

The Raging Riff-Raff of Merry England

Al Decker

Sep 30, 1997

Contents

- Road (and Infrastructure) Wars 3
- Monkeywrenching in the UK 4
- Reclaim the Streets 5
- Hunt Saboteurs 5
- Great British Publications: 5
- We're Watching Big Brother 7

The culture of ecological and social resistance is thriving in the United Kingdom. This article focuses primarily on England, though much of the same can be said of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Earth First! in the UK today seems similar to American EF! of the early eighties: a young movement, full of fire, battling mainstream groups over the sabotage issue, at times totally unorganized and dysfunctional, yet managing to pull off brilliant actions, pushing the boundaries on what is acceptable and, perhaps most importantly, spreading the good news abroad. For instance, the amazing Young Lions EF! group from South Africa got turned on to EF! when three of them were political refugees in England during Apartheid. Radical eco-activists from countries including Germany, Finland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, France, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand, Australia, Poland, Russia, Italy, Greece and Sudan have come to learn from the movement in the UK and taken what they learned back to their bioregions. Britain has certainly sent its fair share of resistance strategies and innovative road-blockading techniques over to the US and Canada, including inspiration for North American cells of Hunt Saboteurs, the Earth Liberation Front, and the Animal Liberation Front.

One difference between Britain and North America is that fewer people here call themselves “Earth First!ers,” and EF! groups don’t really conduct campaigns as such, but more often provide a forum for people to get involved in a variety of actions. British EF! also has a deeper involvement in social justice issues and class analysis, due to the long and hard history of its class-based society, as well as the near complete lack of British wilderness to defend.

Road (and Infrastructure) Wars

The British anti-roads movement has met with staggering success. Since the first major campaign at Twyford Down in 1992, the Department of Transport has seen each proposed road protested, blockaded, sabotaged and otherwise deterred. The recent eviction of the Fairmile camp, considered the University of Road Protests, may signal the end of a road wars era. Yet the movement has won a limited victory, with several hundred road schemes canceled and widespread public support for a ban on new roads. Many activists are looking to move in new directions; one told me that open-cast mining protests will be the next major focus; another said industrial transport, including airports and railroads. Yet it’s likely that the movement will challenge the entire industrial infrastructure (including shopping malls, golf courses, urban sprawl and other nefarious forms of development). The current campaign against the expansion of the Manchester Airport reflects this.

The usual rad, basecamp riff-raff, joined by grayhaired local residents, are putting up one hell of a fight to save a lovely area of woodland set to be clear-cut, filled and paved into a runway. The tunnelers, straight out of Tolkien are fiendishly digging shafts and wickedly-clever fortifications. Fifty feet up a cliff wall overlooking a classic British

countryside stream, a rappel line can be seen hanging down to a horizontal tunnel, reminiscent of an Anasazi cliff dwelling.

Though collapse is possible, UK activists have urged! me to encourage Americans and Canadians to take tunnels up as a blockading technique. (Indeed, it took seven days for a professional spelunking crew to remove the tunnelers at Fairmile.) The scene at Manchester during Easter weekend was totally surreal. On a Saturday morning, dawn's rosy fingertips illuminated a lovely site; the barbed-wire fence surrounding the site had been seriously trashed. Base campers were openly and gleefully talking about the next three nights of holiday monkey wrenching festivities. Others were using sections of liberated fence to build fortifications for tunnels, camps and tree forts, and otherwise making themselves at home. The airport has to go through lengthy court proceedings to remove each individual squatter, even though they are located on private property.

Opposition to mining has really kicked off here in the last couple of years as reflected by a recent well-publicized EF! action in Wales against an open-cast mine (or strip-mine). The state reacted in advance by hassling local organizers (to the point where most didn't even show up for the action) and basically setting up a military occupation of the site: 200 riot troops, 150 police, Special Branch officers (similar to the FBI), the Royal Marines, four miles of razor wire fencing, road blocks; shit, they even welded down the manhole covers! So, instead of heading off to an ugly head-bashing, the gathered activists out-bluffed the coppers and instead went to a nearby mining site, the scene of major actions over the last year. A "virtual" action at the port was achieved (it was reported that the police costs for the weekend were over \$300,000) with massive media, and a solid rampage at the mine ensued, shutting down work for the day. A number of machines were allegedly damaged, and the corporation claimed that it had to lay off 20 workers as a result.

A humorous situation occurred when an EF! activist from abroad was arrested and gave the name of Edward Abbey to the Old Bill (police). A Special Branch agent told the local cops at the jail that Edward Abbey is the founder of Earth First! and a writer of eco-terrorism manuals, which provided some comic relief when they removed him from his cell into isolation, saying they feared for the safety of the other inmates. Needless to say, when they discovered Edward Abbey had died a decade ago and their big chance at catching an international terrorist disappeared, they weren't very amused.

Monkeywrenching in the UK

An editor of the *EF! Journal* once gave a speech at a conference in Eugene advocating public monkey-wrenching. The EF! movement in Britain is evolving towards that, the most spectacular example being the recent Newbury Rampage detailed in the most recent *Journal*. A thousand people broke through fences and stormed a construction site, dismantling heavy equipment to the jTCHKUNG!-esque beat of pixies drumming

on Earth-aping machines (music plays a big part in British festivals, actions and riots). Flames of elfin glee flickered up into a fog-shrouded night sky, as cops and security watched helplessly. In a similar vein, at an EF! National Action in 1995, hundreds of activists stormed an open-cast mine and wrenched the place up (even the train tracks fell apart and disappeared), causing an estimated \$400,000 worth of damage and shutting the place down for days.

EF! UK activists are also more angry and less polite during office occupations. Following the EF! anti-open cast action mentioned above, a raid on the Under-Sheriff's office turned into quite a melee, with creme pies flying all over the place and files rearranged and liberated.

Reclaim the Streets

This London-based group has held three major street parties and several other actions during the last couple of years, and already Reclaim the Streets ideas have spread throughout Britain and abroad. A front page story in the *EF! Journal* (September-October '96) described last summer's "Street Party '96: A Festival of Resistance," which promoted the view that, "Ultimately it is in the streets that power must be dissolved: for the streets where daily life is endured, suffered and eroded, and where power is confronted and fought, must be turned into the domain where daily life is enjoyed, created and nourished." Yes, and that is certainly what happened when 8,000 people partied on the M41 motorway while pneumatic drills tore up the concrete beneath the skirts of 30' Victorian Lady streetwalkers. Creative and ambitious might be good adjectives to describe the group.

Hunt Saboteurs

The Hunt Saboteurs Association (HSA) has been active for 30 years, disrupting hunts and educating the public about cruel bloodsports. All over the British Isles, hunts are constantly disrupted by dedicated, well-organized and well-funded sabs. The HSA produces an excellent quarterly journal, entitled *Howl*, with info that would be useful to activists in North America, as well as publish an updated tactics booklet. After many years of hard work, it seems clear that the days of legal fox hunting are numbered.

Great British Publications:

- *Do or Die: Voices of Earth First!*

The scurrilous diatribe against industrial culture entitled *Do or Die (DoD)* has roughly the same publishing schedule as *Live Wild or Die (LWOD)*, which is to say, infrequent.

- *The EF! Action Update*

The *EF! Action Update*, published continuously since 1991, is definitely what it purports to be: updates on actions and happenings both in the UK and abroad. It shares the same radical cutting edge of the wedge as *DoD* and serves to put people from many different campaigns and movements in touch with each other.

- *Green Anarchist*

“For the Destruction of Civilization,” which boldly appears in the *Green Anarchist (GA)* masthead, aptly describes where the Oxford green anarchists are coming from. Perhaps no other publication I’ve ever come across elicits a reaction like *GA*. Originally a peacenik newsletter, it evolved into more of anti-industrial/anarcho paper in the late eighties and early nineties and ultimately developed its full-on philosophy under the current editorship.

People seem to either love or hate *GA*. Yet, even those who claim to be ambivalent about it often read it compulsively to check out the eco-defense, animal liberation and community resistance diaries. These world-wide diaries list various actions, demos, blockades, monkeywrenching, arson, sabotage, acts of community resistance and also breakdown. From postal strikes to political bombings, they serve as a compilation of discontent.

The *GA* folks are extremely critical of what they consider to be a pathetic response by American activists to the Unabomber affair, and they are also skeptical of the *LWOD* #6, which they consider tame, perhaps in particular for lacking an “Ecofucker Hit List.” To their credit, they did report on the FBI harassment of the Katuah folks about *LWOD* and have issued a call of solidarity: “We hear the Feds are after the editors of *Live Wild or Die* for supposedly inciting FC. They are currently on the run and could do with more support than a cowed US anarcho scene has shown Ted K so far.”

I have gone into the *Green Anarchist* at length because the publication, and the activists involved in the amorphous movement towards a green anarchy, are the vanguard of resistance to industrial culture here in Britain, and their actions and evolving philosophy are having an effect abroad as well. The concept of “HEAL” (human, earth, animal liberation) has encouraged activists have to venture out of their single-issue ideological ghettos and link up with other movements. Animal rights people now take part in street parties; earth activists go ,to animal rights demos; anarchists take part in road wars, recognizing that it is the heartless techno-industrial system as a whole which brings misery to humans and non-humans alike.

- *Schnews and Squall*

These two very different publications are effective and creative forms of communication. *Schnews* is put out by “Justice?,” an anti-CJA collective based in Brighton. These folks are plugged into the activist scene all across Britain, and they get reports about all sorts of trouble from the actual activists instead of the corporate media. Every week they publish a widely-distributed, double-sided flyer. Unafraid to call politicians, bureaucrats and corporate execs the wankers that they are, *Schnews* is a lively and uncompromising rag. Besides the schnews, each issue contains a CJA arrestometer, a crap-arrest-of-the-week award and a brilliant disclaimer.

Squall is sort of the high brow, polished publication of squatters, ravers, dongas (who are kind of like the crowd at a typical American protest base camp), anarchists, social activists and other “Do It Yourself” folks; it’s subtitled “a magazine for assorted itinerants. “ What distinguishes *Squall* from other news journals is the excellent quality of the writing. The layout is really good, the articles provoking and, all-in-all, its a killer read. If you want to find out what’s happening with British counter-culture overall, you probably couldn’t do better than subscribing to *Squall*.

We’re Watching Big Brother

Conscious Cinema and *Undercurrents* are two activist video collectives that do a great job of publicizing direct action and protest through a series of tapes, each a collection of films and footage from various groups and movements. *Conscious Cinema* is a bit more lively and punk, while *Undercurrents* is more polished and traditional. But they both get incredible footage of actions and succeed at getting the film out, both to the media and through their own releases. One recurring bone of contention, however, is that video documentation of actions has been used by the cops to identify and arrest activists at a later date. On the other hand, footage has also been used by activists to earn acquittals, dropped charges and false-arrest lawsuit victories.

Conscious Cinema and *Undercurrents* keep people up-to-date on what’s happening in often far away places, communicate in a very compelling way to non activists or those who relate best to the video medium, and inspire and incite concerned individuals to take action against the forces of destruction.

For more information and British contacts, check the *EF! Journal* directory or write:

Hunt Saboteurs Association and Howl at POB 2786, Brighton, BN2 2AX, England; phone/fax 01273 622827; e-mail: hsa@gn.apc.org; <http://envirolink.org/arrs/HSA/newhsa2.html>

Reclaim the Streets at POB 9656, London, N4 4NL, England; phone 01712814621; e-mail: rts@gn.apc.org; <http://www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/campaigns/rts.html>

Green Anarchist at BCM 1715, London WC1N 3XX, England. The *Green Anarchist* is also available from Autonome Distro, POB 791191, New Orleans, LA 70179-1191 or Wind Chill Factor, POB 81961, Chicago, IL 60688.

Squallat POB 8959, London, N19 5HW, England; e-mail: squall@dircon.co.uk;
<http://www.phreak.co.uk/squall/>

Schnews and Justice? at POB 2600, Brighton, E. Sussex, BN2 2DX, England; phone
01273 685913; <http://www.cbuzz.co.uk/SchNEWS/index.html>

Conscious Cinema at POB 2679, Brighton, E. Sussex, BN22EF, England; phone
01273 679544; cinema@phreak.intermedia.co.uk

Undercurrents at 16b Cherwell St., Oxford, OX4 1BG, England; phone 01865 203
662; fax 01865 243 562; email: underc@gn.apc.org

The Ted K Archive

Al Decker
The Raging Riff-Raff of Merry England
Sep 30, 1997

Berrey, Cathie, et al, eds., Earth First! Journal 17, no. 7 (August 1997), Pages 12-13.
<archive.org/details/earth_first_1997/page/n160> &
<environmentandsociety.org/node/7027>

www.thetedkarchive.com