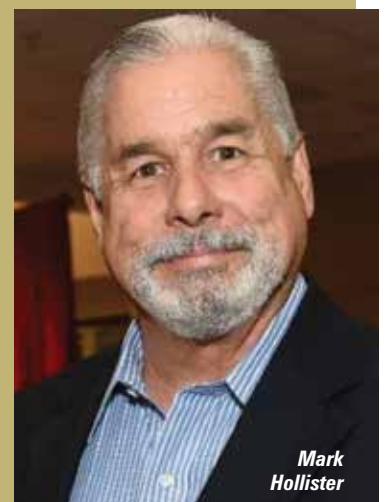
Born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Hollister studied and graduated with a marketing degree before joining FMC in Chicago. By that time FMC had acquired Link-Belt and rebranded it as FMC Link-Belt.

In 1986 he moved to Tampa as the owner of Marco Machinery Company and later moved to a management role at Ringhaver Equipment, which later became Ring Power. After his time at Ringhaver he joined equipment dealer

Nortrax, where he was vice president and general manager for the Southeast. The rest of his career was spent with Sims Crane & Equipment where he was appointed as vice president of business development in 2013.

Throughout his career he was known for his professionalism and caring for the people with whom he worked, many of whom he acted as a mentor. He was also known for his sense of humour. He is said to have enjoyed keeping his garden/yard in tip top condition, and a good glass of wine.

He leaves behind his wife Theresa, and children Morgan, MacKenzi and Terry, two stepdaughters Brittani and Baileigh and five grandchildren.



Mark Hollister

Ian Michael Gamble 1941-2022

Last month UK access and plant hire veteran and mentor Ian Gamble died at the age of 81 having suffered from ill health for more than 15 years, most recently with cancer.

Ian was truly a one off - the term 'character' simply does not begin to do him justice. He was responsible for far more company success stories than just those that he managed or that bore his name, and he rarely took any credit but was happy to provide all manner of support and advice and see the fruits of his success - accolades just were not his thing. He is perhaps best known for having founded and managed general rental company Gamble Jarvis until he sold the business in 2005.

Gamble started his business in 1960 at the age of 19 when he purchased his first piece of kit, a JCB backhoe loader. Although he had grown up in a family business F.L.Gamble & Sons, his father Frank had built his own crane in the 1950s for contract work erecting barns on farms in southern England. He then teamed up with Mike Sadler to create Gamble & Sadler Crane Hire, which was eventually sold to Hewden Stuart by which time it ran around 160 cranes and had revenues of £12 million. Young Ian however was more interested in doing his own thing, and with the new machine he established his own plant hire company which became Gamble Jarvis - the Jarvis being Paul Jarvis.

One story he apparently used to tell nervous entrepreneurs, was that having collected his first machine he had to stop several times on the way home with it to be sick, such were his nerves over having made such a major investment without a plan. Anyone who knew him later would be hard pressed to believe that. Perhaps it was a way to reassuring a nervous young entrepreneur that had done the same thing, that all would work out well? It would certainly have fitted his character.

In the early 1980s, Gamble spotted the growing potential for aerial work platform rental and bought a number of Economy (later Snorkel Economy) scissor lifts from the UK dealer Kato Cranes - now Kranlyft. Over the next few years, Gamble Jarvis became a major regional access rental company, while also running a wide range of general equipment including telehandlers.

Gamble sold his business in 2005 to a group of investors who, it turned out, never had the wherewithal to fund or manage the business and it failed, owing Gamble a most of the deferred acquisition price.

In addition to running his own business, Gamble helped or encouraged numerous other entrepreneurs to set up their own operations, either with direct funding or simply by offering advice and mentoring. He always seemed to have time to help others. The two following examples illustrate the nature of the man:

When Kato Cranes' access salesman Alan Russon had the idea to set up his own business as a dealer to import Skyjack scissor lifts from Canada into the UK, he turned to Ian Gamble for advice and support to start the business. When Skyjack took over that business in 2000, Russon started up again within Gamble Jarvis, but trading as Russon Access to import the Liftlux range of heavy duty scissor lifts. When Gamble Jarvis was sold in 2005, the new owners quickly dropped the access operation and Russon, once again in partnership with Ian Gamble, set up a new business. Around the same time JLG acquired Liftlux leaving Russon Access without a product, so it switched to Holland Lift, becoming the UK distributor.

In another example Gamble helped Facelift founder Gordon Leicester, by providing advice and knowledge etc. Leicester had purchased a Simon truck mounted platform in 1985 to carry out some work on a hotel in Brighton. When it was completed, he wondered what to do with it. Sensing the opportunity to lend it to others for money, but knowing nothing about equipment or the rental business, Leicester went to see



Ian Gamble



Ian Gamble, who ran the leading rental company in the area. Although he had never met him before, Gamble invited him in and spent a great deal of time with the young entrepreneur - who was roughly the same age as he had been when he purchased that first machine - giving him plenty of tips on how to get into the emerging access rental market. He even gave Leicester his first rental contract there and then. Armed with all this advice and secure in the knowledge that he had a mentor, Leicester started up his company Facelift which became one of the leading truck mounted platform rental companies in the UK, later adding self-propelled machines, before being acquired by AFI in 2019.

Ian Gamble was a larger than life character. His rugged features and massive smile reminded people of the well-known British comedian and star of countless 'Carry On' films, Sid James. Gamble loved life and lived it to the full. Even after he became ill, he continued smoking his "50 a day" and enjoyed his whisky, not to mention chocolate cake, which tended to show on his physique. He was apparently called 'Grandpa Belly' by his grandchildren.

In the few days before he passed away his wife, Maggie, observed: "I knew he was really unwell this time because he stopped eating his chocolate cake."

Ian Gamble was one of the rare individuals who could always bring an instant smile to your face no matter how bad things were. His smile would light up a room and you really couldn't be miserable when meeting him. Gamble always seemed to have time for you and had a wicked sense of humour and a great laugh!

Other people from the industry have summed up Gamble best such as: "He was always an absolute legend, I would have walked through hell for him," commented one. Another said: "It is so so easy to say nice things about Ian."

"Ian was always so supportive, I referred to him as Daddy Gamble."

One story recalls a visit to the Aichi plant in Japan. "We had attended a series of dinners with different Japanese executives over the week. At the last dinner before we flew home, Ian stood up and gave a sort of thank you speech in some sort of made up sounds that sounded like our Japanese hosts, complete with gestures mimicking the speeches he heard over the previous few nights. He did it with such charm and wit that, rather than offending his hosts, they saw the funny side of it and what he was trying to do and received an ovation. He became something of a legend with everyone wanting to meet this 'Gamble San'.

Ian Gamble was a true legend, and the industry has lost one of its major characters.

He leaves behind his wife Maggie, and children Julien, Emma, Nicholas, Jamie, Robin and Michael.

Martin Craig Davies 1966 - 2022

Former European access and crane sales manager and managing director Martin Davies passed away on January 23rd at his home in Rhuddian, Wales, following a year of worsening ill health, he was only 56.

Martin Davies began his career in 1989 as an operator and salesman with truck mounted rental specialist Butler Powered Access. After five years he took his first job with a manufacturer when he



**Martin
Davis**

joined the insulated truck mounted lift manufacturer Amador Aerials selling the Canadian-built lifts mounted on Unimog chassis. In late 1994 Amador was acquired by Skyjack and it soon became clear that selling Amador products in Europe was a challenge and Davies was transferred to Skyjack to support its dealers - such as Russon Access - in the UK, its largest European market at the time.

In 2000 he was involved in setting up Skyjack UK in Oswestry, Shropshire, and then in 2002 was promoted to head up Skyjack Europe. The following year the company closed its operation in the Netherlands and moved its European headquarters to the UK.

At the end of 2005 he reached a mutual agreement with Skyjack for his departure, which led to him leaving the company in early 2006. He planned to try his hand as a professional photographer but was soon recruited by Oil&Steel to become its UK sales director.

In 2008 he moved to MEC to head up its European sales efforts and in 2009 he set up Equipment Parts Wholesale (EPW) Europe alongside the MEC operation and took on the European distribution for Thermoil battery conditioning fluid. As part of the move into parts and accessories he moved into a facility in Greenfield, Flintshire and in 2012 added material lifts from new company LiftSmart.

By 2014 events had led to the closure of the MEC and EPW operations and Davies moved into the crane rental industry joining Bob Francis as commercial manager, leaving for Graham Jones Crane Hire in 2020.

Over the past year or so his health had been failing, and he finally succumbed, just after his 56th birthday.

Martin Davies was a colourful character, hard working, hard playing, quick on his feet and eloquent. An excellent example of this was a small charity auction held at the evening event of Vertikal Days 2009 when he demonstrated substantial skills as an auctioneer, helping raise more than £7,000 for charity from a small push-around lift and a few crane models.

He has been out of the mainstream access industry for eight to 10 years, but many will hopefully remember him at the peak of his powers in the 10 to 12 years from the mid to late 1990s when he played a significant role with Skyjack and the UK access market.

One ex-customer said: "He was always very supportive and there was never a dull moment when he was around."

Another added: "A very sad end to a very colourful life."

He leaves behind his three children Bethany, Alexa and Jack and their mother Elaine.

Dear Leigh

"It is with great sadness that the family of Martin Davies have asked me to inform you all of the passing of their father and great friend of mine at the age of just 56. As I sit here with the impossible task of trying to describe someone's life in just a few sentences here are just a few details that formed the larger than life character that Martin was.



Martin Davis

Martin was born and raised in Denbighshire North Wales and was very proud of this heritage and would tell me lovely stories with a misty eye of him and his Dad working together in this area.

In his professional life Martin worked for Amador, Skyjack, where he became MD of Skyjack Europe, Oil & Steel and MEC and latterly his own company, introducing Thermoil into the UK.

His hobbies included long lunches telling stories of his travels on business throughout the world, but especially Europe, Canada and the US. Walking his beloved dogs on the beautiful hills surrounding his home followed by a long lunch. Shooting his shotgun at clays and trespassers, followed by a long lunch. Fishing at his local Lake followed by a long lunch. Being very bad at golf, followed by a long lunch. However his very favourite thing would be a long lunch talking about his children Bethany, Alexa and Jack, he was immensely proud of them all and their achievements.

Martin's personality was like his shirts, loud, expensive and XXL and it's fair to say he never let the truth get in the way of a good story however, if you were fortunate to be in his company you knew you were in for a good time.

God only knows Martin wasn't perfect but who is? Martin had his Demons but don't we all? Martin fought his for a long time unfortunately last week they took him.

As we meander through life we gather and forget many mates but very few true friends. Martin was a friend of mine. I like his family will miss him immensely.

He leaves his lovely children, their mother Elaine, three sisters and both parents heartbroken. However as I've been writing this I've been chatting to Bethany with a mixture of deep sadness yet with a smile talking about the silly old bugger.

The funeral will be 2pm Thursday 17th February at St Asaph Crematorium LL17 OLG followed by a wake at Faenol Fawr where, once upon a time Martin was a bouncer.. or so he told me..

Whilst loud shirts are not obligatory it would make him smile."

Tim Ward



(L-R) Tim Ward with Martin Davis and Willem Hilderink at Vertikal Days