

# CAT TRACKS

by Chim Blea

## What Are We Fighting For?

What are we fighting for? Are we working towards a Golden Age of Deep Ecology, Reinhabitation, Appropriate Technology and Peace? Most of the essays and articles I read in *Earth First!* and other publications dealing with environmental and similar "progressive" themes seem to follow that line. They urge us to reach out to our fellow human beings to show them the error of high-consumptive, cut-off-from-nature lifestyles. We are told we are on the horizon of a New Age, that the old paradigms will fall away and a new worldview is coming. Education, moral leadership and deeper questioning of ourselves as human beings and inhabitants of this earth will lead to a revolution in our relationship with Gaia and to a new harmony on Earth.

I like to dream too. But in reality Ecotopia is not just around the bend and a little further up the canyon. I see two major problems with hopes for this great and positive change in worldview and lifestyle among human beings.

The first is time. You can read the statistics elsewhere. But we are rapidly devastating natural diversity and the basic life functions of Earth. There is not enough time to peacefully transform industrial, overpopulated human civilization into something that can and will live in peace with the rest of nature. We are in the final crisis of the unhappy human adventure.

Then there is the human experiment itself. How long have noble souls worked for peace, freedom and plenty; for an end to war, oppression and poverty? Centuries. Millennia. And have we gotten any closer? At no time in human history have so many suffered from oppression, hunger, poverty, and the threat and actuality of war. We fool ourselves, I fear, with human arrogance when we visualize human beings filling the role of the cerebrum in the body of the living Earth. The eminent American historian, William H. McNeill, had a far more accurate view of the human role when he wrote in *Plagues and Peoples*:

... it is not absurd to class the ecological role of humankind in its relationship to other life forms as a disease. Ever since language allowed human cultural evolution to impinge upon age-old processes of biological evolution, humankind has been in a position to upset older balances of nature in quite the same fashion that disease upsets the natural balance within a host's body ... Looked at from the point of view of other organisms, humankind therefore resembles an acute epidemic disease, whose occasional lapses into less virulent forms of behavior have never yet sufficed to permit any really stable, chronic relationship to establish itself.

We are a disease, yes. But a disease that is just about to burn itself out. If graphed, human population growth, technological development, impact on the planet and production of toxins form the same

exponential curve — the classic biological population curve which ends in only one way: a sudden and precipitous drop. Hopefully our collapse will spare most of the rest of the biosphere and the living planet will recover from its dreadful bout with humanpox with a minimal number of pockmarks to show for it.

There are many ways this collapse could come about. The most obvious at this time is nuclear war. I think this is unlikely given the materialistic rulers of both the United States and the Soviet Union. More probable are economic collapse, famine, disease and the Earth striking back (earthquakes, volcanoes, weather changes, etc.) or a combination of these.

This grimmer, darker, but more accurate view of the human experiment leads to a different answer to the question of this column: What are we fighting for?

*We should be fighting to preserve and protect as much natural diversity in as many places as possible from the ravages of humanpox until our disease has run its course.*

For those of us within the humanpox who have somehow mutated into antibodies for the Earth, we should resist the ravages of humanpox wherever we can so that when this dread fever of the Earth's finally breaks, there will be grizzlies and whales and redwoods and condors and pupfish and rainforests and prairies and coral reefs to come back with the health of the Earth.

This view has major implications for strategy and tactics within the environmental movement and within Earth First!. If the utopian vision of Deep Ecology, Reinhabitation, Appropriate Technology and Peace is true, then, yes, indeed, we should live exemplary lives to encourage others to follow our enlightened path. We should educate our ethically-adolescent siblings, we should seek the methods and tools of appropriate technology and reinhabitation.

But if the Golden Age is a fantasy, if human beings are really a pox, then we who are antibodies should merely resist the ravages of the disease using whatever tools and tactics that are effective in saving natural diversity. In this sense, *the end does justify the means* so long as the means are consistent with the end which is natural diversity and a world cured of the humanpox.

In practical terms, this means using all the "tools" Dave Foreman discussed in his introduction to the section on non-violence in the September 23, 1983, *Earth First!*. But in a strategic sense, it means that it is not so important to make a moral statement, to convince the general public with our courageous and ethical stance, as it is to just stop the goddamned destruction. Stop the road. Stop the clearcut. Get the cows out. Save the grizzly. Save that one redwood. Stop toxic waste dumping in that one stream. *Resist*. Resistance restrained only by what is strategically and tactically most effective in the short term.

This view naturally leans far more towards monkeywrenching in the dark than to noble Gandhian direct action or political lobbying. I am not trying to win a place for myself in heaven. I'm already there. I'm



just trying to stop the humanpox which is destroying it. I'm going to die. That's immaterial. But life, hopefully, will live on.

(In a future Cat Tracks I will discuss how this philosophy picks the issues on which we should work and those we should forget.)

*Chim Blea is a long-time wilderness activist. Her nom de plume (nom de guerre?) is the name given to the mountain lion by the natives of Baja California. Her controversial column, Cat Tracks, appears irregularly in Earth First!.*

## Letters (cont)

Dear *EF!*

I think it would be great to have a column for young readers in *EF!* because this struggle will surely include even more generations than those before us and ours. I find the 5-year-old in our household frequently asking me about Earth First!. She loved the photos in the past issue with kids in them. If anyone is interested in a column for young readers, they can contact me and I'll try to put something together. Have you considered offering a collection of "Mutterings from Mama Rue"? I found her writings on earth religions most informative and succinct and would like to read them all together.

— Roger Brooks  
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Newport, OR 97365

Dear *Earth First!*

At last! After a lot of searching and inquiry, there was your address in my October Canoe magazine. Since first hearing of the activities and perspective of Earth First! I have been interested in becoming involved.

With influences like Watt loose in our world (he may be "gone," but the man who hired him isn't — yet) I strongly believe that a force like Earth First! must exist — and grow. The old cliché of fighting fire with fire comes to mind. Outfits like the Sierra Club, and Audubon have their place for sure, but it's going to take more than what they can do to get the job done.

This little backward corner of S.E. Texas I find myself in these days is not the most environmentally enlightened place in the world, but it's worth working on.

— Beaumont

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