

Carry On Camping

A Round-up of British Action Camps



Since the last issue of Do or Die (printed April 1998) there have been 34 direct action protest sites in the UK. This section lists the camps that have been set up or have continued to be occupied in the last year—some are still there now, some have won, some have been evicted. The most noticeable thing over the last year or so is that sites tend to be smaller, and they are diversifying away from roads—testament to the decimation of the roads budget. The remains of the once-huge roads programme were slashed even further in the '98 Roads Review. Only 37 schemes—including M25 widening and Bingley—are planned for the next 7 years, with over 100 scrapped, deferred, or given to local authorities to worry about. Birmingham is really the only large anti-roads camp there has been in the last year (and that's privately financed!)—Lyminge, Crystal Palace and Manchester were all fighting other things apart from roads. We tend to be fighting housing developments or leisure complexes as much as roads now. Another step forward is the anti-genetix crop squat... With camps all over the country there is bound to be one near you, so go to stay or to visit, and help barricade, dig, fortify and generally cause trouble!

🏠 marks those camps which are current at time of going to press (August '99).

Scotland



Faslane Peace Camp 🏠

Despite 80% opposition to nukes in Scotland, Faslane, on the river Clyde, is home to all Britain's nuclear submarines—now including the brand spanking new *Vengeance*, a snip at £1000m. Faslane Peace Camp has been there for

over 16 years opposing the subs, and is still going strong. As reported in the last DoD, the council were planning to evict the campers, and in July '98 eventually won their legal appeal to be able to do so. However after seeing the formidable camp defences on telly, the cash-strapped local council agreed to talks with residents to try to find an amicable (and cheaper!) solution.

Meanwhile, campers continue to cause merry hell with the laughable base 'security': breaking in to play football, blockading the gates, delaying war-head convoys and disrupting the sailing of the Trident subs. Large sections of the base fence have



also vanished... So come and visit Faslane for fun and defiance by the Gareloch.

Contact: Faslane Peace Camp, Shandon, Helensburgh, Dunbartonshire, Scotland, G84 8HT. 01436 820 901



The North

Victory in Derby!

Protesters who have been protecting the Bass Recreation Park in Derby city centre since February '98 came down from

the treetops in September, following a council decision to change the road plans, saving Derby's last bit of green space. The council was planning to stick a road across the site and the park was under threat of sale to private developers with plans to turn it into a shopping centre. The park contains a Grade 1 wildlife site and gives many diverse species a place in common: water and land plants, kingfishers, local walkers, footballers...

Protestors had occupied the site since February '98. There were regularly about 20 people on site and there was enthusiastic local support. A petition of over 11,000 signatures was collected. Fun days and a 'Planning for Real' exercise (to come up with a 'People's Plan' for the site) were held over the summer.

Contact: Nottingham EF! (see contacts section p. 341)

Menwith Hill Women's Peace Camp

Menwith Hill in the Yorkshire Dales is the largest US spy base in the world. Using its 27 (soon to be 29) satellite dishes, covered by radomes (the famous 'golf balls') the US National Security Agency (NSA) can eavesdrop on all national and international calls, email, faxes and telexes in the Northern Hemisphere. These communications are then sifted for 'key-words'—sorting millions of words per minute, tracking governments, armies, businesses, groups and individuals. The US needs Menwith Hill to plan, prepare and carry out wars—it played a crucial role in the Gulf War in 1991.

Activists have been protesting against the base since the early '80s and there has been a permanent women's peace camp at the base since 1994. By continuously breaking into the base, the women from the

camp have found out more top secret information about Menwith Hill than is known about any other NSA spy base. The camp was threatened with eviction in November 1998 and the women complied with a court order to move all but one caravan—the camp has now been scaled down, allowing the campers to refocus on other activities...

Sellafield Women's Peace Camp (bi-monthly) 🏠 Sellafield Women's Peace camp has been a site of protest against the nuclear/military industry since 1990. The camp takes place the last full weekend of every second month and is situated outside the visitors' centre at Sellafield nuclear plant, near Seascale on the west coast of Cumbria.

Contact: Box Z, c/o CRC, 16 Sholebrooke Avenue, Leeds, LS7 3HB. Phone: 0113 262 1534. Email (marked clearly for the peace camp): cornerstone@gn.apc.org

Bingley

After living for two years in a beautiful riverside location, the campers of the Bingley 'Ryeloaf' camp abandoned their home in November '98. The site was resisting the construction of the £64m Bingley Relief Road Scheme, which is intended to service a proposed greenbelt housing development of 10,000 properties. The camp was originally set up when the scheme was first aired in 1996 and featured walkways, treehouses, lock-ons, a communal bender, a nearby squat and a ground hut on stilts. The site suffered from a lack of people and those few that were still living there just got burnt out. The decision to build the A650 has been constantly postponed since the Tory road-building programme collapsed. But after lengthy legal processes Bingley council finally got the go-ahead for the road in 1998. In November '98 the council did a recce, and finding the site deserted, they levelled the place, taking out 16 mature trees at the same time.

Manchester: Arthur's Wood and Cedar Wood

On the edge of a valley in a beautiful beech woodland lies the camp of Arthur's Wood. On Sunday 21st June 1998 protesters set up camp in the wood, near the site of the Manchester's second runway (see DoD no. 6, p. 82) when they heard that AMEC were planning to fell trees during the bird nesting season. Contractors arrived the next day to find people in trees blocking their path!

The trees in Arthur's Wood are not even on the route of the second runway. Manchester Airport says it needs to cut them down to improve flightpath visibility and radar reception when the runway is opened, but the Inspector of the public inquiry



advised that everything possible should be done to prevent these trees being felled. The wood belongs to the National Trust who are removing environmentalists (accused of “trampling on the ground”) from their land in order to allow Manchester Airport to trash it. In the spring of ‘99 another camp was set up in Cedar Woods to prevent tree felling there. The camps’ appeal against eviction was thrown out of the court in June—leaving both sites on eviction alert.

Contact: Cedar and Arthur’s Woods, Meercat Protest Village, Nr. Oversley Lodge Farm, Atrincham Road, Styal, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 4LJ. Phone: 01565 873 551 / 07931 931 850 / 07957 993 456 / 07979 361 416

Park Nook Camp, Liverpool 🏠

A 3-acre inner-city green space within the boundaries of Liverpool’s Princes Park is under threat from developers wanting to build 2 blocks of luxury flats, a new road and a car park. The site is an oasis of wildness in the city and is home to owls, foxes, rabbits and pipistrelle bats. Four treehouses were constructed in May, and more walkways and lock-ons are being prepared.

Phone: 0403 176 279

Sheffield

The Tysak site in Sheffield was occupied for a week-end in August ‘98 to oppose a planned supermarket development on the largest empty space in South Sheffield. The site aimed to show alternative uses for the space, with cricket and football pitches and a cinema put up, and though it rained and rained all week-end, local kids came to play...

Manchester Birley Tree

In Hulme, an inner city area of Manchester being thoroughly ‘regenerated’ (i.e. knocked down so the corporate scum can move in) locals got active in June ‘98 when the oldest tree in the area was threatened by a proposed hotel—it was soon boasting a cosy treehouse, bender, displays and a community garden. The campaign went to court to be evicted, and negotiated an agreement not to fell the Black Poplar until a detailed planning application was put in for the hotel the council so desperately want for this inner-city area.

Contact: Manchester EF! (see contacts section, p. 341)

Green Guard

The Green Guard camp set up to oppose the construction of 500 houses and a 4 mile dual carriageway at Nantwich near Crewe, was evicted in September ‘98. Under threat were (rare) Black Poplars, an

orchard and hedgerows up to 30 foot thick. The camp boasted treehouses, a tunnel, a tower, and 97% local support. However, dwindling numbers meant the last few occupants chose to move off the site the day before the eviction was due to take place. The campaign continues—when the bulldozers came for the ancient hedgerows a few weeks later, they were occupied by local people, who proceeded to stop work for 4 days.

The Midlands

Birmingham Northern Relief Road 🏠

The campaign to stop Britain’s first privately funded toll motorway continues, despite the



camp being evicted in the middle of June. The road will be a 27 mile long, 6 lane motorway bypassing Birmingham to the north and will destroy woodlands, water meadows and important ecological sites and pave the way for greenbelt expansion along its route. A new camp is promised soon.

The major evictions on the route of the £700m BNRR took place over the traditional winter eviction season of ‘98-’99. Over December and January the site saw three evictions of camps and squats inside six weeks. The Moneymore squats were the first to go—several hundred police, bailiffs and security guards turned up on 8th December. At the same time the cops destroyed a bunker on the Greenwood site. The tunnellers included one security guard defector who stayed underground for three days. The eviction of the final camp came a few days later on 13th of January—with most people bailed off route and six people remanded after a bunker eviction a few days earlier, there were only three people around to keep the Greenwood camp running, so they were fairly quickly evicted.

After the evictions in December and January, a new camp was set up at The Spinney. This was evicted in the middle of June. However, resistance to the BNRR is still going strong... And with 26 1/2 miles of route left to protect there’s plenty to do!

Contact: Birmingham Northern Relief Road Campaign, The Spinney, Turf Pits Lane, Nr. Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B75 5T? Phone: 07931 161 761



Ketts Rebellion 🏰

A former hospital site in Norfolk was squatted on the 10th July to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the Ketts Rebellion of 1549. That summer the dispossessed peasantry of Norfolk formed themselves into a 20,000 strong army which reclaimed the commons for two months and locked up the hated landowners.

The campers are trying to use the little-known 1965 Commons Registration Act to get the site classified as a village green thus saving it as a commons for the future.

Contact: The Land is Ours, Box E, 111 Magdalen Rd. Oxford OX4 1RQ. Tel: 01865 722016/ site mobile 0961 460171

Anti-Genetix Squat in Norfolk

At 5am on Saturday 23rd of May 1998, Britain's first 'crop squat' began, as 30 anti-GE activists moved on to a release site for experimental sugar beet at Kirby Bedon near Norwich. Within a few hours gardens were established, transforming this epitome of industrial corporate agriculture into an organic garden. The campers got an eviction order after two weeks (what do you expect if you squat the land of the Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk?), and packed up and left.

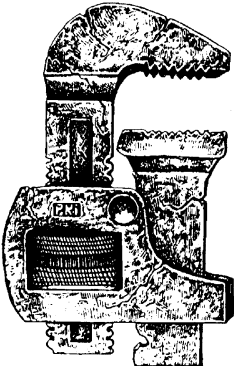
Contact: Norfolk EF! (see contacts p. 333).

Alvis Peace Camp

Camp set up against the Alvis factory in Coventry which makes Scorpion tanks and tank kits for Indonesia, where they will be used for internal security and political repression.

Butts Water Meadow

The camp set up in December '97 in Bury St. Edmonds to stop an access road for the local Greene King brewery was disbanded in March '98, tating down the day before their eviction date to the surprise of the cops and baliffs who turned up the next day. Plans to take action were called off when a judge ruled that Greene King were wrong not to have conducted an environmental assessment for their planned road across the virtually untouched Butts Water Meadow. The campaign continues...



Wales and the South West

Brewery Fields/ Eithinog

Brewery Fields: a beautiful piece of common land in Bangor, unploughed for 40 years, with a marvellous view of the sea prized by local residents and potential developers alike. The camp to stop housing development on the fields was violently evicted on March 31st '98. All eight protesters needed hospital treatment. The officer in charge of the eviction claimed to be using 'approved techniques'.



A new camp was set up on an access road, on part of the site not covered by the original eviction order. Treehouses and walkways were set up. Threatened with eviction again in July '98, campers tried to thrash out a deal to avoid this last eviction. While negotiations were going on, the enemy used walkways to get up trees and cut rope bridges while unharnessed protesters were still on them; others were violently wrestled out of the trees. They tried to hack away at a tunnel with a shovel, only damaging the door, so blocking the occupant's only exit. Despite all this, campers held out for 22 hours.

Contact: Gwynedd and Mon EF! (see contacts p. 341)

Teddy Bear Woods

The camp set up mainly by locals in 1996 to stop the Weymouth Brown Route Road has avoided its expected eviction. Protesters discovered in July '98 that the Weymouth Relief Road will not go ahead—the government won't give the council the money for the road.

Ashton Court 🏰

The camp at Ashton Court was set up in March '98 to stop the extension of the limestone quarry owned by Australian multinational Pioneer Aggregates into 20 acres of wildflower meadows and public parkland. The meadow contains over 90 rare species which are being "translocated" (Star Trek here we come!) by Alaska Environmental to allow Pioneer to dynamite the land where they used to be. The camp has disrupted the relocation on a number of occasions and near the end of '98, 10 lorries at Alaska's Avonmouth plant were sabbed.

After some months of noisy activity the camp was taken down in March '99. But the campers did not go



out without a bang—protestors visited Ian Wattle, Pioneer’s planning manager and translocated his lawn on to the pavement outside his house. The daffodils from his garden were planted in his car. Later on in the week two people abseiled 100 feet down on to a ledge in the quarry five minutes before the face was due to be blasted. They unfurled a banner reading “Oi!—No!” and were only removed 32 hours later when climbers were flown in specially from Dublin.

Contact: c/o Bristol FoE, 10-12 Picton St. Montpellier, Bristol, BS6 5QA. Phone: 07970 423 834

Avon Ring Road 🏠

Although the camp to stop ‘Bristols answer to the M25’ was recently evicted, the campaign continues. Work began on this £30m dual carriageway road through the ancient Siston Common in June ‘99. The road will destroy a disused railway line, large areas of fields and woodland and a beautiful section of cycle path along the route of the old railway. If it is built infill development and suburban sprawl will destroy even more.

When site clearance work started in November ‘98, direct action took off. Camps were swiftly set up and on 12th January ‘99 the campaign invaded the only building left on route, the day before it was due to be demolished, and christened it the ‘Hotel Chechnya’. In the spring protesters built a camp and tree houses in a 100 year old oak tree to draw attention to the Ring Road-to-M4 Link Road. The government has since axed this Link Road.

Contact: STARR (Stop The Avon Ring Road) c/o 84 Colston St. Bristol BS1 5BB Phone: 0797 999 0389

Radstock

A camp was set up in summer ‘97 in an area in which Bath and North Somerset council are planning to build high cost fortified executive housing, shops and industrial units on top of a piece of naturally regenerated railway line—an open space that local people want kept that way. Served an eviction order as of Oct 7th ‘98 the camp was on constant eviction alert throughout the end of ‘98.

Contact: Bath EF! (see contacts p. 341)

Swindon Greenbelt Housing

The camp set up against the construction of greenbelt housing outside Swindon was evicted in January. The site was set up in opposition to a proposed £2.5 million scheme by Beaufort Homes. A public right of way was closed and an ancient hedgerow flattened, trees were felled and wildlife eradicated.

Development then increased from 12 houses to a further 750. Swindon Town Council has been quoted as saying: “Swindon will become a city, no matter what the cost.” After the eviction, 80 people took part in a protest walk around the site.

Contact: The Rational Trust c/o 49 Holbein Rd. Swindon, SN5 8AQ Phone: 0788 059 2370 / 0836 743 581

Victory Against Greenbelt Housing!

And in a related Wiltshire greenfield battle: Plans have been dropped to trash Hagbourne Copse—a neglected woodland by junction 16 of the M4. The woodland was up for sale and the agents dealing with it just love industrial development. However, after the Rational Trust threatened direct action, the sale was dropped.

Contact: The Rational Trust c/o 49 Holbein Rd. Swindon, SN5 8AQ Phone: 0788 059 2370 / 0836 743 581

Toytown

In August ‘98 a camp called ‘Toytown’ was set up to defend woodland and playing fields in the centre of Cheltenham from two new roads, 1,500 car parking spaces, a Waitrose supermarket, a drive through fast food restaurant, a 10 screen cinema shed, a petrol station, a nightclub, a bowling alley, a theme pub and a private health and fitness centre, all of which Cheltenham already has.

Local people were angry because their children will lose the only playing field in the area. It’s also one of the last green spaces in the area, a riverside wildlife habitat, that is home to bats, two potential brownfield housing sites, and the historic Alstone Spa. After 2 years, the campaign to protect the area moved into direct action, setting up camp and also organising high-profile stunts to embarrass the council and the ‘developers’. Campers built treehouses, a compost toilet, a covered kitchen, office and benders. They also helped with activities for the young people who use the woodland as a play area, and built a permaculture garden as well as taking action against the builders Waitrose and Morrison Construction.

The camp closed down but action continued: in early spring a plucky band of five ‘Toypeople’ effortlessly stopped bulldozers and shredders who had come to level the ‘Toytown’ site by climbing on top of them and telling the drivers to “go away and take your machinery with you”. And to everyone’s surprise they did!

Contact: Cheltenham EF! 16 Portland Street, Cheltenham, Gloucs. GL52 2PB Email: chelt_ef@yahoo.com



The South East

Lyminge Forest 🏡

After a couple of years battling against the Rank organisation, who want to build a massive 'holiday village' on top of 500 acres of green-



belt land in Kent (see DoD no. 6, p. 72), the Lyminge campers have almost won their battle against the entertainment giants. Rank seem to have lost interest, but there's a rumour that planning permission may be sold to Center Parcs.

Contact: Friends of Lyminge Forest, c/o 3 Abbott Road, Folkstone, Kent CT20 1NG. Phone: 01303 257 046 / 01303 265 737 / 0468 945 595 / 01436 820901 Email: merlin@envirolink.org

Camp for Justice

After Britain's first animal liberation action camp—'Camp Rena' (see DoD no. 7, p. 56), camps outside the notorious vivisectioners Huntingdon Life Sciences have continued. HLS get paid by medical and cosmetic companies to cut up cats, dogs, rodents and monkeys for them. The 'Camp for Justice' is the fourth outside HLS, and was set up on the anniversary of the showing of Channel 4's 'It's a Dog's Life' which blew the scandal of HLS wide open. The programme caused the company's share price to drop dramatically and campaigners are hoping the camp will have a similar effect.

Contact: HDSC (Huntingdon Death Sciences Campaign), PO Box 325, Cambridge, CB1 2UF. Phone: 0589 026 435

Oxford Railway Squat

The old LMS railway station in Oxford was squatted on 2nd May '98 to prevent a six lane road and a university business school (to be paid for by an arms dealer!) being built in the city centre. The £1m road will destroy trees and slice through one end of the Grade II listed old railway station. The building was decorated and used by the community for free events. Treehouses were built (including one thatched!) in the 8 mature trees.

Wednesday 9th September '98 saw the start of the eviction of the old railway station by Oxford University. The bailiffs took 60 hours to evict the building and it is believed to have cost more than half a million pounds. It was an inventive, creative, full-on fun-packed anarchic pisstake of an eviction thanks to snug treehouses, cargo-nets, barricades,

lockons, bunkers, and the world's first Sofa-Lock-On! The last tunneller was removed at dusk on Friday 11th, ending an eviction which saw 17 arrests, the confiscation and destruction of personal property by police, damage to the (listed) building by police, 3 extra trees illegally felled, one cop injured when he fell through a roof (pigs might fly!) and one protester get 2 broken fingers. Legal proceedings have begun regarding the illegal fellings, the damage and the injured protester.

Kingston Trees

The poplar trees that had been occupied since November '97 at Kingston in London were evicted in March '98 with helicopters and riot police at 5:30 in the morning. The forces of Babylon had a 53ft tower, a tree village and tunnels to contend with. The local Council and developers Fairclough Homes wanted to cut down the 76 trees to 'enhance the view' of the Thames for dwellers in a posh new estate (£100,000 for a riverside view anyone?) Over a hundred police, 140 security and 35 sherrifs officers arrived on the first day of the eviction. Two people were still down the tunnels two days later. The police offered them a deal—if they came out then 30 people would be allowed on the site for a media stunt. One protester reported the response was "100% fuck off."

Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp 🏡

The peace camp is held on alternate weekends outside the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment near Reading. In March Trident Ploughshares 2000 activists invaded the base, where they manufacture nuclear weapons. They scaled the fences and blockaded the gates. Campers also organise shareholder campaigns, awareness raising and direct action protests.

Contact: 33 Heron Road, Bristol, BS5 0LT Phone: 0117 939 3746/ 01703 554 434

Crystal Palace

The Crystal Palace site was evicted in March '99 at a cost of over £1m, after a year of resisting the construction of a huge cinema multiplex on park land in South London. The eviction only finally ended after the final two protestors voluntarily came out of the underground bunker they had been in for the past two and a half weeks (see article on page 189). The campaign is far from over.

Phone: 0181 693 8200

Epsom

In June 1998 activists set up camp in Epsom in London to stop a relief road and car park being built on top of local woodland. They occupied some prime



(stockbroker belt) development land, woods, and squatted a house. The camp seems to have been in a top location—the council offices, police station, ambulance service, fire brigade, courts and bailiffs were all just minutes away! One local councillor took to threatening campers with violence, saying: “We can’t afford to evict you. Fuck off while you’ve still got time.” However the council did finally manage to stump up the cash and in January ‘99 the camp was evicted (see article on page 193). Up to 500 cops, bailiffs, the FIT team, scab climbers and tunnellers and the Under Sherrif of Greater London all stormed on to site in a dawn raid operation believed to have cost £100,000. However, the camp had been abandoned and partly burned out a month before and when the forces of darkness arrived there was only one man in a van occupying the site. A local councillor justified the operation by saying that they “didn’t know how many people were going to be on that site”—despite it being right next to the police station!

ICC Genetix Squat

After loads of hassle from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Inter-Continental Caravan (ICC) finally got their visas to enter the UK in June. There were 600 activists in the caravan, from many countries in the Third World, including loads from India. They came to the UK to bring the concerns of the South directly to the heart of the North. Their visit to Europe was to coincide with the G8 summit on June 18th. Inspired by the genetics crop squat that took place last year in Norfolk, British activists planned a crop squat to welcome the caravan to the UK. However on 27th June they were busted while attempting to squat a field where the mutant crop had already been trashed. They had to very quickly move on to a new site in Essex. The site was swiftly turned into a permaculture garden with an info centre focusing on the dangers of genetic engineering. (see articles on page 28 and 97).

St Mary’s Churchyard

In July ‘98 Camp AARDVARK (Arboreal Activists Reinforce Decent Values Against Redevelopment Killing) was set up to protect St Mary’s Churchyard—“the very last green open space in Southampton”—from being redeveloped by the Church of England and the usual property speculators. Their plans were revealed to involve covering most of this beautiful churchyard in buildings and tarmac. Campers quickly established a base camp and houses in some of the 40 mature trees.

Aardvarkers were all from Southampton—one was christened in the church—and there was loads of local support. The camp was attacked one night by organised thugs not from the local area, who trashed tents, badly bruised someone’s back and broke someone else’s finger. The camp was disbanded in August as the Church scaled down their plans and were sent back to the drawing board. The camp will set up again if needed.

Hockley Housing Camp 🏠

A new protest camp was set up in July to resist a housing development of 66 luxury homes on 11 acres of ex-greenbelt land at Hockley near Southend. Seeing as the adults in the area weren’t doing anything, the camp has been put together by a group of teenagers aged between 14 and 16. The site is next to a designated wildlife area featuring great crested newts, badgers, adders, shrews and more...

Contact: 01702 206 181

Diggers Land Occupation

On the 3rd April, St. George’s Hill was briefly home to a camp in memory of the 350th anniversary of the original Diggers’ land occupation, when, at the end of the English Civil War, Gerrard Winstanley and his chums set up camp on common land the landlords were trying to enclose. St. George’s Hill now boasts a golf course and one of the country’s most exclusive housing estates, home to Cliff Richard among others. Three hundred people marched to the hill and then went on to a nearby site to establish a communal settlement—aiming to increase public access rights to the hill.

Contact: The Land is Ours, Box E, 111 Magdalen Rd. Oxford OX4 1RQ. Tel: 01865 722016

Gorse Wood 🏠

A new anti-road camp was set up in Essex in May ‘99 to stop the A170 bypass from Chelmsford to Southend. The road is going to be paid for through the infamous Private Finance Initiative—the same scheme that brought us the A30 extension. The bypass, which is to be built by Laing construction, also seems to be part of a grand plan for a future London outer orbital motorway. It will pass through several fragments of bluebell woods and aquatic habitats and threaten others by its proximity. Fifty people set up the camp and had erected two tree-houses in the first week. Work on the road is expected to begin in August.

Contact: Friends of Lyminge Forest, c/o 3 Abbott Road, Folkstone, Kent CT20 1NG. Phone: 07957 915977 Email: merlin@envirolink.org

Comments on Camps

Out of Site, Out of Mind?

The physical occupation of sites threatened by development has been one of the main strategies used by our movement over the last eight years. The last few years has seen an increasing amount of concern with, and discussion about, their effectiveness as a direct action tactics. Here are four pieces of writing that raise some of the main points from these discussions.

Camps Are Not Enough!

This piece is critical of direct action camps, since I reckon the negative aspects of protest camps are more important and worthy of analysis than the positive ones. Yes, camps can be great; dynamic, exciting anarchic communities, examples of low-impact earth-centred living, where people live and struggle together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and solidarity. However, I've felt for some time that such ecotopian glimpses are all too often swamped by the other side of the story. I'm certainly not criticising those who are, or have been, on camps, as that's most of us—and it's undeniable that camp-based campaigns have inspired our movement to amazing feats.

However, we must consider the tactical effectiveness of camps, and the effects of 'camp culture' on Earth First!

The development of Earth First! in Britain has been heavily influenced by protest camps. Many campaigns, especially against roads, have relied on the central tactic of

building a camp, fortifying it fantastically, and waiting to resist eviction. All camps share an identical mindset: defensiveness. Extremely impressive resistance has been achieved with this tactic, but it's a limited strategy. In particular, because camps demand loyalty from those who defend them, spending time or resources on more offensive tactics (office occupations, site invasions, sabotage) can be seen as abandoning the camp, almost to the point of 'treason'!

'Defensiveness' leads to campaigns stereotyping themselves, and makes innovation so much harder—unless it involves taller, madder treehouses or deeper, more impregnable tunnels. Logically, the only way to advance in the 'arms race' between us and the bailiffs/scab climbers/men-in-black is to make ourselves so vulnerable that serious injury or death

becomes even more likely. Enough of us have either been hospitalised (or come close) to make us question whether the stakes are too high to be worth it. I don't want any of my friends to become martyrs.

The danger of camp life highlights another problem—camps are highly specialised environments. Not everyone has the agility, stamina, confidence and time to climb trees, hang off bits of blue rope, or live outdoors in all weathers. Therefore, camps divide activists into two; the ultra-committed—usually young—whose lifestyle becomes intertwined with the camp, and the rest who can only support them. This hierarchical dynamic is not a good basis on which to build a radical movement. The image which



often underlies it—the individualistic, self-sacrificing defender of the trees—is also a problem. I believe that it is our collective confidence we should be developing, and individual commitment and ability should feed that confidence, not override it.

Camps very often have an aggressively countercultural vibe, which most people will find alienating. Camps can be too easily dominated by macho ego-warriors, complete with harness codpieces, who create an intimidating atmosphere, especially after a few cans. Of course, I'm not suggesting serving McDonalds and installing Sky TV at sites to attract 'normal people' (the counterculture is a good thing!), but we need to question what opportunities camps present for facilitating wider involvement in our struggles.

You don't need to actually visit a camp to feel alienated; the spectacularisation of our movement has ensured that most TV viewers can now safely view eco-direct action as an alien 'phenomenon', rather than a challenge. Our over-reliance on spectacular tactics—perfectly illustrated by the modern protest camp—is a serious limitation to our threat.



Camp-based activism creates a transient, rootless movement, comprised of people who have lived in too many places which end up being trashed. The mobility of the movement has many strengths, and has fed our dynamism and energy. However, it marginalises us as a ‘cause’ beyond the real lives of most communities, and is not sustainable. There are only so many years of the camp-building/eviction cycle anyone can take, and most activists become too burnt-out, disillusioned or wage-enslaved to ‘carry on camping’. It’s thus difficult enough to keep existing numbers and energy up, let alone expand! The need to develop new more sustainable and inclusive modes of struggle, without losing any radical edge, is urgent.

I’ll stress again that I’m not anti-camp. I hope that camps will continue to pop up like mad mushrooms to vex our enemies and change lives—and hopefully continue to actually stop things, as at Stringer’s Common in 1997 (see *Do or Die* No. 7, page 2). However, the attitudes and assumptions preserved by camps must be challenged. Camps are a huge element of our tradition, but we need to learn from other traditions, and—most importantly of all—develop novel strategies that will really kick some arse. I don’t think we’ll do that until we analyse honestly the shortcomings of our previous struggles. Camps are not enough!

Back To Basics

For many activists, protest sites are a ‘thing of the past’. Their tactical limitations and unsustainability, amongst other things, have been under a lot of discussion. However, a huge number of present activists have been involved with protest sites and, regardless of all these arguments, their influence is undeniable. Even if many activists, like myself, have ‘moved on’, I think we still need to address how sites have influenced the way we work, and consequently how we can go forward without them.

Sites, in a number of ways, helped build and sustain the network that we have now. They have an accessible nature; an open invitation to have a cup of tea or a long-term stay. Of course, this has to be weighed up against many negative aspects; from drunk or offensive behaviour to generally muddy or messy conditions. However, in the past sites have attracted huge numbers and a fairly broad range of people. This, admittedly, was largely due to the mass appeal of the anti-roads movement and hard to relate to the broader global anti-capitalist direction we have moved in, but the point I’m trying to make is that

sites provided an open ground for a large number of people to come and fight together.

This is where I think the real significance of being on site comes in. To live with such a range of people, to share the same experiences; everything from trying to light a fire when it’s been raining for days to the intense emotionally and physically painful evictions, is a bonding process that I don’t feel we have managed to replace yet. On site, I learned to tolerate and trust people I wouldn’t otherwise have probably talked to. Yes, it’s an overly intense atmosphere, and



yes, it’s a fast track to burnout, but it also produces friendships that would normally take years to consolidate.

It isn’t just a comment on site social life. That kind of friendship is crucial to making cohesive groups and successful actions. None of us are perfectly reliable. It’s not enough to know someone has good pol-



itics. You've got to know if they'll do what they said they'd do, whether they're likely to be late or just not turn up or if they'll back you up if an action goes wrong. We need to work with people we can trust. But if people only rely on the friends they've known for years, or were on site with, it makes us insular and cliquey; feeding attitudes like 'if you weren't at Twyford or Newbury you don't count'. If we are to successfully grow, new people need to be included and trusted. Admittedly you don't have to live on site to form those kinds of friendships. Actions, even the bad ones, can be good shared experiences. Skill sharing can be done by pairing up with new people. Good debriefings, social events and affinity groups training, especially trust games, are all ways to get to know individuals better. But these things need more emphasis. We've taken for granted the opportunity sites provided for meeting so many new people, for sharing so many intense experiences, crammed into a short space of time, and emerging with a really strong group of friends.

I'm not trying to be nostalgic about sites. I'm not saying they're perfect or irreplaceable. I think we've come a long way from the days of anti-road sites like Newbury. We've successfully broken out of 'single-issues', incorporated an anti-capitalist analysis, and made strong links with groups all over the world. But our efforts to strengthen our own network in Britain has, I think, shown just how much we depend on individual friendships to work well as a group and to make strong links with other groups. We can't afford to take for granted the trust and friendship that is fundamental to sustaining this network.

It's Shite On Site!

Like many people my first real involvement in ecological direct action came about on protest camps. I have visited and lived on sites at the Wells Relief Road, the Newbury Bypass, Manchester Airport and Bingley. There has been a lot of discussion over the last few years over what role sites can play and even over whether they have any valid role to play at all. I am of the opinion that sites have the potential to be an effective and progressive form of activism. I am also of the opinion that they generally refuse to address the problems that prevent them from reaching this potential. The result of this refusal goes a long way to account for the fact that I have had very little to do with them for the last two years.

Living on site is a very intense experience, your entire life and identity become bound up with a particular piece of land and what you can do to defend

it. There are good things that can come out of this; passion and commitment to your activism, as well as the radicalisation that occurs when something directly relevant to your life is destroyed by business and the state, protected as ever by the police. However, this intensity of immediate experience, combined with the fact that sites are almost always very marginalised from the rest of the society which they inhabit, also leads to many problems:

Sites tend to be very 'single issue' orientated. Those who live on them often develop a kind of arrogance, whereby they see sites, and their site in particular, as being the only worthwhile form of protest. There tends to be very little strategic analysis on site with people content to remain on the defensive, even looking forward to the glorious defeat of eviction as though it was impossible for them to take the offensive in any way.

The level of wider political thought is often even worse; I remember several people on site telling me that they weren't interested in capitalism, class, or animal rights and this being accepted as though there was nothing wrong with it. Someone even voiced the opinion that road building was not a problem, just so long as no trees got cut down!

Sites are often also home to various hierarchies based on gender, expertise and sub-cultural credibility. If you don't know how to climb trees, have a job, look fairly straight or are female, then the chances are that you will be made to feel as though you can't do much to help, and, what you can do will involve you playing only a supportive role for those who are doing the real work.

Connected to the lack of political analysis, and feeding the macho cult of the long-haired eco-warrior, is the obsession that many sites have with the media. The media is treated almost entirely uncritically, with journalists invited on to site and people performing all sorts of ludicrous antics for them, hanging out of trees and even appearing on chat shows to be ridiculed. In this way sites play a key role in their own spectacularisation, turning themselves and the rest of the ecological resistance movement into a sub-cultural commodity, all to get their faces on telly in the interests of a single issue.

Like most forms of activism, protest sites have their good points and bad points. The criticisms I have made of sites can often also be applied to non-site based direct action. The difference is that, in my experience, the issues are more pronounced, and, crucially, less challenged, on-site than off-site.



Site Life

I have lived on protest sites on and off since the summer of 1996. The few years before that, which many people regard as the hey-day of British protest sites, were well before my time and so I have no experience of them. I first got involved in site life simply because it was the most effective and accessible form of direct action that was around at the time. The sites that I have lived on have all aimed to prevent the building of environmentally destructive developments by almost exclusively defensive tactics. Occupying the land under threat and building as many fortifications as possible with the aim of making the eviction as difficult and expensive as possible for the forces of darkness.

This has proved quite effective, especially since the development of underground defences (tunnels and bunkers) which can cost hundreds of pounds an hour to evict and can last out for weeks. In theory the structures themselves could last months but this has never been tested as people tend to crack and come out voluntarily well before they would have been evicted. This has led the tunnel bailiffs to just wait around for protesters to get bored, mad or run out of food, only putting on the pretence of work when the Undersheriff comes round—thus further lengthening evictions. (This state of affairs will probably continue until the police train up specialist tunnel cops!) The threat of an expensive tunnel eviction was enough to make Guildford Council change their mind about a road widening scheme and who knows how many others have decided against some new earth raping activity behind closed doors.

One of the big things about protest sites is that since you are occupying the area that you want to save it takes over everything. This tends to make the experience fucking exhausting and intense. The last site I lived on I felt like I was on the job every minute of every day. Just when you were about to relax there were pigs at the gate or local nutters in the kitchen and you would have to get up and sort it out. Despite that the all-encompassingness of protest sites this is still their biggest turn-on for me. On site you know that everything you do; whether it's cooking, cleaning, washing up, chopping wood, watching the kids, building defences or going on actions, contributes towards the overthrow of the State. Work becomes something you want to do and get a buzz out of. Living like that is just fantastic. There's something about living communally combined with the edge of confrontation and struggle that makes a protest site a

proper autonomous zone and liberated area. Since living on site takes so much energy, with the defences and preparations for eviction tending to become the entire focus of the campaign, nobody has the energy or time to offensively hit the companies involved. On the other hand having a semi-permanent centre of activity that people can come to any time to help can keep a momentum going. It also allows people new to the movement to become more involved quicker. It can take months to gain acceptance in an Earth First! group but, provided you muck in, only a matter of days at a protest site.

You have to put a lot of energy into a protest site before you can get any out, and there is always the danger that keeping the site running will become an uphill struggle that leaves no time to attack the enemy or fortify the space. Crystal Palace (see pages 154 and 189) was an object lesson in this for many of us. Special Brew was our undoing. Most sites these days have to deal with the demon drink as so many activists are heavy drinkers it has become central to the culture of protest sites. It's the only thing I really don't like about site life. It makes us more vulnerable to threats from outside—pigs, vigilantes, local nutters etc.. It makes us fight amongst ourselves and it causes people who used to have a problem with drinking to either leave or get sucked back in. As Crystal Palace was an urban site this was magnified by local pissheads that came to visit. Sadly kicking people off site became an almost daily occurrence. We didn't like doing it but we had no choice. That part was easy but what if lots of otherwise hardcore activists are big drinkers? What if it's most of the site?

At Palace we used to just let it slide until the communal areas were filthy, the firewood was damp or non-existent, the tools were lunched out and no one could take it anymore. Then a couple of people would have a good shout at anyone they thought was lunching out, we'd kick out the real pisstakers and everyone else would get off their arses and clean up, chop wood and build a big impressive defence. Then we would repeat the entire process again. This pattern was familiar to me from campaigns past, although it has to be said never in quite such an extreme form. We always did get it together but a lot of the time many of us didn't think we would. Although we put up a damn good fight in the eviction I can't help thinking that we could have done so much more for so much less effort if we'd just not lunched out in the first place. Sobriety would have helped—it really would.