

## chapter eight

### FOREST BLOCKADES, 1984-1995

#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Further developments in Australian nonviolence occurred in blockades against old-growth forest logging. This chapter explores particularly the actions organised by the North-East Forest Alliance (NEFA)<sup>1</sup> in northern NSW. The actions built upon those of an earlier generation of activists in the region, who had revolutionised political action in Australia, through their use of nonviolent direct action to stop rainforest logging at Terania Creek, Mt Nardi and Nightcap.<sup>2</sup>

Those actions influenced the TWS decision to use nonviolent direct action at the Franklin, albeit in a more orthodox, centrally-controlled form; but this form of nonviolence led to a reaction towards militancy at Roxby Downs. That trend towards militancy continued at the Daintree blockade (see below) and during the NEFA blockades, with important tactical developments occurring concurrently in forest action throughout Australia, in south-east NSW, East Gippsland (Victoria), in south-western Western Australia and in Tasmania's Tarkine region. I visited all these actions except East Gippsland, but confine this account to the most relevant actions. Table Four names these, giving their dates and main actors.

These blockades have generally not been well-documented. NEFA organiser Aidan Ricketts (2003) and Cohen (1997) both make valuable emic contributions, with some discussion of nonviolence. Hawley (2003) features interviews with Ricketts and other prominent men from NEFA. Other major NEFA blockades, however, such as Wild Cattle Creek and Mistake State Forest, are barely covered. This chapter rectifies this gap

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<sup>1</sup> Several smaller but similar and related groups, such as the Bowra Action Tribe, Wingham Forest Action, Wild Cattle Creek Action Group and Mistake Forest Action Group, were also involved.

<sup>2</sup> These actions were mentioned in sections 1.2, 3.3 and 6.2.

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in the written historical record, by giving my accounts of those blockades, drawing on articles published in Wilderness Society newspapers (Branagan 1992b, 1993). I also describe the tactical developments, with the aid of NEFA's (2003) *Intercontinental Deluxe Guide to Blockading*, which presents valuable information but without much theory. I contextualise the tactical developments, and give a contrasting perspective on the blockades, critiquing particularly the nonviolence discussions of Ricketts. The use of the arts at those blockades is also discussed.

**Table Four**

<b>BLOCKADE</b>	<b>YEAR(S)</b>	<b>GROUPS INVOLVED</b>
Daintree	1984	Local activist groups, NAG, TWS, ACF,
Tantawangalo, Coolungubra	1989, 1991-1993	SEFA, TWS, individual blockaders
Washpool	1989	NEFA, TWS (Armidale)
Chaelundi	1990, 1991	NEFA, TWS (Armidale), National Parks Association
Mt Killiekrankie, Mummel Gulf, Styx River	1992	NEFA, Armidale Environment Centre (AEC), TWS (Armidale)
Wild Cattle Creek	1992, 1994	Wild Cattle Creek Action Group, NEFA, AEC, TWS (Armidale)
Mistake State Forest	1993	Mistake Forest Action, Bowra Action Tribe, Wingham Forest Action, TWS (Armidale), NEFA, AEC
Wollumbin	1995	NEFA, Caldera Environment Centre

## 8.2 THE ISSUES

The reasons for campaigning for 'old-growth' - forest which has had little human disturbance and is ecologically mature - are many and varied, ranging from rigorously scientific to purely aesthetic. They have been well-documented elsewhere (eg Suzuki 1997; TWS 2002), so they are only briefly mentioned here.

Although each blockade had slightly different issues, most shared common rationales, such as to slow the current unprecedented crisis of extinction of species, partly because "the planet's forests are being irrevocably lost in what amounts to a mere tick of the geological clock" (Suzuki 1997:149). Over half Australia's land animals and three-

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quarters of its plants live in forests and woodlands, yet protected forests that have not been logged cover just 0.3% of Australia's land area (TWS 2002:17). Australia already has a high rate of extinctions; logging further threatened biodiversity. Burning, poisoning and roading that accompanies logging has a disastrous effect on many species, and makes the forests more fire-prone (O'Dwyer & Branagan 1995:28). Nor was the logging for essential building or value-added products: "[o]ver 90% of old growth logs taken from public land are turned into woodchips and exported" (Davidian 2003). There was often little financial gain to the community from logging (and export woodchipping particularly), with the taxpayer often subsidising large corporations; job losses, while blamed on conservationists, were inevitable through new technology, company 'rationalisations', and the limited nature of the 'resource' (GECO 2001:3-7). In most places the value of forests for tourism, recreation and sustainable employment was much greater than for logging.

Conservationists argued that the forests had an intrinsic right to exist, independent of humanity. But there were anthropocentric reasons too for old-growth preservation:

Healthy old growth forests are crucial to the long-term consistent supply of high quality water to cities, towns, farms and aquatic ecosystems. Water stored by and slowly released by forests is of the highest economic value (TWS 2002:7).

Regrowth forests, on the other hand, consume water (*Big Times* 1993:2). Contrary to propaganda by logging advocacy group the National Association of Forest Industry (NAFI) that logging and replanting can reduce the greenhouse effect,<sup>3</sup> logging and firewood collection contributes at least 50 million tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere annually, and perhaps much more (TWS 2002:17). We also advocated that old-growth had incalculable spiritual and artistic benefits for humanity. We did not oppose all logging, but supported the use (and better management) of plantations.

### 8.3 DAINTREE AND SEFA BLOCKADES

Radical new forms of forest-based action emerged during the blockade to stop a road through the Daintree rainforests of north Queensland. I visited this blockade during my university holidays in May 1984, and co-staffed its information centre during a relatively quiet week. At other times, protesters climbed trees in the bulldozer's path

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<sup>3</sup> I actively campaigned against this propaganda for several years (see O'Dwyer & Branagan 1995; Anderson 1992; Branagan 1992a).

(Figure 78), others (such as NAG's Doug Ferguson) buried themselves in the road to prevent further entry of bulldozers (Figures 2 and 77). This involved some damage to the road, and was disapproved of by some environmentalists; others argued that the damage was minimal compared with the damage further roading would do, both to the forest and the Great Barrier Reef. Another action involved an activist being 'crucified' on a cross embedded into the road (see Figure 79; Kendell & Buivids 1987:132), symbolising the suffering of the environment, and comparing the protesters, vilified by government and media, to Jesus of Nazareth. As I discuss in section 13.2.3, the actions had powerful symbolic value; they also had the tactical advantage of slowing down the roading, because police had to dig the activists out - a lengthy process. Although the road was completed, the blockade created the impetus for World Heritage listing of the much larger Wet Tropics (Sanderson 2004:7).

By 1989 NAG had virtually disappeared, but new groups had formed, such as the South East Forest Alliance (SEFA), a relatively informal network of local environmentalists. The Tasmanian Wilderness Society had become The Wilderness Society and grown into a national body with full-time employees and a 'chain' of shops; with the Australian Conservation Foundation and others it formed a network which increasingly relied on elitist political and bureaucratic lobbying, as it attempted to work with the federal ALP government (see Doyle 2000: 161). In 1989 in forests in the South-East of NSW, tactical innovations continued, despite major disagreements over nonviolence. The orthodox views of Robert Burrowes (described in section 4.5.4) were very influential here, views endorsed by both TWS and SEFA. The local farmers who were part of the campaign went along with these tactics initially. Artistic actions by designer Jenny Kee, and an appearance by musician Sting with some touring Amazonian Indian chiefs in the South-East forests produced powerful media images (Cohen 1997:174).

However, as the police presence grew and the campaign slowed, a minority of full-time blockaders not aligned with SEFA or TWS decided to perform more militant actions, involving physical devices to halt logging. One was a set of steel tubes with internal locks which closed when an arm was inserted, nicknamed 'wog wogs'. These were cemented into the road and seven protesters were locked into the devices in a dawn protest that represented a significant departure from orthodoxy (Cohen 1997:175). The SEFA blockade of Cooloongubra (see Sorensen 1992:24) saw the first use of tripods:-

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three long poles lashed together in a pyramid shape with an area on top where activists could perch (see Figure 65). When police tried to move one of these, activist David Burgess<sup>4</sup> crashed to the ground. Film footage of this incident was repeatedly shown on television, making police more careful in the future, but also straining relationships between SEFA and police. In another innovation, protesters constructed tree platforms (Figure 70), and interconnected trees so that removal of any tree would endanger lives in other trees. This tactic was dangerous for protesters, but saved whole coupes from logging, because the platforms were too high for police 'cherry-picker' machinery to reach. In another dawn action, a protester locked her neck to a bulldozer using a Kryptonite bike lock; when two sets of boltcutters failed to release her, police used an angle grinder, finally cutting through at 3 pm (Cohen 1997:177). The bulldozer left, and did not return for fourteen months. Clearly these tactics were working.

There was much resistance to them however from TWS, who had a narrow scope of actions they considered nonviolent. They opposed treesits because they were secretive and did not involve all the protesters, and they opposed hunger strikes, despite the regular use that the guru of nonviolence, Mahatma Gandhi, had made of them. As these tactics spread, and the supportive farmers adopted more militant tactics involving horses, TWS began to withdraw support from the blockades.

I visited Tantawangalo and Coolungubra in 1993, after a Sydney Peace Squadron gathering where SEFA activist Jarrah<sup>5</sup> and I agreed to visit each other's blockades to show solidarity, build links, and share tactics. I arrived after the peak of the area's activities, during which 1000 people had held a meeting. The withdrawal of TWS support had left the camp small and demoralised. One morning's actions at the Eden chipmill, where most of the logs were being woodchipped, resulted in angry scenes by loggers and truck drivers. One driver backed his truck into a conservationist's car, but in the process crushed the pelvis of a logger (see Susskind 1992:8). The activists returned to camp fearing violent reprisals from the loggers. Most decided to leave. I was pressured to maintain the blockade in a phone call from NEFA's Ricketts, but I had other commitments, and was not prepared to engage in a virtually solo vigil.

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<sup>4</sup> Burgess was later famous for painting NO WAR on the Sydney Opera House.

<sup>5</sup> This was a man, not to be confused with Kristina 'Jarrah' Schmah.

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Although factors like remoteness were involved, there can be little doubt that the orthodox/militant schism in nonviolence contributed to the failure of the blockade. The rebelliousness of the blockade had been inspiring, but when that rebellion was internalised and directed at TWS rather than logging interests, its energy dissipated. Although an impressive 1200 arrests were recorded (mainly for orthodox actions), only a comparatively miniscule 6000 hectares was saved from logging. The initial orthodox strategies undoubtedly contributed to large numbers of protesters, some high profile, but these numbers were not translated into a particularly successful outcome.

### 8.4 CHAELUNDI, MT KILLIEKRANKIE

Meanwhile, in 1991 NEFA had begun a blockade in Chaelundi, near Dorrigo, NSW (see Branagan 1991; Woodley 1991b, 1991c), which I visited briefly. With no expectation of TWS support, they proceeded to develop their own, militant tactics, while using some orthodox strategies like lobbying, legal action and initiating police protocols. A small group of 'alternates', who had recently built their own pole houses in forest near Kyogle, were well resourced with equipment, such as four-wheel drive trucks, crowbars, chains, winches and toolkits. Assisted by riggers who had recently been working on film sets, they set up a whole series of physical impediments to police and logger entry, such as tripods and concrete pipes<sup>6</sup>. Later, holes were dug to accommodate protesters, who then had vehicles lowered on top of them, their wheels removed; they then locked themselves onto the chassis (Figure 81). Some activists chained themselves to bulldozers (see Figure 71; Painter 1991:24). Timber obstacles, fires, and heated rocks were all used to slow the entry of loggers. Despite a huge police presence, through this militant form of action NEFA was able to slow logging, until legal action stopped it altogether (see Brazil 1991:6). As section 12.5 argues, this was a significant victory.

A year later, at Mt Killiekrankie a reunion-cum-meeting created another blockade, as logging was occurring in this World Heritage-nominated area (see Painter 1992:2). Although I had had little involvement at Chaelundi, owing to burnout<sup>7</sup>, studies and a

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<sup>6</sup> The latter had been fortuitously left by roadworks.

<sup>7</sup> After The Bike Ride in 1986, I had visited Borneo twice, attended blockades of rainforest timber ships and warships in Brisbane, Sydney and Perth, been arrested several times, worked on northern NSW campaigns, and suffered a nervous breakdown and long periods of depression.

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lack of transport, I had now returned to full-time activism with the Armidale branch of TWS. This branch had been involved in Chaelundi, despite being told not to by TWS' management committee, according to an internal memorandum by Armidale's TWS shop manager Roger Brown (26 February 1992). The branch was in the difficult process of loosening its ties with TWS and becoming an environment centre, because of concerns with TWS' increasingly corporate nature, and in order to be more independent and deal with a wider array of rural environmental issues.

The experience of many seasoned campaigners was in evidence as a blockade was swiftly set up in the Catbird Road Compartment. Tripods were erected, pipes were buried in the roads (people then chain themselves inside the pipes), media releases went out and visiting locals were treated to impromptu street theatre and music. Police were shown around the camp, and were impressed by the fact that the TWS Armidale contingent had twice walked the 50 km round trip down the mountain from Pt Lookout. Some locals were aggressive, and at one stage tried to blockade in the blockaders. Interestingly, they were told by police that if anyone were to be arrested it would be them. They quickly dispersed. Logging was stopped in the compartment. A Green camp remained in the area for more than a month, although the threat of violence from locals was constant (Branagan 1992b:3).

In a new development, the tripods became joined together and topped with living platforms, where protesters could stay for days at a time (see Figure 66). A thick logging cable was also strung across the road to prevent vehicular access. It was quickly decorated, in an action that combined art and ritual, to become known as the "wild women's witchy weaving fortification". Another innovation, the cantilever, was imported by NEFA strategist Dailan Pugh from successful forest actions in the United States (Figures 63 and 69). This device was a single pole fixed into the rock wall on the upper side of a road. It extended horizontally across the road and five metres into the abyss below, thereby preventing vehicular access. We added a new element:- a blockader balanced on the end of the pole. Using these devices, a bulldozer was trapped six kilometres inside the blockade, with a further tripod over the bulldozer ensuring it remained there.

After NEFA's vindication in Chaelundi, the police did not attempt to dismantle our delaying devices, seeming more interested in maintaining peace between us and a vocal opposition of loggers. The latter's blockade of us consisted of about thirty men, who had parked their four-wheel drives across the road. Claiming to be representing the National Farmers' Federation, their anger was little helped by the provocative attitudes

of some of the NEFA crew. Women with children tried in vain to leave, and the situation was only defused by the arrival of the police.

The next day newspaper headlines of “Loggers Armed With Chainsaws Blockade Conservationists” (see Cohen 1997:207) showed that far from ending the issue, the loggers had actually stirred it up just as media interest was fading. They agreed to end their blockade on condition we returned their bulldozer<sup>8</sup>. Not only was logging stopped, but the Forestry Commission (FCNSW) was prosecuted for its practices (which had caused severe erosion and damaged water quality) by the Environment Protection Authority, after NEFA lobbying. The Soil Conservation Services’ control over the FCNSW was greatly expanded, and NEFA was again vindicated. The new blockading devices had played no small part in the resounding success.



Figure 63: Cantilever blockading road in forest (NEFA).

### 8.5 YEAR OF THE BLOCKADE: 1992

This was the beginning of a year of constant blockading for many of us, with one action blurring into another. Although there was much that was enjoyable, there was also an element of Gandhian self-suffering involved: we lived out of our backpacks, with minimal possessions and income, in rugged, remote but breath-takenly beautiful terrain. Most blockades were high in the mountains of the Great Dividing Range, and nights were often below freezing point, damp and windy (see NEFA 1992:2). There was limited access to water, and health problems like giardia, nits and tropical ulcers resulted. Camp life could be stressful: many people on the fringes of society were involved, bringing with them drug and alcohol abuse and other anti-social behaviours.

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<sup>8</sup> This condition was agreed to after much discussion, although when it became bogged, loggers and blockaders worked together to free it!



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Some camps were deemed illegal; most were subject to harassment by loggers and surveillance by police, and occasional violence by both.

Organisation, however, was more than professional, especially in comparison with the Roxby blockades:

Overall there was superb anarchic organization, a tribal feel to all our actions ... We had functioning radio nets, abundant kitchens, warm (but smoky) shelters. Regular supplies of food, utensils, implements and clothes were donated by local individuals and businesses (Branagan 1992b:3).

This can be seen as a nonviolence development, related to affinity groups. Whereas the Roxby blockades were relatively short actions involving large numbers of tenuously-linked activists from distant, scattered bases, the NEFA blockades were longer, smaller, involved strong existing networks, and were nearer to the activists' communities, facilitating rest breaks from the blockades. Section 12.2.1.2 explores this point.

### 8.5.1 Mummel Gulf

The Mummel Gulf (near Walcha) blockade commenced in June 1992 after talks with the FCNSW broke down (see Ricketts 1992:7). The FCNSW tried to wait us out, but instead of tiring we built tepee villages in a radius of about fifteen kilometres (see Figure 84) and became:

... a really strong blockade. We were on a roll, the government didn't want to tackle us after the drubbing we'd given them at Chaelundi and at Killiekrankie. At Mummel we'd actually taken over a closed forest and no attempt was made to get us out (blockader Tim Sommerville in Ricketts 2003:128).

More than 200 were involved in these camps, in a climate where it occasionally snowed. Numerous locals, scavengers and small forest industries (eg seed collecting companies) were supportive as the large operators such as Fennings were clearfelling and refusing others access to forests. Largely thanks to organiser Megan Edward's impassioned eloquence, police were non-intrusive and media was constant and high-profile.

We blockaded the major entrances to the logging coupes, and declared the 'Mummel Free State', as had been done at Chaelundi [presumably based on the Irish Free State]. We established three major camps – Base, Feral and Runnamuck [after Riamukka State Forest] in our Free State, which had been 'officially' closed to all but loggers under 1916 legislation. The highlight of the

blockade was the hot bath set up in a creek, giving the lie to claims that hippies never wash. The police have the photographs to prove it (Branagan 1992b:3).

The result of this show of ‘people power’ was a verbal agreement from FCNSW that there would be no logging there until the following May.

#### 8.5.1.1 Arts and technology

Among the arts used at Mummel were performance, music, and dress:

One particular action stopped logging for a day, ‘captured’ several huge dozers and enabled one onside cameraman to stage-produce an action extravaganza starring Benny Zable. It was widely telecast in NSW... Children played, music was endless ... Many of the blockaders were dressed in overalls clearly labelled ‘Green Extremist’,- these had even the reddest necks smiling. (Branagan 1992b:3-4)

These arts were not separate but an intimate part of the blockade, creating a deep impression on many. As one woman commented:

Those few days at Mummel were incredible. They changed my life (Nano, Louise 2003, pers. comm., 11 November).

Despite actions and reconnaissance spread widely over quite inaccessible country, there was effective communication via a sophisticated radio network.

At one stage we had three blockades in different parts of the state all linked through our network. We had an extensive internal and external set-up at the Mummel Gulf ... and that was linked back to the base station near Lismore with another link out to Carrai near Kempsey and the first Wild Cattle Creek blockade was happening near Dorrigo at the same time. Each of the three camps could communicate with each other simultaneously, so we had the capacity to respond quickly to any new situations (Sommerville in Ricketts 2003:128).

Blockaders were even able to perform media interviews while locked onto machinery via high quality radio-telephone patches. Indeed, NEFA’s communications were such that, as the pro-logging Forest Products Association complained to the government, they were superior to those of both the police and FCNSW (Cohen 1997:202). For example, the court decision to grant an injunction to stop logging Chaelundi was relayed to the protesters in fifteen minutes, while the police did not receive the message for eight hours. Not only did NEFA know what it was talking about with respect to legal and scientific matters, but it could do it quickly, a fact that gained police respect. Communication is an important aspect of nonviolence (Martin 2001:71), and NEFA’s efficient internal communication made for a more effective network of blockades,

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moving people to where they were needed, sharing information. Externally, it enabled up-to-the-moment and often dramatic media to be relayed from remote locations. This technology in itself represents a development in nonviolence, further discussed in sections 12.2.4 and 13.2.10.

### 8.5.2 Wild Cattle Creek, Styx River

After Mummel, we moved to Wild Cattle Creek, where Bellingen Environment Centre had discovered perhaps the oldest brushboxes in the world (estimated at 2000 years old) in a coupe faced with logging. In an historic meeting with FCNSW, we procured a reserved status for those trees. The more radical Wild Cattle Creek Action Group (WCCAG), however, was unhappy about any logging in the rainforested Compartment 546, and set up blockades. Unfortunately the WCCAG blockade was marred with violence, particularly after the forest was closed to the public. Blockaders were forced to go bush, to avoid police and pro-logging vigilantes, and were attacked in the nearby town of Dorrigo. Eventually WCCAG withdrew altogether. This blockade is not well documented, the exception being a song recorded by blockader Mick Daley, for the album 'Lock-On', which details some of the actions and protesters. His song thus performs an important historical function, as I discuss in section 13.3.2.7.

After a brief occupation in July of the FCNSW office in Armidale, where one man chained himself to a desk, a tripod was set up in the street outside, and five people were arrested (see *Armidale Express* 22 July 1992:1), we moved to the Styx River. In a nerve-wracking experience, I drove someone's old, rusting Holden there along slippery dirt tracks, fortunately arriving without mishap or apprehension by police. We quickly established camps, set up tripods and the like, and searched for the rare Eastern Quoll. The police were shown through our blockade, and no doubt reported that it was comprehensive, for shortly afterwards the FCNSW abandoned plans to log there. Once again, the new modes of resistance had proven effective.

### 8.5.3 Carrai sabotage

After Styx, I travelled south to work with the Sydney Rainforest Action Group, visit the SEFA blockade mentioned above, and join protests against the mining for limestone of

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Exit Caves<sup>9</sup> in Tasmania. Comrades kept me updated about the continuing ‘rolling’ blockade. This had moved to the Carrai plateau near Kempsey, after a cultural event – a forest festival - had boosted numbers, replacing burnt-out blockaders with new ones. The District Forester and a contractor responded violently:- with a four-wheel drive they ran into the tripods, knocking them onto the camp and narrowly missing protestors. Again public forests were closed, and a twenty four-hour police guard mounted. Outside the exclusion zone the vigil continued. Conflict resolution strategies offered by NEFA were, as usual, rejected. On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> of October a rally was held at the Kempsey office of FCNSW. On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> a mass action ensued in the forests. A large police presence pulled down the tripods, and allowed the logging to continue. There were at least twenty arrests, and continuing confrontation.

It was in these circumstances that a group of blockaders decided to sabotage a bulldozer inside the closed forest. On discovery of the sabotage an enormous outcry ensued from loggers, FCNSW and the media. NEFA stated that sabotage was not one of its tactics, and withdrew support from the blockade, which subsequently collapsed. This failure can, in part, be attributed to NEFA’s failure to develop and articulate to newcomers a coherent policy on nonviolence. Perhaps knowledge of the basic tenets of nonviolence to which NEFA claimed to adhere – avoiding sabotage and violence towards people (NEFA c1993:2-4) - was presumed as common knowledge, but this presumption was obviously not shared by all. I discuss this further in section 8.9.3.2.

### 8.6 MISTAKE STATE FOREST, LAND RIGHTS

Blockades continued throughout 1993 and 1994, at Toonumbah near Kyogle and at Wild Cattle Creek, among others. In the lead-up to the 1995 state election, NEFA embarked upon a “campaign of hit-and-run blockades throughout northern NSW forests, with the aim of raising the temperature further” (Ricketts 2003:132-133). I left a boring and demeaning Centrelink kitchenhand course, prepared to live on no income until my job at TWS Armidale began, and travelled down to Mistake State Forest, near Bowraville (see Appendix 5). This vigil<sup>10</sup> was on ‘orange alert’, meaning “the lead up to an action is being prepared. Extra bods [people] needed” (NEFA 2003:12). The vigil involved scouting and much waiting, amid an interesting crew of ‘street kids’, rural

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<sup>9</sup> This blockade gains a further mention in section 13.2.3.

<sup>10</sup> Mistake was also known as Upper Buckrabendinni.

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landholders, highly educated conservationists, and nomadic fruit pickers. Two women – ‘Georgia’ and Emma - were the main NEFA coordinators. Donated food flowed in with each new arrival:- although we began the vigil with one box of food between us, there were thirteen boxes left at the end of the blockade, showing us that communal living was a good survival technique, if nothing else. It was, for me, a spiritual reminder that our material concerns are often taken care of when we ‘follow our hearts’ and take risks as a group.

This action was important for the involvement of local traditional owners from the Gumbainggir nation – primarily Trevor Ballanggang Jnr. Trevor was quite terrifying at first, as he asserted his ownership of the land and his determination to protect it, all the while gesticulating with a tomahawk, which he finally dropped near my foot. We nevertheless became firm friends<sup>11</sup> as he set up a Koori Embassy on top of the mountain. In a press release he supported the conservationists’ blockade, called for more consultation and a methodology to identify and preserve significant sites, and stated that

Mount Martha Anne and Bowra Sugarloaf are very important places to the local koori people spiritually, mentally and physically. They are significant in the Dreamtime to me and my people (Bowraville Aboriginal Lands Council 1993:1).

I wrote that Koori numbers would have been higher at the blockade:

... if they were not so impoverished by the theft of their land. Many could not get up the mountain because they simply don’t own cars. They also tend to avoid conflict situations because they have spent their lives in a Police State, and if you find that a stretch of the truth try living with them for a few weeks (Branagan 1993:4).

Trevor was an inspiration at one moment of the blockade. A NEFA decision had been made to allow National Parks personnel into the blockaded area, but Trevor was unhappy about any white bureaucrats entering, and made the car drive around him, dangerously close to a precipice:

[A]lready facing court (like most kooris his age), [he] remained seated on the road, his small bag of possessions with him, the red, black and yellow [of the Aboriginal flag] flying proudly above him (Branagan 1993:4).

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<sup>11</sup> I would later visit his house in Bowraville, do his radioshow for him at the Bowraville community radio station, and meet up with him at a later blockade at Wild Cattle Creek.

Koori liaison had been part of our strategy from the beginning, as at Mummel, where

We consulted with the Walcha [Aboriginal] Land Council, they supported the blockade fully. This process of consultation with kooris has continued ... [with tablelands land councils] and on the coast a potentially deadly green-black coalition called the 'Bundjalung Nation' being formed (Branagan 1992b:3; see also Ricketts 2003:128-130).

Addressing the thesis' first focus, this was a holistic development in nonviolence. Much more credence was being given to Aboriginal issues than at the Franklin, and the issuing of press releases of support for conservationists by Aboriginal groups was a development since Roxby. Clearly, some members of both groups were starting to work together closely.

#### 8.6.1 Lock-on, secrecy

The numbers at the vigil fluctuated, but generally grew.

As usual the majority of blockaders were the much-maligned non-aligned 'ferals'. They maintained a presence over many a bleak week, living on the breadline and with minimal comforts. Without them the Stockade would almost certainly have collapsed (Branagan 1993:2).

Although I immensely enjoyed their energy and humour, living with young street people and their personal habits became too difficult, and I found my own camp. Later, when it became apparent we needed a vigil at the bottom of the mountain, I moved down to Dead Man's Gully Rd:

... a creepy place to be alone at night I can assure you. We strengthened our solar-powered radio/mobile-phone communications network. We built a kitchen, pantry and numerous humpies. We dug compost holes and shitpits. We set up tripods and bipods, dug trenches and personholes, concreted 'dragons'<sup>12</sup> into the road, flew the land rights colours and erected barricades and banners. We assembled padlocks, chains, safety belts and iron tubes, ready to 'lock on' (Branagan 1993:2).

Although relations with police and government bodies were usually cordial and fairly open, there were also secretive actions:

We established secret camps, and stashes of supplies and equipment in anticipation of the State locking up the forests for the short-term economic gain of a few already-wealthy corporations (Branagan 1993:2).

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<sup>12</sup> 'Dragons' are described in section 8.9.1.3.

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This secrecy was necessary to maintain the blockade, and was felt to be valid given the 'unlevel playing field' on which we were acting, where the government could (illegitimately, in our view) close public forests. Paradoxically, we were often open with police about the establishment of secret camps, keeping only their location secret! When a bulldozer moved into the area, a 'red alert' went out from NEFA, announcing a definite action and calling for urgent help.

People poured in overnight. Camp became one long informal meeting, with child-minding, wimmin's self-defence workshops, gourmet vego meals and the billy constantly on the boil. Media releases were worked on frantically and put out. We prayed for rain, and got it (Branagan 1993:2).

On the morning of the expected confrontation with loggers, no-one was willing to volunteer to lock on to the bulldozer. Reluctantly, I decided to do so. Someone gave me a section of pipe and a chain with a padlock. The idea was for me to put my arms around the axle of the machine, and then place my arms inside the pipe, chaining them together. I arrived at the bulldozer just as its driver appeared. It took some moments to convince someone to hold the keys to my padlock, as the driver approached. I then dived under the bulldozer, wrapped my arms around the axle, but did not have time to chain my hands together. The driver demanded to know what was happening, and fortunately an experienced activist explained to him that I was 'locked-on', and that any attempt to drive the bulldozer would be extremely dangerous. I would unchain myself when he had agreed not to use the bulldozer in this forest. There were no police around, and the driver was furious, but I was protected from his wrath by the large crowd. He departed, vowing to return shortly. I was very relieved, both that my ordeal was over and that my bluff was undiscovered. In the case of the latter, later activists might have been endangered as loggers tested whether 'lock-ons' were bluffs or not.

The next day Georgia pressured me to lock-on again, but I felt we had achieved our objective in preventing logging in that compartment. I was not interested in locking-on to a bulldozer indefinitely, an action which would only further antagonise its owners. After a compromise<sup>13</sup> agreement was reached and the blockade ended, I returned to Armidale to take up my position with TWS.

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<sup>13</sup> This was despite the Earth First stickers and banners common among NEFA which argued "No Compromise in Defence of Old-Growth Forests".

## Forest Blockades

This was in some ways difficult, since the state branch of TWS had withdrawn its support from the blockade on the grounds that there should be no compromise, that all logging of native forests should be halted. I was beginning to assume more of a leadership role in TWS and the movement, and I wrote:

In theory this is spot on. The actuality of Mistake was that Struan [Ferguson] and I were the only [TWS activists] involved at ground level, from Armidale branch or anywhere. Our presence helped to save significant portions of OGF [old-growth forest] which otherwise would have been trashed ... Certainly the Big Picture and long term objectives are important, but if too many small pieces are chipped away in the meantime there no longer is a Big Picture. The uniformity of TWS policy must be balanced against the autonomy of branches (Branagan 1993:3).

This withdrawal of support by TWS was not an isolated case, having occurred in the Franklin and South-East forests campaigns; elsewhere, proposed actions were rejected.<sup>14</sup> I was beginning to view some of TWS' policies as unrealistic, and to see its increasing wariness of direct action as a serious deficiency (this is further discussed in sections 11.2 and 12.3.2). In this case, its failure to allow branch autonomy and compromise can be viewed as contrary to the nonviolence policies of grassroots democracy and satyagraha previously discussed.

### 8.7 WILD CATTLE CREEK REVISITED

We returned briefly to Chaelundi in 1994, setting up a camp and threatening a blockade over logging of compartments containing old-growth. State Forests (formerly FCNSW) backed down quickly, so we moved to Wild Cattle Creek. A vigil had remained here for some time - which I had visited as part of 'The Great Walk' (see Table Two) - although a strong police contingent had prevented an effective physical blockade. It was a good reunion, and when we were not discussing plans or reminiscing, we played music. I recall playing Kev Carmody's 'Thou Shalt Not Steal', about Aboriginal dispossession and white hypocrisy, to a couple of policemen around a campfire. When I commented afterwards to a comrade that they did not seem to have heard it, he replied gratifyingly that "[t]hey were mesmerised". although the fire may have helped create this impression.

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<sup>14</sup> This is discussed in section 13.2.3.



## Forest Blockades

After we engaged in several ‘black wallaby’ actions<sup>15</sup> to slow logging we decided to highlight the fact that once again a publicly-owned forest had been closed to the public. Those who were willing to be arrested would march in. The group awaited word from NEFA headquarters regarding negotiations with State Forests. Mark, a comrade from the Great Walk, and myself sat on the road with a guitar, singing a song we had co-written, entitled ‘The Walkers in the Forest’, with new verses improvised for the occasion. There may have been a conversionary effect on our captive audience, - the police; at the very least the music was cathartic for us.

Eventually, tired of waiting on NEFA, activist Anthony Kelly called on the group to enter the forests. I had not decided to get arrested, and watched as a line formed across the road, with my red-headed comrade Mark emitting bloodcurdling whoops. The line marched directly at the line of police which was guarding the road. Some got through; most were arrested. On the spur of the moment, I attempted to walk in, still playing my guitar, but was grabbed by a policeman. I twisted around to hand my guitar to a friend Zac because I feared it would be broken, and allowed myself to be taken into custody.

A hair-raising ride into Dorrigo followed. At the police station I did yoga and awaited processing. Like most, I agreed to their bail conditions. At least two - Anthony and a woman - did not accept the conditions. They were kept in a cage in the centre of the complex, awaiting transportation to Grafton Gaol. Some weeks later I hitch-hiked to Bellinger for my court-case. I camped overnight by the Bellinger River under a fig tree, only to be awoken by the torch of a police patrol. When they heard I was in Bellinger for a court-case, they left me alone. The court-case showcased the inspirational advocacy of barrister Tim Robertson<sup>16</sup> whose oratorical skills and knowledge of the law had both the prosecutor and the magistrate flummoxed. The case was adjourned, and as far as I am aware, was later dropped altogether.

### 8.8 WOLLUMBIN

The final NEFA blockade I attended was at Wollumbin, near Mount Warning, in 1995. The tripods were set up (I occupied one for several hours), but some targeted local farmers as well as loggers, with one farmer prevented from driving a load of hay

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<sup>15</sup> This technique is described in section 8.9.1.

<sup>16</sup> Tim is the brother of media personality Geoffrey Robertson.

## Forest Blockades

through to his farm. This seemed extremely counter-productive, as it alienated rather than converted this third party. The loggers and farmers were dealt with in an antagonistic rather than diplomatic fashion, increasing their ire. At one point, a logger fired off a gun in a (successful) effort to scare us, the bullet hitting a cow in the adjacent paddock. It was a terrifying incident, and we were fortunate the consequences were not worse.

The blockade was also marred by hysteria on behalf of some blockaders. I was kept up all one night by frequent (but untrue) screams that vigilantes were on their way to attack us. Then, prior to dawn as I was moments from sleep, one of the NEFA organisers aroused everyone, despite the fact that neither police nor loggers were approaching. Tempers naturally frayed, and meetings were heated. In a compromise solution, we ended the blockade after forcing State Forests to undertake pre-logging surveys for threatened species prior to logging operations. Then, in a close state election, the ALP triumphed, and promised to create substantial new national parks and halt old-growth logging until after a comprehensive regional assessment was completed.

### 8.8.1 Protesting the protesters

Meanwhile, in the midst of the blockades Kristina Schmah and I had formed the 'Breathers Rights Front' (see *Green Left Weekly* 1997:4) to protest passive smoking. Many blockaders smoked, and there was little regard for non-smokers. In desperation, we set up tobacco-free areas at the camps. When we attempted to raise the issue we were labelled 'whingers' or 'smoking fascists', even though the smokers were helping destroy forests elsewhere to feed the tobacco industry, and forcing loggers to change their lives while the smokers declined to do so themselves. This was an issue of unholistic, exclusory behaviour which I felt was not satisfactorily resolved. It was a factor in my move away from blockading and other activities involving large, transient groups, towards more solitary methods of activism, such as painting.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Section 13.2.8 discusses this further.

## 8.9 NONVIOLENCE OBSERVATIONS

### 8.9.1 Significant development: *active resistance*

The most important nonviolence outcome of the forest blockades was the many tactical innovations that arose to make blockading more physically effective. Rejecting the ‘political correctness’ of TWS’s orthodox view of nonviolence, groups like NEFA preferred:

... to pursue a vision of non-violence that was also ‘direct’, in the sense that it was specifically targeted towards producing actual physical outcomes that would prevent or delay logging. This was done by physically blockading roads and entrances, locking onto machinery and generally operating a non-violent, yet guerrilla-style campaign in the forests. For NEFA, forest actions were not merely symbolic actions to attract media coverage – they were serious physical actions designed to actually stop a logging operation (Ricketts 2003:138).

Activists thus formulated a series of increasingly intricate (and occasionally ingenious) devices and methods to physically achieve our objectives of stopping old-growth logging. These innovations are a key theme of this thesis; they are described below, and analysed in Chapter Eleven. There I argue that although there was often property damage (eg to roads), they generally involved open (rather than secretive) resistance, arrest and self-suffering, making clear differences between them and sabotage. Such actions should therefore still be considered nonviolent, albeit under an expanded or non-orthodox definition of nonviolence.

This type of action has been termed “active resistance, [which is] still nonviolent, but more animated and imaginative in its choice of techniques, and people have the right to defend themselves” (Doyle 2000:58). Doyle includes as examples of active resistance: moving survey pegs, running away from police instead of surrendering, and sitting protesters in the path of machinery atop giant tripods. The first two of these were not recent inventions, as Doyle suggests, but had been present from the earliest days of major environmental actions. NAG activists had moved surveyors’ pegs at the Franklin, and many protesters, including myself, had run away from the police when ordered to stop. Even earlier, at Terania Creek protestors hid themselves in forests to be logged, in the hope that this would stop logging. Police would try to catch them, before logging resumed. This was not always the case, however; occasionally trees were felled very close to activists:

## Forest Blockades

Others near the loggers screamed to them to stop. They were ignored. We moved towards an outcrop of rocks for safety but couldn't reach it in time, so we huddled behind the buttress root of a rainforest tree as the felled tree cracked. Masses of leaves and branches crashed like a huge storm on either side of us. The others dragged me off. We were terrified: it could have been murder (Michel Fanton in Cohen 1997:20).

There was great danger therefore in these tactics, primarily for the activists but also for police and loggers. Arguably, this was a valid nonviolent tactic, as activists should be allowed the responsibility of putting themselves in danger, while police and loggers should ensure the area is cleared before felling trees, to avoid endangering human life. This technique has been refined somewhat, and is now referred to as the 'black wallaby' technique. It has been used in many, if not most, major Australian forest campaigns of the last decade, and is a popular and effective tactic. At an anti-logging protest in the late 1990s at Badja, NSW, "between 3 and 5 people managed to halt logging for 3 days with no arrests!" (NEFA 2003:10). This is an important tactical development, because, as I argue in section 11.4.1, it was often difficult to have large numbers of people at remote or inaccessible blockades.

### 8.9.1.1 Tripods

The form of active resistance which has grown the most in the last decade is related to the use of physical impediments in conjunction with activists. The most common is the tripod, where a structure of three or more poles is constructed out of saplings or similar, and erected in a road or other place to be blockaded (see Figures 64 and 65).



Figure 64: Erection of tripod.



Figure 65: 'PJ' on interconnected tripods attempts to evade police in 'cherrypickers'  
(see Cohen 1997:189-90).

One or more protestors scale the tripod and sit at its apex, refusing to descend even when ordered to do so by police. The police usually need to bring a ‘cherry picker’ vehicle to remove the protestors, and this may take considerable time in remote and rugged terrain. As tripods became easy for police to deal with, they became linked together, in complex series of structures (Figure 66). Damage to one part might endanger activists in another part, thus police needed to use both their own intellect, and obtain a range of machinery to deal with protestors. Again, this took time.

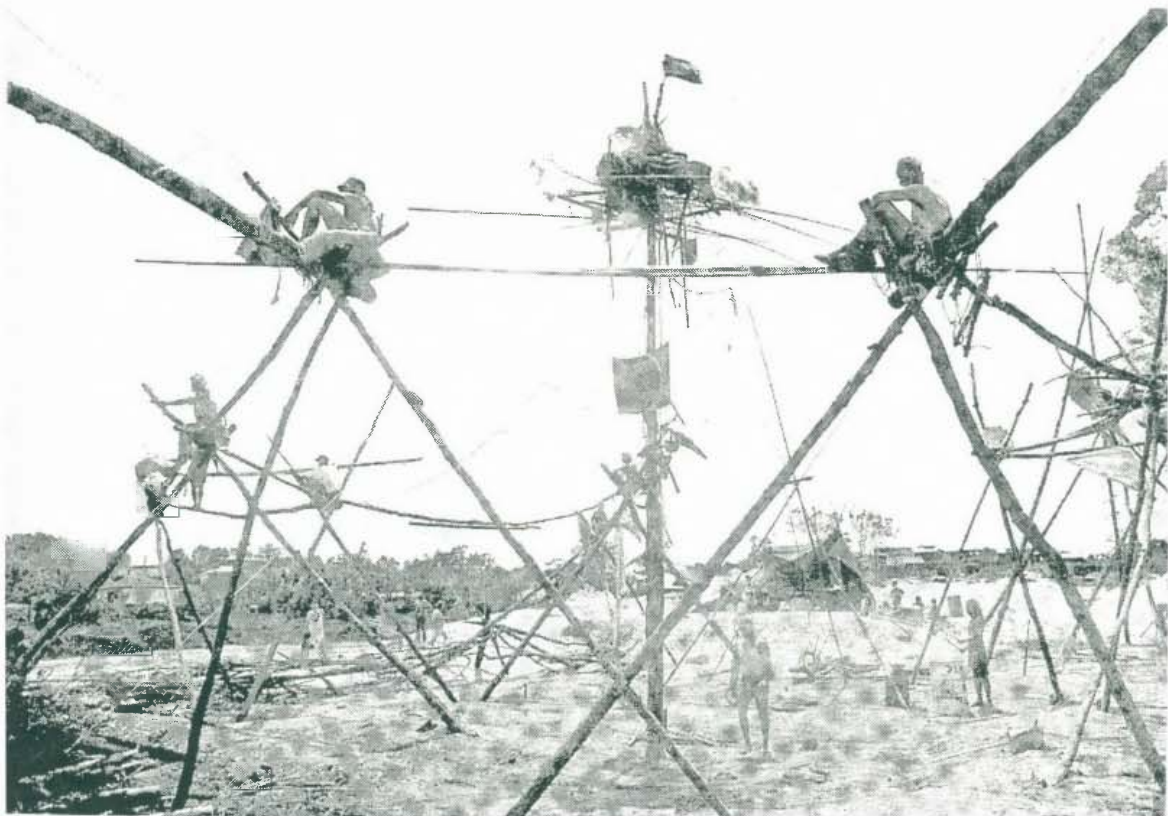


Figure 66: Tripod village, Look-At-Me-Now Headland (northern NSW) protest against sewage ocean outfall.



District forester John Murray and a police rescue squad officer, right, try to figure out how to move a protester perched high on a flimsy platform in the trees.

*Pictures by RICK STEVENS*

or a report from the National Parks and Wildlife Service on whether the area deserves an interim protection order to prevent logging.

However, the Premier, Mr Greiner, supported the Forestry Commission yesterday. He said he had received advice from the Department of Planning that the commission had conducted proper environmental studies on Chaelundi and this work was absolutely beyond reproach.

Mr Greiner said that given this, the commission's actions in preparing for logging the area were justified.



Figure 67: Policeman and forestry official contemplate removal of protester from monopole at Chaelundi, 1991.



Figure 68: Illustration of a monopole

Sometimes the legs of the tripod are placed around a bulldozer or even a train, as happened in Tasmania.<sup>18</sup> This effectively traps that vehicle until the protestors can be removed and the tripod dismantled. While British environmentalists developed different techniques of active resistance, such as tunnelling (see Evans 1998:141,177), the tripod is possibly an Australian invention. It is now used globally, for example in U.S. Reclaim the Streets actions (see Duncombe 2002:214-216; Wood & Moore 2002:24).

Similar to tripods are cantilevers (Figure 69), and monopoles with a 'Star of David' platform on which to sit (Figures 67 and 68). In other cases, activists scale trees scheduled for felling, remaining there in hammocks or platforms for days and even months. Supplies are taken up at the start of the vigil, and replenished when possible - often at night when there are fewer police present (see Figure 70).



Figure 69: Illustrations of a cantilever.

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<sup>18</sup> Section 11.3.2 discusses this incident.





Figure 70: Treesit: 'Global Rescue Station'.

#### 8.9.1.2 'Lock-ons'

Another important tactic is the 'lock-on'. This involves using chains, or metal pipes to lock oneself by the hands or neck to an object. Sometimes people are chained to gates to prevent them being opened. Others lock on to bulldozers or similar equipment, to prevent them being used or moved (Figure 71). Police then need to obtain equipment to cut through the metal. This takes some time, particularly in remote areas, while the operation of cutting is also time-consuming. Thus the forests gain a reprieve of a few valuable hours, during which time city-based activists are often attempting to stop the logging operation through legal or political action.

There is some risk for activists in being injured while they are being extricated from the lock-on. They can also be injured if a bulldozer drives off while someone is locked on to it, so there is preferably someone nearby to inform the driver of the situation, that injury may result from their driving off, and that they might then face legal charges. Increasingly, activists have locked on to tripods, making their removal more difficult. At a mid-1990s Timbarra, NSW, action against gold mining in a wilderness area (see Maxted 1999:6), one activist placed his head in a noose, whereby incorrect attempts to remove him might result in his death by hanging. Despite the macabre imagery this produced on a television documentary ('The Demon Fault' 2003), it was clear he was a dedicated activist prepared to die for his cause. Although, as section 4.8.4 showed, some would regard self-harm as outside nonviolence guidelines, precedents have been set by Gandhi's hunger strikes (see Sharp 1973:367-368) that harming oneself (or at least self-imposed suffering) was a legitimate method of principled nonviolence.

Fig 7.4: Green Extremist being locked on to captured 'dozer, Dingo State Forest, 1993..



Figure 71: NEFA 'green extremist' being locked-on to a bulldozer.

#### 8.9.1.3 Burials, pipes and 'dragons'

The Daintree rainforest campaign was probably the first where holes were dug in a road and protestors buried themselves up to their necks, to slow their removal (see Figures 77 and 83). A later technique - the 'dragon' - combines burial with locking-on (see Figure 72). Activists dig a hole and place a metal pipe and lengths of reinforced steel into it (see NEFA 2003:7). They are then cemented into place. The activist at the appropriate time places her or his arm into the pipe, chaining it onto the steel rods. This takes even longer to remove, involving both digging and cutting. At Timbarra, an activist filled his pipe with aerosol cans, which could explode if cut into. Thus the activist would be at greater risk of injury if police tried to remove him. There would also, however, be some danger to police as well, so it is questionable whether his action could be considered nonviolent.

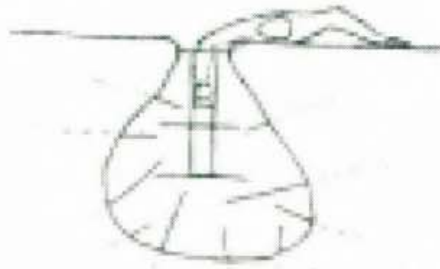


Figure 72: Illustration of a 'dragon'.

A further development was the use of enormous concrete pipes (Figure 73), usually 'borrowed' from forestry roading projects. These were buried into roads, often in combination with dragons, or with activists even cementing their legs at the bottom of deep holes. The pipes made the dragons or cement difficult for the police to access, and further slowed their attempts to extricate protesters.



Figure 73: NEFA activist in pipe at Chaelundi.

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### 8.9.1.4 'Static' blocking methods

'Static' blocking methods do not necessarily involve people remaining after they are set up. They are techniques to slow bulldozers, cherry pickers, logging trucks or police vehicles. Some of the methods used include blocking roads with large boulders, logs, log fires, or rocks heated on fires. 'Scrubbing' a road involves hauling any handy objects - branches, rocks, logs, even drainage pipes - onto a road at regular intervals over distances up to several kilometres (see Figure 74).



Figure 74: Forest road after being 'scrubbed'.



Figure 75: Warning sign at Washpool blockade.

This can slow vehicles considerably, but they need to be given adequate warning to minimise danger (see Figure 75). So too with the 'trucker fuckers' (Figure 76) – devices sledge-hammered into roads – which:

... are installed to prevent trucks from entering the particular area – not to cause accidents. They could be innocently or deliberately misconstrued as lethal traps. Thus the potential for accidents should be reduced by creating other blocks on either side of the truck fuckers (branches, rocks, signs, etc) painting them pink, hanging streamers and banners or anything else you can think of to avoid bad vibes (NEFA 2003:9).

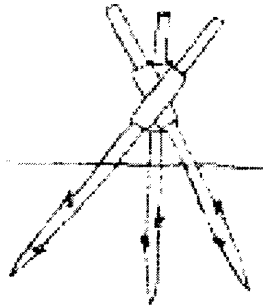


Figure 76: Diagram of 'trucker fucker'.

As each of these innovations were used, police found ways to deal with them, becoming faster at doing so (see Figure 89). Thus protestors tried to stay one step ahead of them, using a new technique or combination of techniques. As the NEFA Intercontinental De-luxe Guide to Blockading states:

If you can quickly whip up a tripod in front of ... hot rocks and any cops hanging around the hot rocks (perhaps a kilometre or two down the road, in front of the oncoming 'dozer, and then put someone in a deluxe sleeping dragon after the bulldozer has trundled by, you should fix them for a while. The dozer is then trapped between tripod and dragon, and the cherry picker is stuffed by the dragon. Even if you can't pull something like this off, by combining blockade devices you inevitably tie up more time and resources (NEFA 2003).

#### 8.9.2 Nonviolence problems

##### 8.9.2.1 Direct action unsupported by TWS

As I moved between the more militant rural blockaders and the city-based TWS bureaucracy and its orthodoxy – working out of Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Newcastle, Hobart and Armidale offices on woodchipping and NAFI campaigns (see Table Two), I found myself in a unique position with regard to nonviolence. After the torrid blockades in 1992, I argued that TWS needed to be less timid and support direct action in the forests:

The importance of direct action cannot be underestimated. It should work hand-in-glove with the equally important city-based work of lobbying media, public and politicians. Direct action allows a tangible focus for our campaigns,

provides a rallying point for a completely different type of people to those attracted to urban environmentalism. It helps to decentralise, to bring together [integrate] the rural and the urban. It also brings the forests into the living rooms of Middle Australia. TWS was built primarily on the massive civil disobedience campaign of the Franklin, and its reputation for effective direct action supported by a sound non-violence and consensus philosophy is world-wide. Australia has, however, one of the most urbanised populations on Earth, and the TWS structure tends to reflect that. Rural-based organizations like NEFA and SEFA are now predominating in the very necessary direct actions to protect our forests. Unfortunately, they sometimes reject NVA and consensus procedures, possibly because of a lack of understanding of them. It is important that TWS supports its rural activists, and continues to work in tandem with other environment groups. After all, a tree doesn't care which office you work out of provided you're helping to save it (Branagan 1992b:4).

### 8.9.3 NEFA and nonviolence

The creation of NEFA was a direct result of the continuing schism between orthodox nonviolence advocates and those advocating more militant tactics:

One of the reasons for the formation of a strictly northern NSW-based forest alliance in the first place had been disagreement with the city-based Wilderness Society over tactics, strategy and meeting procedures (Ricketts 2003:138)

NEFA was not prepared to give TWS ownership of nonviolence:

'Non-violent action' had become a highly contested term within the environment movement by the late 1980s. NEFA chose to add the word 'direct' to distinguish its techniques from the concept of NVA that had gained some influence in southern NSW and Victorian forest campaigns. To the purists, NVA required tactics of entirely passive disobedience, highly formal processes of group decision-making, and cooperation with police; any form of secrecy, or covert actions were viewed as falling under the rubicon of 'violence' (Ricketts 2003:138).

In fact, as shown in Chapter Six, NVA had been a contested term since at least the Franklin campaign, where many actions were secretive and far from "entirely passive disobedience"; challenging orthodoxy was not new. Nor was the adoption of the word 'direct' a NEFA creation; the term 'nonviolent direct action' had been used by many earlier groups, including TWS (see TWS 1982:7).

#### 8.9.3.1 Decision-making

Nor were TWS decision-making procedures highly formal, as a rule, as I discuss in section 12.3.3. By contrast, NEFA meetings were often poorly chaired or involved angry debates which rarely seemed satisfactorily resolved. The usual outcome when a

minority's proposal was defeated through voting, was that they either left the blockade or angrily denounced their opponents, thereby factionalising or undermining the action. Other meetings were patriarchally dominated by one or two men, with questions either tersely answered or ruled out abruptly as 'irrelevant'. Minority viewpoints such as action proposals from visiting SEFA activists, requests for action (near Mistake State Forest) during the 1993 NEFA meeting in Grafton, or at the Shea's Nob meeting in 2001, were given little respect or credence, leading to feelings of betrayal in those people.

### 8.9.3.2 NEFA's ambivalent nonviolence

Despite NEFA assurances that they were nonviolent (eg Ricketts 2003:138), there was rarely any discussion or articulation of any coherent policy<sup>19</sup>, or any training, and the loss of Carrai can be partly attributed to this. In one extremely heated meeting at Wollumbin, another plan to sabotage was only stopped by a woman organiser, who noted all the work NEFA had done to set up the blockade, but stated that the man was welcome to sabotage elsewhere. Similarly, psychological violence was tolerated, with a Chaelundi crowd of about eighty taunting police (Bailey 1991:1), and a protester in a tripod urinating on police below (Woodley 1991c:3).

I attempted to initiate discussions of nonviolence at a NEFA regional meeting near Armidale. However, when I wrote NVA on the agenda, someone added "Not Very Affective" [sic]. The atmosphere was such that I felt both intimidated and that I would be wasting my time to argue, not the case for orthodox nonviolence that possibly my opponents presumed, but that there at least be a higher profile for nonviolence, with preferably some pre-blockade training.<sup>20</sup> The prevailing ethos was not to discuss nonviolence at all. The only workshop on nonviolence prior to a NEFA action appears to have been one organised by TWS Armidale, co-organisers of the successful 1989 rainforest logging protest at Washpool (Nano, Belinda 2004, pers.comm. 6 February; see Figure 75).

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<sup>19</sup> Nonviolence is barely mentioned in the blockade guide (NEFA c1993) and later website (NEFA 2003).

<sup>20</sup> This knockback, however, helped inspire this thesis.

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Similarly, ambivalent messages came from the NEFA hierarchy, with legal activist John Corkhill in an interview with the *Australian* newspaper refusing to rule out sabotage as an option at Chaelundi (Woodley 1991a:5). Although this formed but a small part of the interview, it resulted in the headline “Sabotage ‘an option in logging protest’”, showing how such a statement can be seized upon by media, and give the movement bad publicity. The *Australian* later reported that although protest leaders had repeatedly stated there would be no ‘spiking’<sup>21</sup> of trees, this had occurred at Chaelundi, with loggers complaining that it could maim or kill forestry workers (Woodley 1991b:4).

As with NAG at Roxby 1983, NEFA wanted none of the

... old-style, polite, holy NVA where a mob of people sit passively on the road like Gandhi, then get dragged away and arrested. That only leads to a lot of fines and boring media, and is ineffective. The **only** [my emphasis] way to make NVA value-added is to place people in direct life-threatening situations that are so difficult it takes police hours to get the person out safely (Ricketts in Hawley 2003:22).

The latter sentence reveals an extreme and exclusory approach to nonviolent action, wherein only life-threatening actions are considered valid. This excludes myriad other forms of nonviolence, such as the older tactic of simply being arrested, which continued to happen throughout these blockades, such as at Wild Cattle Creek, when around thirty protestors were arrested. Such actions still gain media publicity, and they have an effect on the police and court officials who are involved. Just as importantly, they are an inclusive tactic for the many activists who may feel strongly about an issue but not want to risk their lives for it. Rickett’s approach also ignores ways in which the arts ‘value-add’ to NVA, and precludes the possibility of as yet undiscovered tactics.

There was also a clear rejection of an orthodox tenet of nonviolence; that the means should be commensurate with the ends: “saving the forests was a battle, and to a large extent the end justified the means” (Ricketts 2003:137; see also Cohen 1997:177). Nor was there much evidence of an understanding of the consent theory of power, while its corollary conversion rarely seemed an aim of the blockaders. Rather, they intended to win, - to save the forests through blockades and an appeal-to-elites approach rather than reaching a compromise agreement with opponents (although this was often because

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<sup>21</sup> Tree-spiking was discussed in section 4.8.1.



State Forests refused to negotiate). Indeed, one conversionary attempt I made with a Grafton local at a hotel after a 1993 NEFA meeting, was interrupted by the same man who had (badly) chaired the meeting. He proceeded to pick an argument, leaving the local infuriated and confiding that “Your mate’s a bloody idiot”. My comrade’s methods of vigorous argument of course have validity, but they impinged on my own.

#### 8.9.3.3 Militaristic attitude

Another issue exposes the inconsistency of NEFA claims to be nonviolent. Rickett’s section on nonviolence: “Direct Action: the Path of the Non-Violent Guerilla” (2003:138) exemplifies the machismo of the NEFA actions, with even the title containing a militaristic term. He notes (apparently without irony) that:

[s]emi-militaristic terms were common – NEFA’s media nerve centre and store of hardware in Lismore was always referred to simply as ‘the bunker’, and the act of climbing onto a tripod was referred to a ‘flying’ the tripod. Those who intentionally placed themselves in arrestable situations attached to blockade devices were somewhat humorously referred to as ‘bunnies’ or ‘cannon fodder’, while specific actions at forestry offices or particular log dumps were often referred to as ‘hit ups’ (2003:139).

Elsewhere, Ricketts describes (in gender-exclusive language) Chaelundi as “our seminal battle, like the Somme”, and “an almighty blockade, real trench-warfare stuff”, with “six different battlements” (Hawley 2003:22), NEFA lobbyist Dailan Pugh is referred to a “Field Marshall Pugh” (Hawley 2003:19), and Cohen talks about his “crack troops” (1997: 184). People who had little time but made the effort to join blockades at weekends were denigrated as ‘fluffies’. An internal NEFA blockade update from Andrew Steed refers somewhat humorously to the “Mummel Gulf War” (NEFA 1992) while fellow activist Andrew Kilvert describes an occupation of the FCNSW offices in Sydney as “no 1960s –style ‘sit-in’... rather it was a cross between a siege and a bloodless coup” (in Rogers 1998: 175). There was clearly a conscious decision by NEFA activists to identify as guerrillas taking part in some militaristic struggle, rather than nonviolent activists in a country where dissent is somewhat tolerated by the state.

This preoccupation with militarism could be seen as a subversive takeover of military strategies and terms by nonviolent activists attempting to gain supporters by making activism more glamorous, particularly for young men. Alternatively, and more probably, it represents a continuing patriarchal glamorisation of war and violence, and

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the sexism, secrecy and hierarchy inherent in militarism. Unlike TWS, NEFA was perceived as a violent organisation, with timber industry lobbyists repeatedly alluding to the violent nature of forest blockades (eg see *New England Times* 1992:1). Although this was related to the group's civil disobedience, it should also be partly attributed to NEFA's failure to promote a coherent nonviolence policy.

Although I was advocating greater commitment to nonviolence, I was also part of this machismo. I often carried a large pocket-knife or wore army clothes; both were practical but also had a threatening aspect. Once, when I was sought out by a campfire, someone pointed me out as I sat whittling as "the dangerous-looking one with the knife". One botanist asked me at Chaelundi if I believed in violence, a question which shocked me and made me question my behaviour. (Similarly, having my face covered in charcoal or clay was seen as threatening, although this was more the outcome of adopting indigenous modes of decoration after months in the forests.) Part of this machismo was no doubt due to a desire to appear like a tough crew who would not be frightened off by intimidation from loggers or the State, but it involved a confrontational approach that continued violent paradigms.

Over the years, at least six women said to me that they had been 'turned off' blockading by NEFA's machismo, and the sexism of some of its organisers. The primacy accorded by NEFA to direct action, whether or not an action was effective in the long-term, and regardless of its impact on opponents or third parties, was anathema to many thoughtful and creative women. Their loss deprived the movement of people who could have contributed significantly.

### 8.9.3.4 Patriarchy and hierarchy

A patriarchal element can be observed from the NEFA blockades, an element which is far from holistic. There were many women involved at all levels of the network who helped achieve its successes (such as Megan Edwards, who organised the Mummel blockade from the newly-formed Armidale Environment Centre), but one would never know this from the reminiscences of Ricketts, Cohen and others. Even an extraordinary action of around 40 women that I witnessed at Wollumbin gets no mention. This began when a crowd of angry loggers approached the remote, unpoliced blockade. It was potentially a violent situation, but the women quickly organised themselves for action.

## Forest Blockades

They ordered the men to remove ourselves<sup>22</sup>, and walked down the dirt road to confront the loggers. The latter, faced with determined yet diplomatic women, removed themselves very shortly afterwards, and the situation was defused. It had been a powerful and effective women's action to prevent violence and maintain the blockade.

Elsewhere, similar confrontations had taken much longer to end, or resulted in a riot (see Cohen 1997:188). Because of the lack of nonviolence training and even common diplomacy, some activists tended to increase, rather than neutralise or reduce, the tension. Although many applied nonviolence principles in trying to converse with or reach compromise solutions with opponents, there was often a vocal minority who saw them as an enemy to be triumphed over.

When women began to assume the prime NEFA coordination roles, nonviolence was much better articulated. Training sessions were organised (see Schmah 2002), and an action where activists meditated in the midst of an occupation of the State Forests offices in Coffs Harbour involved both direct action and a gentler, more spiritual aspect (see Rosenhek 2002:1).

Allied to the issue of patriarchy, despite NEFA's claim to be anarchistic and non-hierarchical (Ricketts 2003:123-124), there was clearly a hierarchy within the network which had access to information, and made unconsultative decisions which affected everyone. This group was alluded to somewhat facetiously within blockades as 'the NEFA Non-Hierarchy'. While 'scrubbing' a road during the Mummel blockade, one of this group drove up and informed me: "We're moving out". I felt extremely disempowered at their autocratic manner and at having no input in the decision, despite being one of the activists 'on the ground'. The structure and decision-making of NEFA was at times - and despite its rebel stance, dreadlocks and marijuana - highly traditional.

### 8.9.4 Effectiveness

The success of NEFA, however, is undeniable. In tandem with political lobbying and courtcases, NEFA preserved some 725 000 hectares of forests, more than doubling

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<sup>22</sup> One man and I climbed a nearby tree to observe the action, and later sing Beatles songs.

## Forest Blockades

national parks in the region (Hawley 2003:19). According to Ricketts, the blockades also led directly to the resignation of the NSW Education Minister, and later to that of the Premier, and to groundbreaking endangered species legislation (2003:126-127). Using innovative devices to physically slow logging was clearly effective, and NEFA activists were called upon to share their new-found expertise with other activist groups. NEFA's effectiveness energised the movement after a long period with few high-profile successes, and, as I argue in section 11.5, affected how people view nonviolence. The blockades also had an important effect on the social and cultural lives of the region, by teaching skills (see below), and providing people with homes and a purpose.

However, as at Roxby 1983, the pendulum probably swung too far to the action side of NVDA, and threw out too much of nonviolence. An effective policy of nonviolence for sustainable change should continue to develop militant techniques, while at the same time encourage holism, inclusivity, conversion, equation of means and ends, and grass-roots democracy. Such nonviolence need not be highly codified and dogmatic,- merely better understood, debated, articulated and trained for.

The forest blockades were also effective internally, in terms of the learning and teaching that occurred within the movement. The blockades provided:

... a fantastic source of job training. Many so-called dole-bludging hippies learned practical and organisational skills, and gained a sense of empowerment and direction. They went on to study law, environmental science, media, architecture, naturopathy, make films, write books and songs, start bands, galleries, nurseries, organic food shops and restaurants. Some even went into local and state government (Hawley 2003:23; see also Ricketts 2003:133-146).

I have shown links between education and conversion in section 4.6.2. In these blockades, however, the main educational impact was on the blockaders themselves, whereas elsewhere (eg Jabiluka) there was more of a conscious decision to educate opponents and third parties.

### 8.10 ARTS OBSERVATIONS

The arts featured in all the NEFA blockades, but to a lesser extent than the Franklin, Roxby II and Jabiluka actions, with street-theatre being rare. There was an element of the arts in the powerful symbolism of protesters perched atop tripods and buried in pipes. This type of performance was rarely seen as artistic, but it nevertheless resonated

## Forest Blockades

with the public.<sup>23</sup> Banners were common and often beautiful, and one created by Armidale women for Chaelundi was half-jokingly described as “imbued with magic” (Grey, Marlene & Nano, Belinda 2005, pers.comm., 12 February). Advertisements used humour (see Figure 87) or dramatic photographs (Figure 25). Arts fulfilled an important ritual role in marking our successes, such as at the spring equinox celebration at the end of the Mistake blockade:

The great humour ... and fabulous live music that had been a feature of the Stockade kept us partying until the wee hours, under a huge moon that sprinkled through the wise old forest (Branagan 1993:3).

This ubiquitous music was generally internally directed towards the blockaders, rather than aimed at converting opponents. One example is Liina’s ‘Forest Fuckers’ (on the ‘Lock-On’ album) – “I fuck the forests for the fun of fucking forests ... the ferals and the fairies fear me, I fuck the forests for free” - which had no intention of building bridges with opponents, intending instead to maintain the blockaders’ resolve against supposedly uncaring, irresponsible opponents. Not without its appeal, the song nevertheless makes few concessions to nonviolent ideals of conflict resolution. Unlike at the Franklin, there was little group singing, most of the music coming from talented individual musicians or small groups. Organised festivals also attracted adherents as well as developing a culture of artistic resistance (see Ricketts 2003:142-143); these featured the *Von Tramp Family* puppet show, as well as acoustic music, ‘garage punk’, fire twirlers and DJs.

There was little development, however, of arts used in tandem with blockading, probably because the emphasis on direct action implicitly downgraded artistic actions, even though the two can complement each other well. Humorous slogans and graphics were often painted onto the pipes in which protesters were buried, but they tended to be unprofessional or were abusive, such as one which had Bart Simpson saying “Fuck off loggers” (see Figure 88). Yet such paintings, done with care, can change the appearance of a blockading wall from a threat and challenge to police, to a community outpouring of dissent involving many groups, and not just young, fit, and fearless men with time to spare.

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<sup>23</sup> Section 13.2.3 discusses this.

### 8.10.1 Sport as performance and nonviolent action

At these blockades an interesting form of action allied to the arts was used, when sports like frisbee throwing and football played nonviolent roles. As noted in section 5.4, much nonviolent action is a type of performance or ritualised theatre. Similarly, comedians ‘Roy Slaven’ and ‘HG Nelson’ (John Doyle and Greg Pickhaver) have shown on *Triple Jay* radio and elsewhere that sport is in modern times closely allied to theatre and entertainment. Sport at blockades broke down their seriousness and transformed them from confrontation to game. It provided entertainment for police and loggers, and showed that we had some common interests, despite the radical appearance of many blockaders. Sport helped the activists to bond and enjoy ourselves, contributing to a carnival atmosphere. It released tension, by providing exercise and a ‘normal’ behaviour in abnormal circumstances. (The machismo of those blockades, however, was apparent,- some Frisbee games involved a dangerous, flattened tin garbage-bin lid, while another involved the throwing of knives near bare feet or at a moving soccer ball.) Playing these games also fulfilled a tactical role: what seemed like innocent play was in fact occupying a road, with numbers of people milling or running about. There was a boisterous, even physically-threatening element of adults reclaiming a space, not timidly but seemingly fearlessly. It intimated that we had a right to be there, and even play, which we indeed felt we had. As the games contributed to the good-humoured chaos, they helped to occupy time, which was another tactical advantage. The longer the occupation the better, as it gave lobbyists in the city time to work, became more of a presence, empowered people, and allowed the numbers to grow. Thus sporting performances helped keep the blockades peaceful, enjoyable, had a conversionary effect, and imparted tactical benefits.

### 8.11 CONCLUSION

The forest blockades were an important period of evolution of Australian nonviolence, wherein reasonably well-resourced rural-based activists like NEFA rejected the orthodox nonviolence of the more mainstream city-based organisations such as TWS. The former developed militant techniques to physically impede logging, and these tactics, combined with legal action, saved much old-growth from logging. This evolution of tactics and technology addresses the thesis’ first question (and is further analysed in section 11.4), while the effectiveness of the new methods addresses the thesis’ third question. With regard to the thesis’ second question of nonviolence

## Forest Blockades

problems, these blockades evinced some progress towards holism, such as an increased recognition and promotion of Aboriginal issues. However, NEFA's commitment to nonviolence was tenuous, ill-articulated and poorly promoted, and some of its structures and processes were traditional and patriarchal. Additionally, while art-forms such as music aided the movement internally by entertaining and encouraging blockaders, there was little attempted conversion of opponents through the arts (this addresses the thesis' fourth question). Thus, although the new devices and support for traditional owners advanced nonviolence in one direction, in other areas nonviolence took a backwards step. This dynamic between active resistance and the arts, which relates to the thesis' fifth question, is further explored in section 14.2.



Figure 77: Blockaders buried in Daintree road 1984. Central woman also features in Figure 2.



Figure 78: Council worker threatens to cut occupied tree at Daintree.



Figure 79: 'Crucified' protester at Daintree blockade.



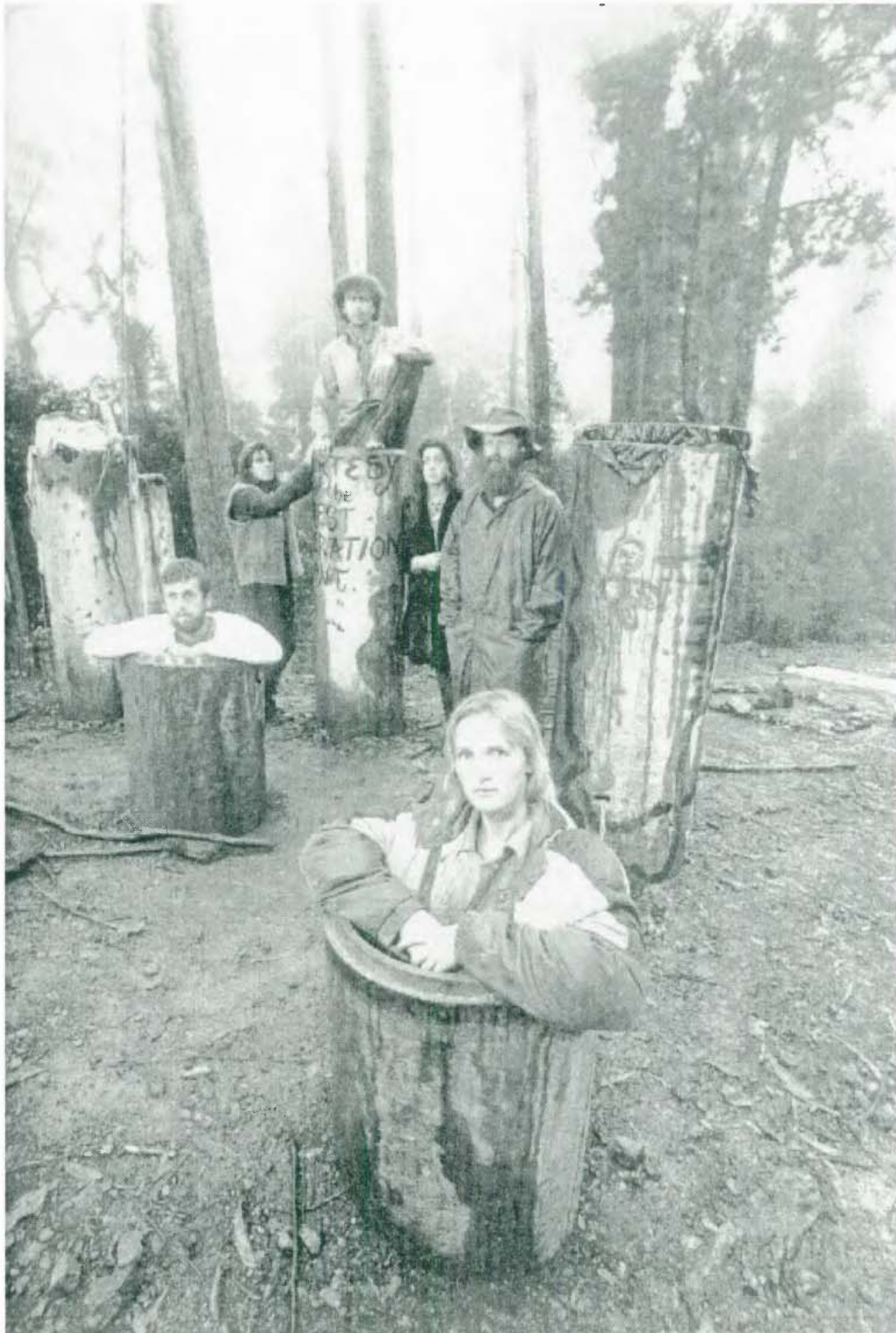


Figure 80: NEFA protesters chained to ground in decorated concrete pipes embedded in road.

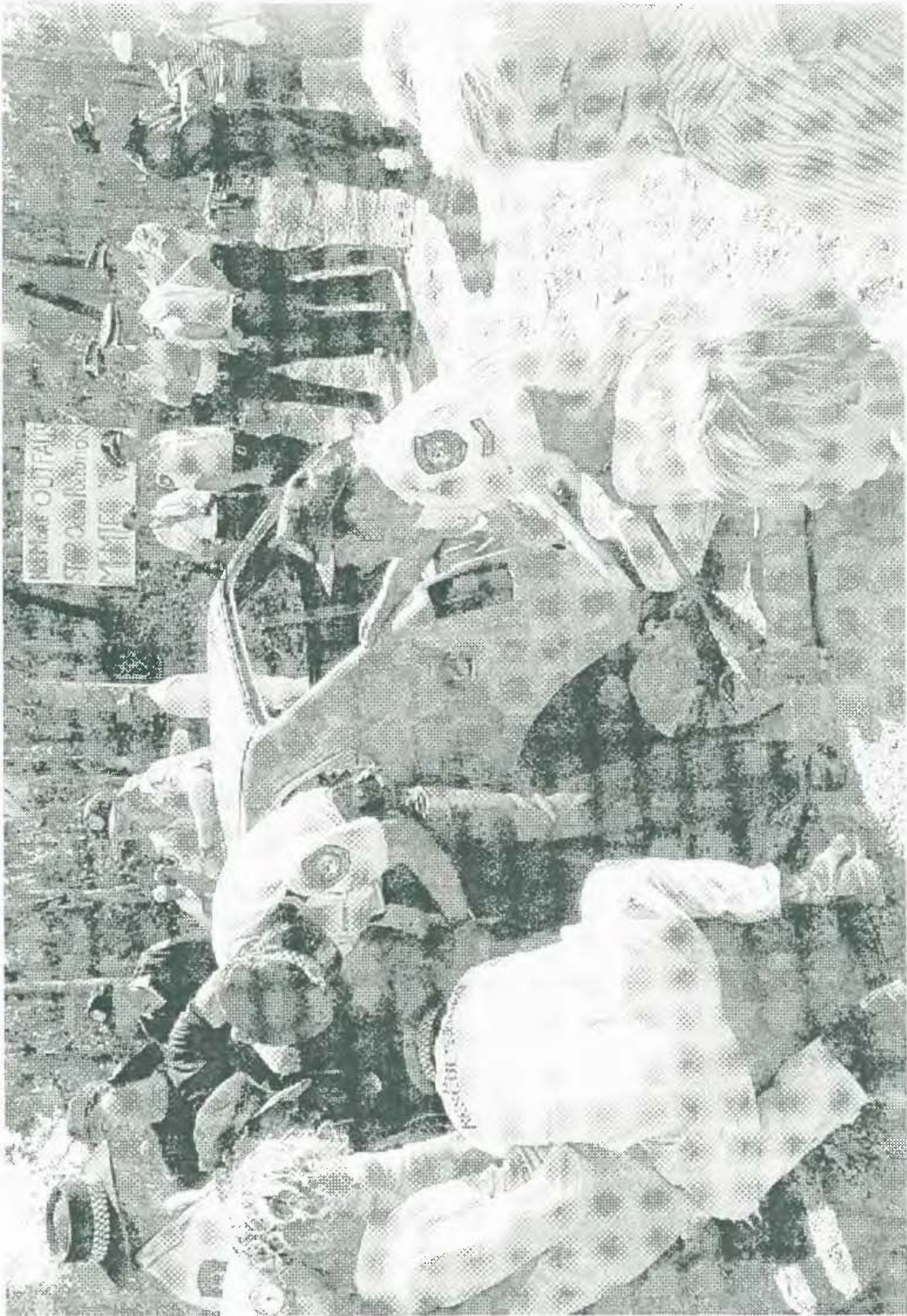


Figure 81: Arrest of protesters chained to car embedded in road.



Figure 82: Removal of activist locked onto excavator at Look-At-Me-Now Headland.



Figure 83: Police commence removal of activist half-buried in a road in 1991 Chaelundi protest.

Forest Blockades

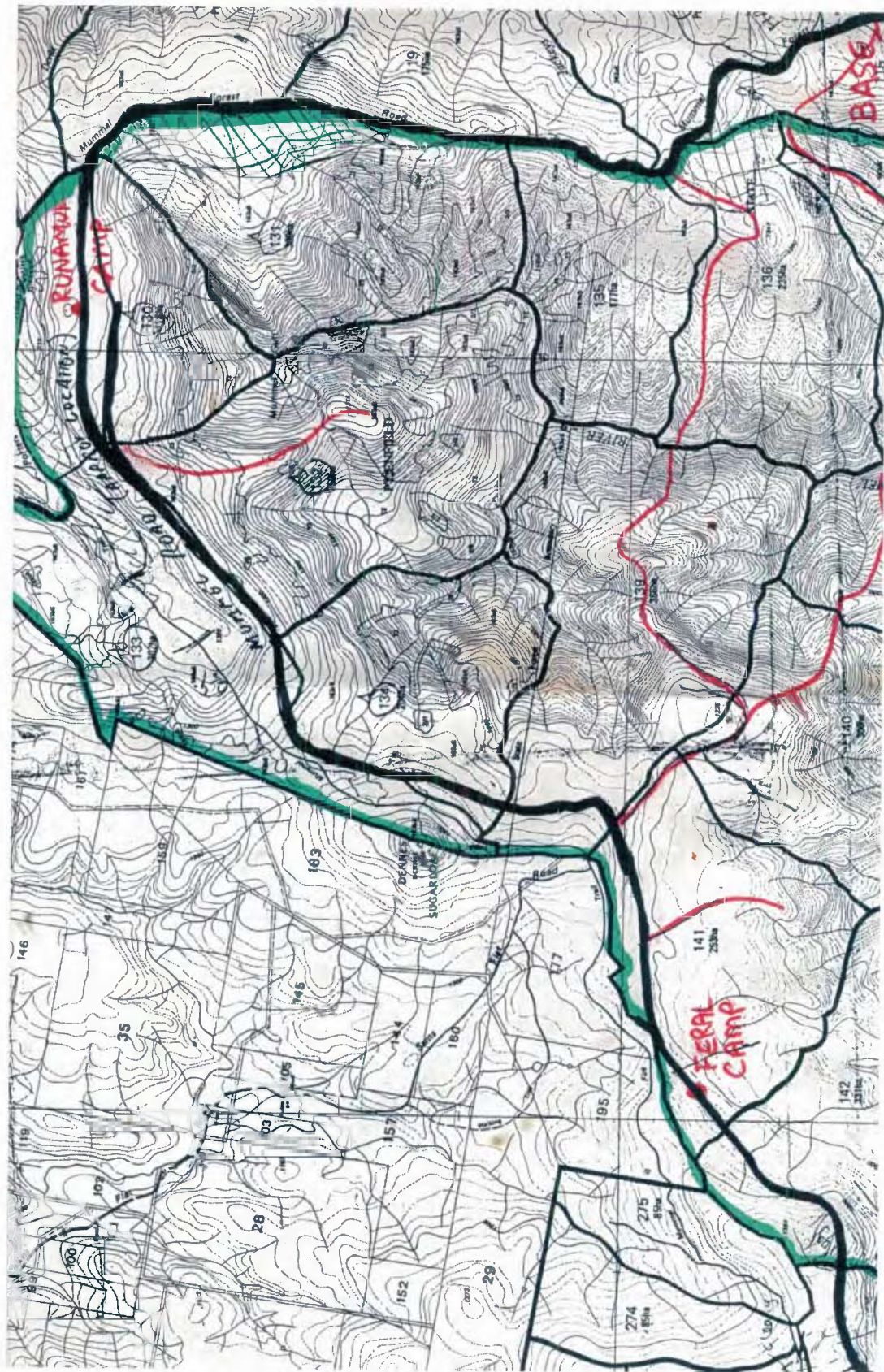


Figure 84: Map showing the three camps at the Mummel Gulf blockade.

FORESTRY ACT 1916.  
FORESTRY REGULATION 1983  
(CLAUSE 17 (2)).

THE ENTRY OF ALL PERSONS INTO OR ONTO PARTS OF ENFIELD STATE FOREST N<sup>o</sup> 337 AND RIAMUKKA STATE FOREST N<sup>o</sup> 992 (AS SHOWN BY HATCHING ON PLAN OPPOSITE IS HEREBY PROHIBITED. PERSONS ENTERING THESE AREAS WITHOUT CONSENT ARE LIABLE TO PROSECUTION. MAXIMUM PENALTY \$500.

BY ORDER  
FORESTRY COMMISSION OF N.S.W.

DESCRIPTION OF AREA.

THAT PART OF ENFIELD STATE FOREST N<sup>o</sup> 337 AND RIAMUKKA STATE FOREST N<sup>o</sup> 992 INCLUDING ALL ROADS AND TRAILS WITHIN THE BOUNDARY COMMENCING AT A POINT ON THE OXLEY HIGHWAY AT THE JUNCTION OF THE PANHANDLE FIRE TRAIL, ALONG THAT HIGHWAY IN AN EASTERLY DIRECTION TO THE BOUNDARY OF ENFIELD STATE FOREST, THEN ALONG THE ENFIELD STATE FOREST BOUNDARY IN A GENERALLY SOUTHERLY DIRECTION UNTIL THE JUNCTION WITH JACKEYS CREEK, THEN ALONG JACKEYS CREEK IN A GENERALLY SOUTH-WESTERLY DIRECTION TO MUMMEL FOREST ROAD, THEN ALONG MUMMEL FOREST ROAD IN A GENERALLY SOUTH-EASTERLY DIRECTION UNTIL THE JUNCTION WITH NUMBLE CREEK, THEN ALONG NUMBLE CREEK IN A GENERALLY SOUTH-WESTERLY DIRECTION TO THE MUMMEL RIVER. FROM THIS POINT ALONG MUMMEL RIVER IN A GENERALLY SOUTHERLY DIRECTION TO THE JUNCTION WITH LIGNITE CREEK. FROM THIS POINT ALONG LIGNITE CREEK IN A GENERALLY NORTH-WESTERLY DIRECTION TO MUMMEL ROAD. FROM THIS POINT ALONG MUMMEL ROAD IN A GENERALLY NORTH-EASTERLY DIRECTION TO THE JUNCTION WITH THE MUMMEL FIRE TRAIL. FROM THIS POINT ALONG THE MUMMEL FIRE TRAIL IN A NORTH-EASTERLY DIRECTION TO THE RIAMUKKA FOREST BOUNDARY THEN ALONG THE FOREST BOUNDARY IN A GENERALLY NORTH EASTERLY DIRECTION TO THE JUNCTION WITH THE ENFIELD STATE FOREST BOUNDARY. FROM THIS POINT IN A GENERALLY NORTH-EASTERLY DIRECTION ALONG THE ENFIELD STATE FOREST BOUNDARY TO THE OXLEY HIGHWAY. FROM THIS POINT IN AN EASTERLY DIRECTION ALONG THE OXLEY HIGHWAY TO THE JUNCTION WITH THE PANHANDLE FIRE TRAIL.

Figure 85: Sign erected in Mummel forest excluding the public under regulation dating to World War One.



Figure 86: Tripod (with banners), decorated pipe embedded in road, and campfire at the Mummel Gulf blockade.

**DON'T MISS OUT ON  
THE NORTH EAST FOREST ALLIANCE'S  
EXCLUSIVE WINTER  
HOLIDAY PACKAGE**

VISIT THE MAJESTIC OLD GROWTH FORESTS OF WALCHA,  
JUST 2 HOURS FROM SUNNY PORT MACQUARIE.

TELL YARNS AROUND WARM OPEN FIRES, ENJOY REAL BUSH  
COOKING AND STAY IN TRUE PIONEER ACCOMMODATION.  
A BUDGET PRICED HOLIDAY WITH A DIFFERENCE!

THIS IS A ONCE IN A LIFETIME CHANCE AS THESE OLD GROWTH  
FORESTS ARE BEING LOGGED RIGHT NOW!

**FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT THIS AMAZING OFFER  
CONTACT N.E.F.A. ON**

**18**

Figure 87: Humorous advertisement calling for blockaders.



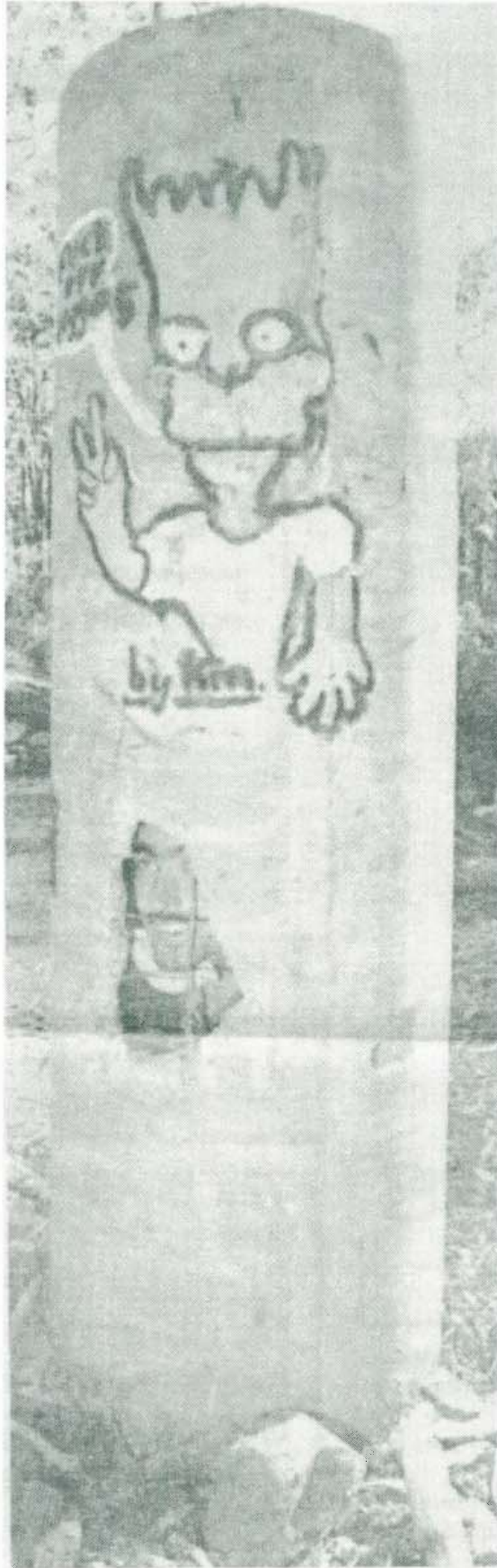


Figure 88: Embedded pipe decorated with Bart Simpson saying “Fuck off, loggers”.

## Forest Blockades



Figure 89: Police use 'cherrypicker' to end NEFA tripod blockade.

## chapter nine

### ANTI-NUCLEAR BIKE RIDES, 1986 and 1998

#### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter compares two anti-nuclear bike rides with which I was involved – one in 1986 and one in 1998 – to show how nonviolence in the eco-pax movement developed over that period, particularly with regard to group structures and processes, the balancing of protest with the creation of positive alternatives, and the use of conversion and education. All of these developments were aided by a variety of artforms.

Both rides acted as mobile rallies similar to protest marches; they also engaged in blockades. The first ride was called simply ‘The Bike Ride’. It left Adelaide, South Australia, in January 1986, intending to ride to Darwin and possibly further. The ride had a holistic objective of linking the nuclear arms race to the military-industrial complex and the uranium industry. It aimed to show how many links Australia had to the nuclear arms race, through its uranium mines and military bases and its hosting of US spy facilities (see Coxsedge et al 1982:101-130; Camilleri 1984; Burgmann 1993:195-204; Hutton & Connors 1999:137-144). It aimed to highlight these links by visiting a military research centre near Adelaide, a firing range near Port Augusta, Roxby Downs uranium mine, the nearby Woomera missile testing range, and US spy bases at Nurrungar, South Australia, and Pine Gap, near Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. Darwin was also considered important as a target for anti-nuclear protest because yellowcake was loaded onto ships there for export.

The 1998 ride was known as the ‘Cycle against the Nuclear Cycle’ (CANC). It had similar anti-nuclear objectives, being particularly linked to the campaign against the Jabiluka uranium mine, which is detailed in the next chapter. CANC did not attempt to visit all the nuclear-linked sites that The Bike Ride did, but it forged better links with Aboriginal groups along the way, and was more active educating people about nuclear issues at a community level in outback towns.

## Anti-Nuclear Bike Rides

These rides followed precedents set as far back as 1975, when anti-nuclear bike riders from FoE converged on Canberra, where they performed street theatre (Hutton & Connors 1999:138). A similar action followed the next year, which included public meetings, media interviews, meetings with the Aboriginal Embassy outside Parliament House, and a brief occupation of Mining Industry House (Hutton & Connors 1999:139).

The personal narrative accounts of The Bike Ride and CANC are important because they show significant nonviolence developments in the movement over a period of twelve years. Evidence of these developments can be seen from a comparison of The Bike Ride with CANC, with the latter showing better planning and resources, a more realistic size and better group dynamics, a longer ride, better involvement with communities *en route*, and a more dramatic conclusion. Additionally, the arts featured more prominently. CANC also placed more emphasis on the nonviolence 'constructive programme' (creating positive alternatives) discussed in section 4.6.4, by focusing on education and networking rather than primarily on protest.

The narrative accounts are also useful in filling a gap in the historical record, since there are, to my knowledge, few accounts of these epic undertakings, a video documentary of CANC being a notable exception. The Bike Ride account is aided by a somewhat vitriolic 1986 article I contributed to *Honi Soit* (Branagan 1986), while the CANC account draws heavily from an article I distributed by email to the Centralian Jabiluka Action Group (CJAG) and other activists Australia-wide (Branagan 1998b).

### 9.2 'THE BIKE RIDE'

The Bike Ride was a 1986 event organised by Franklin and Roxby veterans such as Lee Pregnell; it featured some sixty people from all over Australia. Many had been active at Roxby, such as Denise Smekal and Melissa Oldroyd, and similar subcultural groups were involved. I had high hopes for the ride, and spent a summer in a factory to buy a bike and save money. Although well-intentioned, the ride suffered from an unwieldiness because of its size and over-ambitious nature. The logistics of organising such a large group with little income or resources to travel through remote and inhospitable country were very difficult. Much of the group's time was expended in lengthy, frustrating meetings. The group was factionalised, with some feminists refusing to communicate with some men, and vice-versa. Conflicts between the factions

## Anti-Nuclear Bike Rides

occurred from the start of the ride and continued throughout. One man, a veteran of a similar previous ride, left before the ride had even begun. The group was similarly split between those with different aims; some (mainly single people or childless couples) rode up the highway and engaged more in direct actions against Roxby Downs and the US bases Nurrungar and Pine Gap (see Branagan 1986:22). The other group, with which I rode, contained a number of parents and their children; it took the more remote, rougher road from Port Augusta, through Marree.

The split caused new problems. When some of the others were arrested in an action at Nurrungar, they sent us:

... a letter to the effect that they were martyrs ... [and] that we were holidaying in the sun, and would we all abandon the Bike ride and return to Port Augusta for jail support. Reluctantly we agreed (Branagan 1986:22).

Their presumption that our group 'had it easy' showed little understanding of the difficulties of family-oriented activism.

The ride further fragmented as fast riders moved hundreds of kilometres ahead of the slower ones, traveling in groups as small as one or two. Communication became even more difficult. Conditions too were difficult:- the weather ranged from extremely hot to cold and wet, with wind a constant problem, especially for the three-wheeled bike fitted with a sail, since the wind often came from the wrong direction<sup>1</sup>.

With such internal divisions, and no nonviolence training sessions, it was perhaps inevitable that relations with people outside the group were poor. There appeared to be a self-righteousness to much of the direct actionist group, in that they either preached to or ignored the outback inhabitants, rather than attempting to find common ground and befriend the locals first and then interact with them on equal terms. When I tried to do the latter, by taking up some locals' invitation to go shooting (targets) with them, I later felt ostracised by the direct action group. As one of the slower riders, I perhaps have such bad memories of the ride because I had to endure much of the local resentment

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<sup>1</sup> I spent some time on this, usually with a befrosted male puppeteer and a two year old girl. When I hitchhiked south from Alice Springs some months later, a truck driver informed me that he had seen many strange things in his job, but that the strangest was passing a baby and two men, one in a dress, sailing down the highway. Socio-cultural as well as political mores were being challenged.

## Anti-Nuclear Bike Rides

created by the ride. Although some antagonism is inevitable during a protest, it could perhaps have been lessened if the riders had placed more emphasis on nonviolent techniques such as conversion, treating opponents and third parties as equals and reaching truths together. Other groups attempted to engage with the ride, including Ricketts and Kilvert who would later be involved in the NEFA campaigns. They too were ostracised, seemingly because of their 'feral' appearance and attitude.

There were several actions that could be regarded as reasonably successful, in that they gained media coverage and confronted the links in the nuclear chain with protest, impacting on the workers, police and locals. The ride itself was a monumental achievement. Through undergoing many hardships together, many close friendships were formed. A good interaction occurred with Aboriginal people at Nepabunna, east of the Flinders Range, perhaps being influential in several of us later returning to work in such remote communities. Furthermore, according to Bob Boughton, who was then resident in Alice Springs:

Those who stayed in Alice Springs and took part in Pine Gap actions were very effective advocates for nonviolence, and did a lot to help build the local movement, in the lead up to the 1987 peace camp (2005, pers. comm., 18 March).

The factionalism and frustrations of the ride, however, were such that, for me at least, there was little satisfaction with it as a group activity, although my own immaturity and uncertainty about a life path was no doubt a factor. I was left with feelings of anger, bitterness and a sense of betrayal, that if one stepped outside the boundaries of urban, middle-class conventions, one would be ostracised.

### 9.2.1 Art exhibition

The most positive aspects of the ride I experienced involved the arts. After doing jail support for the arrestees in Port Augusta, I travelled up to Nurrungar by car, and early in the morning "trespassed onto US property, wandering a long way down the ancient seabed with a borrowed didgeridoo [yidaki]" (Branagan 1986:22). It was a deeply moving (and, on reflection, perhaps culturally-inappropriate) experience to play yidaki in a small cave in the vast, still, sacred landscape, to use one of the oldest instruments near a facility dedicated to war, and filled with expensive, modern and sophisticated technology.

Later, an artist known as 'John of Hearts' (John Edmondes) hired Marree's local hall and held an art exhibition. He displayed a number of hasty but interesting sketches he had made of the Bike Ride and its protest actions (see Figure 91). I stayed to support him, and contributed a few amateurish sketches of my own. None of our work was aesthetically great, and mine was overly didactic, but John's work particularly is valuable as one of the few records of the ride. Although there was not much of a response to the exhibition, it showed me how easy it was to hold one, a learning which would prove invaluable when I increasingly worked as an artist. The exhibition also gave us the opportunity to know this hostile, strange town a little, and to meet friendly, generous tourists.

I arrived in Alice Springs suffering from pleurisy and exhaustion, after a puncture near Cooper Pedy left me three days without food or water, only to be rescued by a stockman and his wife. In Alice Springs, John and I jointly held another exhibition in a hired hall. I contributed more works this time, including some paintings, and the response in this larger, more cosmopolitan town was encouraging. I began to see the educative potential of art, and how it could complement activist or protest activity. Having an avenue for expression was liberating and empowering, and I felt able to build some bridges with bike riders with whom I had previously had little in common. Thus, despite having little satisfaction with The Bike Ride as an action, I had begun a new direction in life, involving the use of the visual arts as a type of activism that did not require large groups and all their attendant problems, but that could be practiced on an individual or small group level.

### 9.3 'CYCLE AGAINST THE NUCLEAR CYCLE'

Twelve years later in 1998 I was living in Alice Springs<sup>2</sup> and working a third of the time as an artist, another third at the local Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) and the rest of the time in permaculture, with occasional tutoring and driving jobs that took me

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<sup>2</sup> After the NEFA blockades, I had engaged in an occupation of a rainforest timber ship, toured a street-theatre piece with a small group, and traveled with my partner to northern Eire (Ireland). There we worked on organic farms, and I played yidaki in the Belfast trouble-spots of Garvaghy and Falls Roads. I also wrote to *Sinn Fein's* Gerry Adams, telling him of Australian nonviolence successes and urging him to adopt nonviolent means in the Irish republican struggle.

into remote desert communities. I had been working as an artist for several years now, and had held solo exhibitions. I was making some progress towards supporting myself through art alone, although my paintings often had protest themes and were thus less saleable.

The Jabiluka campaign (see Chapter Ten) was my main focus at ALEC. An important part of this campaign was the 'Cycle Against the Nuclear Cycle' (CANC), which I travelled with for a week as part of the support crew<sup>3</sup>. The thirteen CANC riders departed Melbourne on 20 June 1998, with a hundred-strong rally at North Ltd (financial backers of Jabiluka) headquarters to farewell them on their 4040 kilometre ride (Cameron 1998:4). Compared with the 1986 'The Bike Ride', CANC was a much more successful action, despite (in fact, largely because of) smaller numbers. Internally, CANC involved much better group dynamics, because numbers were kept to that of a large affinity group - about twenty, including support crews. Logistics were easier to organise for a group of this size, and meetings were much shorter and more amicable. The core group was also cohesive, having known each other for some time at university in Melbourne. The group appeared to have further developed organically as an affinity group, and exhibited few of the immense factional differences observable on The Bike Ride. The use of consensus too appeared to be better understood and implemented. With less time spent holding meetings, organising logistics and dealing with factional disagreements, the group was able to cover a much greater distance than The Bike Ride, which (with one or two exceptions) fizzled out in Alice Springs. CANC's more efficient dynamic also meant that it was much more active in actual campaigning:

The coming of the Cycle Against the Nuclear Cycle (CANC) created a whirlwind of activity in the Alice ... Their stay was no holiday:- their time was spent in the ALEC office organising visits to solar stations and doing media, with 8CCC [radio] being very onside. They also shot video footage, visited schools and ran a stall in the mall, after wading through council bureaucracy. They talked to locals and visitors, getting heaps of signatures on petitions (Branagan 1998b:1).

The video footage referred to was added to an ongoing CANC 'road movie', which was shown in Alice Springs and also aired in weekly segments on an ABC-TV youth programme: *Recovery*. This shows how the group used the art-form of a self-made

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<sup>3</sup> I was unable to ride because I had recently fractured my fibia tackling a large American soldier from Pine Gap, during a twilight soccer game.



documentary to reach a wide audience, thanks to good organisation. Importantly, CANC had control over the project and not the mass media. The availability of more portable and cheaper video equipment also assisted this project, while other new technology like a satellite phone was not so successful. Even the bikes were better, and solar equipment was much more ubiquitous. Section 13.2.9 further discusses media, while sections 12.2.4 and 13.2.10 discuss technological developments.

CANC also showed a superior understanding of the nonviolence tenet of conversion. Rather than taking the largely oppositional stance of The Bike Ride, the group intentionally attempted to convert people by educating communities at a grassroots level (see Cameron 1998). As CANC rider Ceridwen Gordon remarked at the outset:

We're not going to barge in wearing anti-uranium suits, honking our horns and waving banners. We're just going to try to talk to people on the streets, and if all we can do is give one leaflet out, at least that's something (in Masterton 1998:11).

Similarly, CANC's Heidi Chappelow said that raising awareness was their main goal (*Australian Associated Press* 3 July 1998, online). Through careful planning CANC achieved favourable publicity through newspaper articles (eg *Australian Associated Press* 3 July 1998, online; Masterton 1998; *Sun Herald* 6 September 1998:39), and on television through a weekly nationwide showing of the documentary.

In an example of the value of direct action, the presence in the outback town of Alice Springs of a group of energetic, committed activists had a catalysing effect on the local activists, who worked and played music alongside the CANC riders. Together they organised the town's first 'critical mass' bike ride<sup>4</sup>:

... as ALEC members farewelled CANC on their way north. There was sax, singing and fruit; then we set off en masse up the highway; it felt great to have the security of riding in a big mob. We rode in solidarity with their anti-nuclear theme and as a pro-bike anti-car statement. The collaboration of petrochemical and uranium mining companies was clearly demonstrated before Kyoto, when a consortium leant on the government to demand increases in our Greenhouse emissions, to our international shame. As well as WMC who with BP started the Roxby uranium mine, Esso and Exxon were involved, both of whom profited from Nazi slave labour camps. So too did Chase Manhattan bank, who is a major investor in Jabiluka along with the ANZ, Westpac and National banks (Branagan 1998b:1).

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<sup>4</sup> These rides argue that they are not impeding the traffic: they *are* the traffic!

## Anti-Nuclear Bike Rides

At the critical mass ride I met a woman who was driving to Jabiluka, and wanted passengers. This is one benefit of rallies,- bringing people together. I decided to join her, along with two others. We set out a few days later, caught up with the ride and spent a week travelling with them and acting as a support vehicle. CANC continued to be active in small towns and along the road, often using the arts (and - as in the NEFA blockades - sport) to create a spectacle which impacted on CANC's immediate and television audiences. Intermingled with these actions was a sense of play, of people using the arts as self-fulfillment and enjoyment as well as to proselytise:

The riders didn't rest in Katherine either. Dallas decided to enter the local triathlon and, proudly wearing his CANC t-shirt, finished a credible third. It was great to camp with them as part of the support crew, share food, music, art and stories under the stars. The Devil's Marbles or (Serpent's Eggs) was a memorable stop. Another night was a birthday party with firestick dancing, and a bonfire by the road to stop one of the buses which had vital supplies of organic food from Melbourne. Heidi was a sight juggling on her monocycle; she travelled 10 ks on it one day, 50 another. Michael was travelling with a kite, which I delightedly got into the air for the first time in my life (Branagan 1998b:1).

Our support crew then travelled ahead to the blockade. CANC would later arrive there in a triumphant and dramatic fashion, to the accompaniment of music, visual art and symbolism, and ritual (Figure 90). This 'performance' is better described in the context of the blockade, in the next chapter.



Figure 90: Cycle Against the Nuclear Cycle arrives at Jabiluka.

#### 9.4 CONCLUSION

In addition to being more cohesive and better organised, my impression at the time was that CANC 'was better received [than The Bike Ride], public opinion having shifted considerably in the interim' (Branagan 1998b:1). Quite probably, despite its apparent lack of success, The Bike Ride had played an 'ground-breaking' role in challenging dominant paradigms in central Australia, paradigms which accepted covert military facilities and secretive uranium mines, and was antagonistic to protests. This initial ride, and similar actions such as the Great Walks<sup>5</sup>, and various Peace Buses which had toured Australia, would thus have contributed to the success of the CANC ride, and contributed to movement learning. This is an area where nonviolence training can demonstrate the importance of long-term planning, and the recognition that even when there are no headlines subtle progress is often being made. Such recognition can prevent the movement abandoning nonviolence through an apparent lack of success, as I discuss in section 12.4.1.

Although CANC was smaller than The Bike Ride, it was more successful both internally and externally. Its size was such that it was more efficient and professional, better organised and more enjoyable for the participants. With a more cohesive group dynamic, people were better supported within an affinity group structure, and consensus decision-making occurred more smoothly. Communication was also superior - partly because of new technology - and the ride was appropriately resourced and well planned in advance. Like The Bike Ride, CANC was visionary; where, however, The Bike Ride was over-ambitious as a mass event, CANC organised itself on affinity group level. This worked extremely well at a grassroots level; since CANC had a viable yet enjoyable dynamic it affected those it encountered in a largely positive manner. Thus starting at a grass roots level and working outwards could be seen to be effective. Nor were people confronted by masses of protesters, but a small group. Yet this group also impacted on a national level,- by organising equipment and persuading an ABC-TV programme to give them airtime, they were able to reach a wide audience with their own material. The use of their own material is important, for it avoided the usual biases that journalists exhibited, as shown in the Roxby chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> Section 3.5.3 discussed these.

## Anti-Nuclear Bike Rides

This longitudinal comparison of two epic idealistic bike rides suggests considerable development in the movement. The success of CANC, especially compared with The Bike Ride, suggests that the movement had learned some lessons, and developed for the better. It had learned, for example, that bigger is not always better, - that a small, well-organised and cohesive affinity group could be more effective than a mass event with poor group dynamics.

As well as demonstrating the nonviolence advantages of a grassroots-oriented structure and process, CANC also displayed better adherence to the nonviolence tenets of conversion and parallel institutions. Although also engaging in protest, the group focussed more than had their predecessors on befriending and educating people in the communities they passed through, and in grassroots networking with indigenous people. Artforms like music, firestick twirling, monocycle riding and juggling were frequently used to break down barriers and to entertain, while CANC's use of film-making spread their message to a national audience.

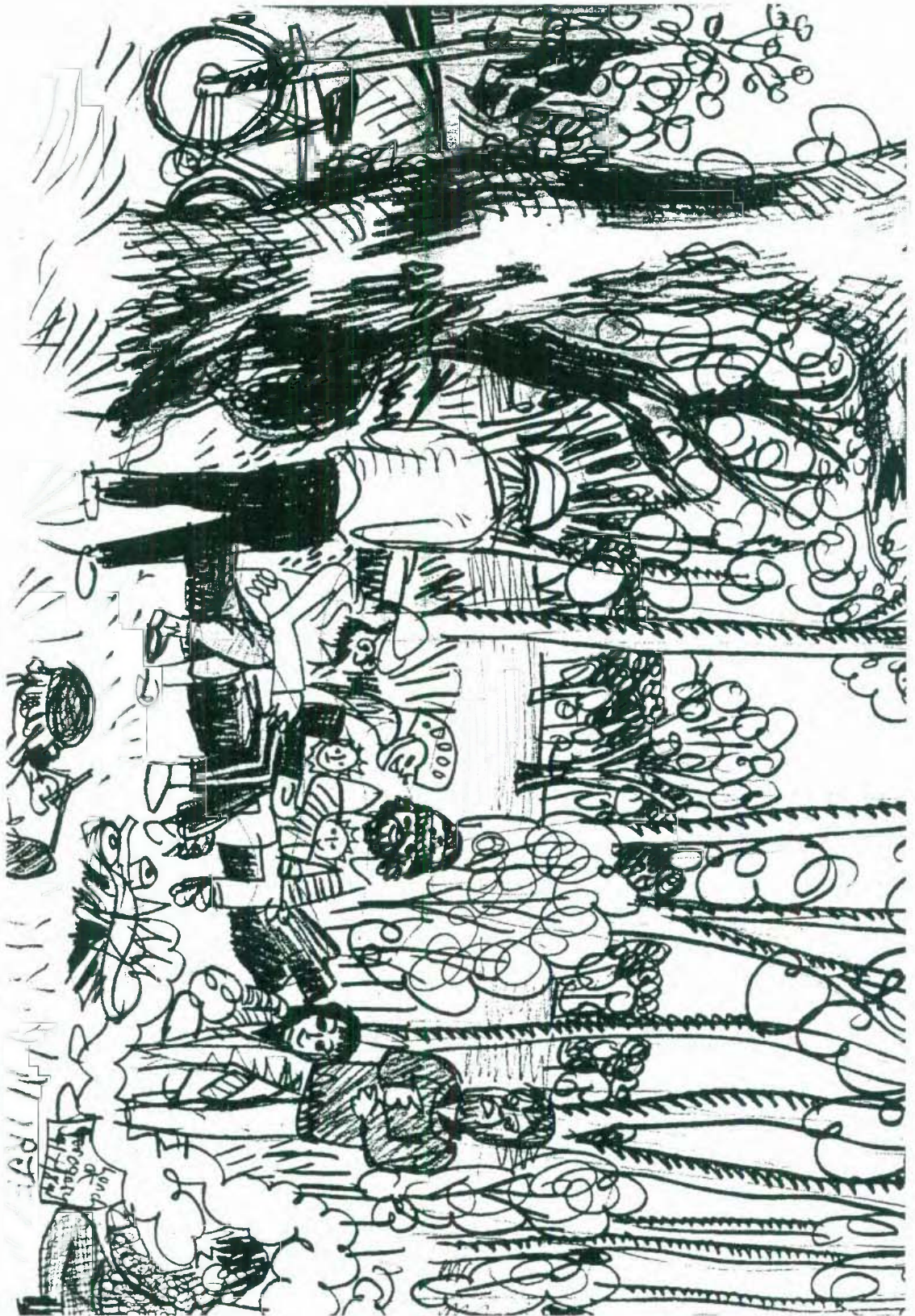


Figure 91: John Edmondson sketch of lunch on The Bike Ride