

Beer and Loafing on the Jack Road

Zap

September-October 1996

A logging truck driver and a security guard stand close together in the predawn cold. They have steaming plastic mugs of coffee. We don't. They have smirks on their faces as they offer us some. We do too.

"Sure would be good to have a warm cup of coffee."

"No, actually caffeine's bad for you."

"Well, how 'bout some hot cocoa?"

"The sugar is really bad for you. Y'all should cut back on that stuff."

"Well, shit, how 'bout Tang?" "Only astronauts drink Tang." Another bonding experience has begun with locals and environmental protesters.

We are freezing our asses off, literally. Eagle can't feel his fingers due to the awkward angle of the lock boxes. The view of the light spilling into the valley is absolutely breathtaking through the clearcut. I am locked down to the gate, barricading the road, with two logging trucks boxing me in. The headlights burn my retinas. The fumes and engine noise choke my brain as I reflect on the last few days that have made this hallmark moment possible.

Only moments before, I had seen the core secondary support people and the affinity-arrestable group break down to the shouted whisper talk of "fuck you." "No, fuck YOU." "Fuckin' shut the fuck up." "Hey, can we focus here?"

Just a case of pre-action jitters? No, it was another one of the many times the action almost didn't happen.

What can be done to ensure a better run next time? Before I break out the crits, I want to make it clear the action was successful and we met all our goals. What doesn't get said a lot, in a movement which wants to portray a united front, is that there are a few serious flaws in some of the ways we relate and organize.

Let's set the stage for the usual open campaign. Volunteers come from a mixed background of class, skills and experience. The amount of time to be donated, or roles to be played, differs tremendously. In each campaign, the influx and outflow of folks creates a constant state of discovery, new ideas, approaches; fresh blood pumping the revolutionary manifestation, full of life. Some groups know each other; lots are strangers. It can click into a dynamic team, or a scary version of your typical neurotic, codependent mess of a dysfunctional suburban family. In our case, it was a volatile combo of both.

Process, respect and timing were the root systems that started to disintegrate. It was Wild Rockies Week, and people wanted to party. Interestingly enough, Avalon's Litha Journal article kept popping up in my head. Every time there was a scheduled meeting to discuss a possible action, more than half the folks were drunk or high. It took three days to have a somewhat sober meeting. Promises were made and broken, trust issues went unaddressed. When the time came to get into gear, roles were forgotten, folks dropped out or continued sleeping.

I am up for a good time when it has its place, but partying and planning are not an effective combination. We could have a set time to drink and a set time to organize. Then folks could choose their priorities.

A respect for all roles ought to be encouraged. We all can do things in the movement that we are comfortable with. If being arrested or going backcountry is not for you, say so. Group dynamics can be more high-powered if folks who consistently wash dishes or live in a tripod are respected equally. Being honest about what you can do does wonders, and provides much more support than failing people who are depending on you.

In a community where it is sometimes assumed we are on the cutting edge of social reform, people seem to dislike the process of a consensus circle. Sometimes they are way too long and core problems are still not addressed. Dealing directly with personal problems between people before they usurp group trust is key.

At Cove/Mallard, clear consensus circles where everyone was heard and the purpose was met needed to happen more. We lacked any follow-up circles after people broke up into smaller groups, so assumptions of roles plagued the action. If few people know each other these processes help folks decide if they want to participate. A genuine awareness of each other's boundaries would be bliss.

In a product-oriented world where the justified means is tearing the earth apart, for us to embrace process would be revolutionary.

Even in our whirlwind of craziness there was a central group of people dedicated to stopping road construction. They constantly checked in with one another, giving room for folks to change their minds. They stuck it out and that inspired me. I hope that by looking at the process honestly we can continue to break negative patterns and think of new ideas to make this way of life more empowering.

The Ted K Archive

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Earth First! Mabon, September-October 1996, Pages 8-9.
<www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/ef_16_8_2.pdf>

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