

Young People Go to New Heights to Protect B.C. Rain Forests

By Phil Carter

Walbran Valley, B.C.

It was seven in the morning and a police officer was standing opposite a small group of young people singing around a campfire in the middle of a clearcut. They were singing quietly, almost chanting: "If you cut down the forest. If you ravage this land. Then you might as well be cutting off your own right hand. For we and the earth are one, under the moon and under the sun."

About a hundred metres away, a large yellow grader was waiting to move a barricade of wood that had been constructed by the protesters out of the timber lying in the clearcut landscape of stumps and bare soil. Down in the valley, a grapple-yarder (a large crane-like machine) sits untended. Grapple-yarders are used to take timber from the steep slopes of the rain forest valley.

It was a full moon on the previous night when I drove along the logging road from Lake Cowichan on south-central Vancouver Island to the Walbran Valley. The clearcuts lasted for over an hour in the misty moonlight. Steep valley sides rose in the darkness to unimaginable heights, like an open-cast mine from a science fiction book. Finally, we reached a wooden barricade and there was just enough room to drive around it. A short while later we reached the end of the logging road and faced a wall of giant dark trees. A brief walk along a narrow trail led us into the shadowy forest to a campfire and several tarpaulins slung from trees for shelter. This was "perfection camp," one of the sites where protesters had been living while fighting the construction of logging roads into the coastal rain forest.

The next morning, a pale green light filtered through the giant Sitka spruce and red cedar forest. One of the protesters, a 19-year old girl named Sarena, had already left for the blockade. Walking across the sharply defined line from the forest to the open clearcut, the dream-like impression gained in the darkness of a huge area of deforestation was now an arid reality. With the present heat wave, it was a dry, hot expanse of stumps, some very large. The moisture-retaining web of ground mosses and banana slugs were desiccated and dusty brown.

Sarena is from Ontario, a friendly person with a permanent smile on her face and a neatly clipped mohawk crest of brown hair. She was wearing a calico-colored sweater that morning and she was always first up to make sure that someone was on the protest lines in case the logging company and the police try to surprise them by removing the barrier in the early morning while protesters were sleeping.

"The clearcut is like a desert" she said as the late summer sun began burning away morning mist. "The sun bakes down and there's no mercy for you out there. But in the forest, everything just works together to provide a home and to provide support and safety." A student of creative writing at Victoria University, she has decided not to continue with her course for the time being so that she can continue working on the Walbran issue.



David Dodge

Young British Columbians put themselves on the line to help save the Walbran Valley in B.C. last summer. Above is a massive Sitka spruce in the neighboring Carmanah Valley.

I had planned to meet with Alan Heinemann in the Walbran Valley so that he could show me the hiking trail system that was being constructed for visitors. However, he was arrested for the second time before I arrived. When I did finally meet him, it was not in the deep green world of giant trees, but in the more austere surroundings of the Victoria Supreme Court. The logging companies had obtained a court injunction forbidding people from actively protesting in the Walbran or even from discussing such protests. Heinemann was charged with contempt of court.

MacMillan-Bloedel forester Gordon Eason doesn't think the protesters indicate any significant shift in society's perception of the clearcutting issue. "They're mostly fringe," he said. "They're undoubtedly some who believe in what they are doing, but the rest are being manipulated or else don't really know what they were getting involved with."

MacMillan-Bloedel and Fletcher Challenge are both suing individual protesters for large amounts of money, some of whom have not even been arrested. Heinemann himself was served with an intent to sue by a process server acting on behalf of company lawyers. The proceedings are for criminal trespass, conspiracy to protest and the incitement of others to protest. The companies are seeking damages for revenue lost while clearcutting was delayed.

Sara Turner is 16 years old and went on a four-week long hunger strike to protest the

clearcutting of the Walbran Valley. Blonde-haired and softly spoken, she sat with me on a low wall in front of the B.C. legislature while a rally for the ancient rain forests was going on nearby. A little earlier, she had spoken to the rally about the Environmental Youth Alliance and about her passion for the Walbran Valley. It was a warm evening and the harbor glowed with the orange of the setting sun. The rally was just before the election and speakers from the three main political parties as well as from the Green Party were there.

She chose to go on a hunger strike with all the associated risks. "We tried all the normal means of protest," she said. "We tried petitions, letters, demonstrations and faxes, but the government seemed to consider it a subject that was closed to discussion."

A young university student from Canterbury, England also delayed his return to university so that he could help with the protests. He was travelling on Vancouver Island when he saw an advertisement for a rally in support of the Walbran Valley. "I started off by camping out here with the protesters," he said, "then, I was helping put up tree platforms and helping to feed the tree-sitters and bring them supplies. The next thing I knew, I was there sitting in a tree platform myself," he said. He had just come down from three days sitting in a tree platform 20 metres off the ground.

The tree platforms are a means of preventing blasting or tree felling for road construction. People are not allowed within a two-kilometre radius of blasting operations and it is very hard to remove the protesters from the platforms safely. The wooden platforms are generally slung with wire rope between three trees. People climb the trees using climbing spikes and a safety harness and often rappel down from the platforms at night to leave. However, police and logging companies working together have developed a way of removing protesters from the platforms, using elevating platforms known as cherry pickers. A safety net is first placed underneath the platform and police officers remove the safety ropes, one at a time, from the tree and attach them to a cherry picker. The platform is then lowered toward the safety net and the protester is arrested.

Climbing this way is inherently dangerous. Kathy Campsell, a 20-year-old woman from Ontario, fell from one of the platforms at the end of the week when I was in the Walbran Valley. She was badly hurt, sustaining back and leg injuries in the fall. The incident was an accident, but occurring on the day of the rally, it made the atmosphere very tense and sad. The people gathered were asked to send her thoughts and prayers of love and healing.

Non-violent civil disobedience has a long history, dating back to Gandhi's salt protests in India early this century. Some of the protesters see the current issue of the destruction of the West Coast rain forest as being a struggle between the weak and the strong. They resent the overbearing use of force by corporations, which control the law through financial wealth. ▶

Shaw Woods Nature Preserve: An Ancient Forest Preserved

There are few places left in this world where one can easily step back in time and view nature exactly as it was, untouched by modern civilization.

But within a 90-minute drive from the one million inhabitants of the Ottawa region, sits one such pristine, undisturbed, virgin forest. The tree canopy of Shaw Woods towers over any other for hundreds of miles. The creatures of this forest continue to survive in their age-old natural relationships that have been developing since the retreat of 600-metre glaciers.

Scientists at the Canadian Museum of Natural Sciences see the 50-hectare woodlot as a window to the past, a place where we can see how forests lived and breathed before the ravages of European settlement.

Some trees stand more than 40 metres high, with the lowest branches first appearing 20 metres off the ground — the average canopy height of many present-day forests in the Ottawa Valley. There are a large number of old trees in Shaw Woods such as 105-year-old sugar maples, 200-year-old hemlocks and even a 240-year-old white cedar.

In fact, some of the tallest trees of their kind live within the confines of Shaw Woods Nature Preserve. A 34.7-metre white ash is more than 10 metres taller than the U.S. record of 24.4 metres. A 32-metre beech easily tops the U.S. record of 27.7 metres. A paper birch in Shaw Woods towers 32.9 metres above the forest floor, 2.8 metres over the U.S. record height for the birch. At 37.5 metres, a sugar maple is 2.1 metres taller than the U.S. record tree and a huge 42-metre white pine literally towers over the 35-metre U.S. record white pine.



The trees of Shaw Woods tower over the logged forests of the Ottawa region.

"It's amazing how accessible this place is. It is usually very difficult to see a forest like this," says Albert Dugal of the Canadian Museum of Natural Sciences. Most forests this close to large population centres were cut down long ago.

The story of the preservation of Shaw Woods is a fascinating one going back to the earliest settlement of Renfrew County, near Eganville.

John Shaw, a Scottish miller by trade, came to Canada and settled on the land now known as Shaw Woods. As an entrepreneur, he established what later became a flourishing grist mill and a sawmill.

While much of the surrounding Ottawa Valley was logged for bustling mill towns lining the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers, the family spared this forest of hardwoods.

► Young People continued...

It's easy to wonder whether a young woman like Sara Turner, who went on a hunger strike, was doing so in the spirit of Gandhi. "We didn't have the intention of killing ourselves as it would have served no useful purpose and we would have been written off as radicals," she said. Perhaps the protest was in his spirit. "I fasted," Gandhi once said, "to reform those who loved me...you cannot fast against a tyrant."

Walking along a roughly cut forest trail with several protesters who were taking food and supplies to tree-sitters, we stopped in amazement beneath a huge gnarled maple. The forest is mostly Sitka spruce and red cedar. Both species grow up to 60 metres high. But here, it seemed like something from the old forest in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. The maple was draped with witches' hair lichen, hanging 50 centimetres or more from its twisted branches. For a moment, I completely forgot the protesters and the clearcut line less than 500 metres away. Then we walked on, past a huge red cedar that had been felled by chainsaw, possibly to mark the direction of the logging road in a way that could not be sabotaged by protesters as

easily as survey markers could.

A cheerful voice from high up in the green canopy greeted us. We were talking to Kathy about how beautiful the forest was. Using a rope, food and coffee was sent up to her. She spoke cheerfully, thankful for visitors after such a long time alone, a solitary spider suspended by thin cables between the trees.

Another day passed before she fell. □

Late Breaking News: In late January, the new B.C. government announced 18-month logging deferrals for the Walbran Valley, Tsitika Creek (near Robson Bight) and Tashish Kwois (near Tofino) regions of Vancouver Island. Environmentalists have charged that some important parts of those regions were overlooked in the process. Meanwhile, Stephen Owen, the former B.C. ombudsman, has been appointed to a special land-use commission set up to seek consensus on contentious environmental and forestry issues in B.C. Since this story was written, Alan Heinemann was found guilty of contempt of court. He received a one-month jail sentence, probation for one year and he must undertake 75 hours of community service. Kathy Campsell, the protester who fell from one of the tree platforms, is now getting around on crutches. There was some fear she might be paralysed.

"There were a lot of hardwoods in there and, at the time, they were looking for softwood. I guess they just didn't need it," explains Donald Shaw, who represents the third generation of Shaws to operate the family's Ottawa Valley lumber business.

"I don't know why he (John Shaw) didn't cut it; it was an easy sleigh ride down the hill to the mill only 200 yards away," said Donald Shaw.

By the time John Shaw died in 1927, the family business had expanded to mills in western Ontario and a huge 2,500 square kilometre timber-cutting operation at Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. But the small primeval forest on the doorstep of the original homestead is still standing, almost 90 years later.

The forest may have been preserved by chance in the beginning. But, over time, the family resolved to protect the forest for what Donald Shaw describes as "sentimental" reasons. In 1973, several scientists from the Canadian Museum of Natural Sciences visited the site and deemed it a national treasure. The Nature Conservancy of Canada studied the site and began discussions with the family to help preserve it. Then in 1979, "one of the most magnificent woodlands in eastern Canada" was dedicated as a nature preserve, says Dugal.

"The Shaw family is to be commended for making the preservation of this unique woodland possible. It encompasses an unusually rich assortment of plant communities and contains examples of the full range of stages in northern hardwood forest regeneration from recent disturbance to mature forest," said Dugal.

Shaw Woods Nature Preserve is open to the public and visitors can walk through the forest any time of the year. □

David Gonczol
Ottawa

Konica Supports the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society

Konica, a major producer of quality films, has agreed to donate 25 cents for each three-pack of Super SR film sold between Oct. 15, 1991 and June 30, 1992 to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS).

As part of the promotion, Konica is also offering a beautiful sweatshirt designed by Marcy Lipman that features a full-color wilderness graphic and the slogan "Konica supports the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society." The sweatshirts are free when you purchase five three-packs of Konica film. Or they can be purchased with a minimum purchase of one three-pack of film. The promotions are running in Japan Camera stores and other locations throughout Canada.

Angus Scott, CPAWS executive vice-president, said: "CPAWS thanks Konica for their valuable support." The funds will be used to support the society's Endangered Spaces programs and the goal of protecting at least 12 per cent of Canada's natural ecosystems. □