

the costs of not being able to re-open for some time! As ever, road-building rears up, and protest camps rise to meet the threat, including the recently successful Camp Bling, which saved some woodland and an ancient burial ground from becoming a dual carriageway.

International solidarity has included work with Sea Shepherd, protecting whales and more, and Saving Iceland, where activists have been resisting the building of dams and aluminium smelters. We have strong links with the Rossport Solidarity Camp, which has been successfully resisting a gas pipeline in Ireland for 10 years.

Next year we will be celebrating the 20 year anniversary of EF! in Britain (as well as the 200th anniversary of the Luddites). Plans so far include tours, a puppet show telling some of the stories from the past 20 years and a few publications, to inform, inspire and incite. And there's a chance some pixies might come out to play...

What is Earth First!?

“The general principles behind Earth First! are non-hierarchical organisation and the use of direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces that are responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants. EF! is not a cohesive group or campaign, but a convenient banner for people who share similar philosophies to work under.”

If you agree with the above and you are not racist or otherwise a discriminatory fuckwit, if you believe action speaks louder than words, then Earth First! is for you.

Set up a Group & Take Action

Want to take direct action as an individual or with your mates? The secret is to just do it! To set up an ecological direct action group, talk to a few people, put up posters, stickers, cards in windows, send out emails or whatever. It only needs you and a couple of others to form a group – then you can plot and plan actions like the best. Pick issues and approaches that suit you and where you live - you are an autonomous group, so just figure out the way you want to do it, and do it. Don't forget to share what you get up and post the story afterwards on the earthfirst.org.uk website to inspire others, or put a shout out if you need a hand.

Gatherings

There are usually two EF! gatherings a year, the Winter Moot and the Summer Gathering. The Summer Gathering is 5 days of workshops, networking, skill sharing and planning actions at a low impact eco-living camp organised non-hierarchically. The Winter Moot is an opportunity to network, discuss and reflect on the UK ecological direct action movement and to plan for the future. It often takes place at the end of January/beginning of February. For dates and info on gatherings see: www.earthfirstgathering.org.uk

Read all about it

The EF! Action Update has been printed since 1991, at first monthly, currently quarterly, for sharing news & upcoming events. Check the website for more info, local groups, upcoming events, actions reports, downloads of the Action Update and more...

www.earthfirst.org.uk

Earth First!

20 years of ecological
protest & resistance

– looking forwards to more digger-
diving, machine-sabbing, locking-
on radical direct action



THE first British Earth First! Gathering was on a beautiful squatted site near Brighton in February 1992. People had previously tried to start EF! rabble-rousing over here, inspired by vibrant and radical EF! groups in the USA, Australia, India and other countries, and the first attempt at a gathering in 1991 had been stopped by the police. EF! gatherings have continued to be a place where most of the major ecological direct action campaigns or one-offs have been dreamed up or developed.

Already in 1991 EF!ers had been active setting up the first anti-road protest camp, at Twyford Down, peat-stripping machinery in Yorkshire had been 'decommissioned' and there had been shutdowns of timber yards and ports in support of indigenous resistance against wilderness destruction. Carmageddon road blockades had reclaimed space from the onslaught of the roads programme and car culture, and there'd been countless smaller actions by day and night, from anti-nuke actions, to climate protest, and ecological defence.

Though the timber actions were the first really big ones with, for example, many hundreds of people invading Liverpool docks, and that campaign continued in many forms including 'ethical shoplifting' of stolen hardwoods, the huge campaign that EF! instigated was against the mega road-building programme.

Those Romans Are Crazy!

At the M3 through Twyford Down, along with some traveller folk, EF! set up camp on the Dongas, ancient and beautiful trackways cut deep into the earth, home to many protected plants and very rare Chalk Blue butterflies and orchids. EF! groups kept the camp stocked with people and tat, ferrying groups of people there week in week out, keeping it alive through the winter of '91, and organising the first direct actions to prevent works starting – locking-on to cranes, night-time flooding of the work site, and later, regular disruption of construction.

The first ever protest tripod in the UK (a technique borrowed from the Antipodean Intercontinental Deluxe Guide to Blockading), later in '92, was made from sycamore, and got a round of applause from the bemused workers once we'd got it up fast...before they started desperately building new access roads round us, to try to save the concrete bridge they were half-way through building before it set! The first tree-sits in Britain took place in 1993, organised by Jesmond Dene EF! and the Flowerpot Tribe.

Though EF! started the Reclaim the Streets network in the autumn of '91, organising Carmageddon actions (precursor blockades to the later RTS street parties that more audaciously transformed space) and more, it wasn't till after the major No M11 Link Road campaign in 1995 that it was reborn as a vibrant London-based group that organised amazing street parties of thousands of people, planting trees in drilled holes in the middle of urban motorways! These benefited from the counter-cultural alliances that were made in opposition to the 1994 Criminal Justice Act. Most RTSs in other parts of the country were organised by local EF! groups, with the help of local alternative scenes.

Quiet Victories, Noisy Defeats

Kick-started by EF!, the anti-roads movement of the '90s stopped at least six projects that had already been initiated. Whilst many other sites were 'lost', the movement as a whole resulted in over 300 road schemes being axed, the unsung 'Quiet Victories'. The personal bonds made and the alternative ways of living and organising that the many protest camps fostered was immensely important in what was then made possible. Camps sprung up against quarries, airports and other major infrastructure projects. The Newbury Bypass campaign was the biggest protest, successfully stopping work starting anywhere on the route for three days, and with over 30 camps a huge eco-tax was slapped on the project. The No M11 Campaign blended the defence of urban human communities into the equation, with squatted streets and innovated with lock-on towers and washing machines taking weeks to evict. Later, likely protest was officially factored in to the economic equation around whether to go ahead with road schemes. EF! individuals and groups played an important role as part of camps, providing support and going on the offensive. The huge range and ferocity of actions around the country – contractors, subsidiaries, small service providers and corporations intending to bid were occupied, sabotaged and generally hindered at every opportunity. This combined well with publicity-friendly MP and parliamentary roof-top squats and the disruption of ceremonial events. The slashing of the road-building programme three times was an unprecedented U-turn in national policy, and spawned a generation of radical ecological activists.

Globalisation and Genetix

Towards the end of the '90s and into this century, EF! and other eco-activists took inspiration and in turn inspired others around the world on a different scale. Already road protest, EF! groups and street parties had spread around the world – the Global Street Party in 1998 pushed the G8 leaders to flee Birmingham for the day through an unprecedented (in terms of size and radical protest) summit mobilisation, and June 18th 1999 sealed off, took over and destroyed much of the City of London in a combination of co-ordinated autonomous actions and a masked Carnival against Capital. The preparation work for both helped catalyse global protests. We took our experience to Prague in 2000 to join others trying to close down the World Bank & IMF summit. The well-prepared mainly British mainly EF! bloc explored

the tensions implicit in how to use affinity groups on a mass action, and how to embrace a diversity of approaches from Tactical Frivolity through samba bands to black bloc tactics in the same space.

At the same time, the local focus of EF! largely responded to the emerging threat of GM food. A prolonged, militant and widely popular campaign – using many different tactics, including crop squats, office occupations, supermarket actions, field trial decontaminations (crop-trashings) – successfully halted the growing of GM food in the UK, kicked many biotech companies back across the seas, and limited the importation of GM food to animal-feed. This inspired others around the world to use similar tactics. For many it was a fight against corporate control, and fundamentally fucking around with nature itself. With the threat back on the horizon, and looking very much to the rest of the world for sustained militancy and resistance, the campaign is once again gathering strength.

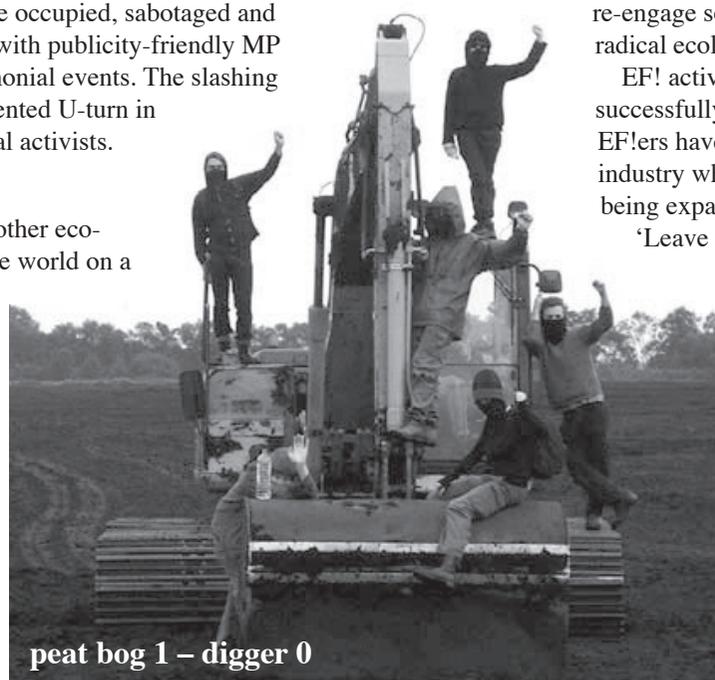
Noughty Noughty

EF! has always taken inspiration, ideas and experience from other struggles in Britain and abroad – such as the anti-nuke, women's, hunt sabbing & animal liberation movements. But wilderness protection and ecological defence, however limited on the set of small islands we live on, have remained 'our bag', from local campaigns to the bigger and longer-running peat campaign, which combined autonomously-organised sabotage and bigger days of action and camps. EF! activists have also been heavily involved with the Camp for Climate Action since its inception in 2006, building on our experience of organising the Scottish G8 eco-village the year before. There are now active Climate Camp networks in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as inspiring action camps around the world. One of the successful aims was to inspire newer generations and re-engage some older generations, and after a lull, to kick-start new waves of radical ecological direct action in the UK.

EF! activists have been part of the anti-coal movement which has successfully stalled a new generation of coal-fired power stations. Similarly, EF!ers have been involved in a chain of recent actions against the aviation industry which has resulted in stopping the UK's three largest airports from being expanded. The spirit of the Manchester Airport protest camps lives on.

'Leave it in the Ground!', originally a specific EF! campaign against an open cast coal mine in Derbyshire, has since become a rallying cry for those defending land, at one-off actions and camps.

Protest camps have successfully fended off supermarket, leisure & housing development, and defended nature reserves (as well as indirectly shelving a range of destructive plans). The Nine Ladies protest site, which after nine years successfully saved an area of ancient woods and heath from becoming a quarry, echoes early EF! campaigns against quarrying. Perhaps the most infamous of these was Whatley Quarry, one of Europe's biggest, which saw a long-term sustained campaign, as well as a national action during which 3 control rooms were dismantled, 20 yards of railway track disappeared and huge machinery fell apart costing 1/4 million pounds not to mention



peat bog 1 – digger 0