



## The Great Monkeypod Tree

by David Graham

Aloha again from the Sheraton Royal Hawaiian Coconut Grove in Hawaii. The Royal Hawaiian, one of only two remaining hotels from the early years, can be seen from almost anywhere in Waikiki because of its pink color. It was a fantastically perfect day for the events!

The head-to-head footlock competition started first, with women competitors climbing swiftly. Elena O'Neill of New Zealand set a new world record of 17.74 seconds.

Cash prizes were an added incentive and the men climbed after the ladies. I mentioned previously how well Joe House did, both Saturday and Sunday. He was very quick.

The ladies' Master's Challenge went next in a spreading banyan tree, with Chrissy Spence of New Zealand, Kiah Martin of Australia and Kathy Holzer of the Pacific Northwest chapter competing for the championship. It was incredible watching them move through this grand tree, as all three ladies are former Master's Challenge winners.

The 2007 crown went to Chrissy Spence who also won in 2005. I hope to have pictures added to the WAA Web site so you can go there to see a few shots I took.

Next came the men's Master's Challenge, and after a short break to clear the banyan

tree, all were focused on the great monkeypod tree. This tree (*Samanea saman*), also called rain tree, is native to Central American jungles, typically grows to over 30 meters high, and spreads to perhaps 50 meters. The specimen used for the event was easily over 100 feet wide.

The monkeypod tree reminded me a bit of honeylocust when viewed from certain angles. The branch attachments and angles were similar. Joe House commented the bark reminded him of white oak.

All enjoyed the time spent near this magnificent tree, listening to commentator Kristian Schultz of Michigan.

The four finalists for the men's division were Brett Hamlin of Australia, Todd Kramer of Illinois, Mark Chisholm of New Jersey and returning champ, Bernd Strasser, of Germany. Watching them move swiftly and smoothly through the stations set high in the canopy was exciting.

The men were given 30 minutes to complete the event. Mark Chisholm thrilled us all when he went to the wire in 29 minutes, 57 seconds. What a climb he had!

Brett Hamlin was workmanlike and smooth, finishing early and spending time packing up all his gear before leaving the circle in 27:27.

Representing the Midwest from the Illinois chapter, Todd Kramer took third overall and fourth in the Master's Challenge.

Bernd Strasser held onto his crown, winning his seventh ITCC title and making it all look so easy.

I challenge all WAA members to attend and watch the competition at the 2008 three-day ITCC event in St. Louis. It is free and open to all.

Climb safely – I'll see you down the road!

*Dave Graham*