

# RUNNING FEET AND ROARING CHAINSAWS IN THE MATTOLE

BY DOCTOR ZAUS

Right now I'm sitting on a platform suspended 50 feet up with a noose around my neck in defense of the last of Northern California's coastal old-growth Douglas fir. This newly assumed position, part of a complex and unprecedented road blockade, allows me to piece together the crazed chapters of the Mattole struggle which have unfolded of late.

In the pre-blockade days we were camped on beautiful Long Ridge, a sacrifice zone from the Headwaters Deal where many of the "harvest areas" are located. This area was also the last stronghold of the Mattole Indians. They fought bravely here until their eventual slaughter by whites in the name of progress.

The sun was rising and the sky was red over the Pacific on November 10 when Pacific Lumber (PL)-contracted Columbia Helicopter falling crews arrived for the trees. Upon our initial contact, the Humboldt County Sheriffs Department was called. Comfortable in their role as PL's private security force, they arrived an hour later, in force.

Soon, down in "Unit 2": "Your under arrest!", a foolish rookie cried. "Now sit down!" This was too much for our crew who broke out with howls of laughter. I was glad he was able to provide comic relief to the increasingly serious situation developing. There were already eight sheriff suburbans and two paddy wagons in the area, not to mention the Columbia crew. They were all closing in at that moment. The fact that our crew was only three was another sketchy factor, but backup was on the way. We cited OSHA regulation title 8 section 6280 (a): "Fallers shall give timely audible warning to buckers and other persons in the area of tree to be felled, indicating direction of fall, and taking notice that such persons not only hear the cry, and are out of reach of the tree, but also clear of logs, falling trees, snags, or other trees which may be struck by the falling tree. Fallers shall stop motors while giving this warning." It remained to be seen if they would comply with these guidelines. We soon found that they would not.

So we set about to wear out the sheriffs. They didn't look too healthy, and we figured we could wear them out early. There were only eight of them and two fallers. When the saws started we charged up the hill, past the police and straight to the tree. There we confronted the Columbia fallers face to face. For a moment we were free of cops. The falling team was clearly agitated and disturbed. They attempted to carry out their work, but we made it impossible. The blades stopped.

Then the sheriffs caught up again, this time wielding large pepper spray canisters. They were spraying 15-foot streams like madmen. It wasn't long before both my companions had been sprayed squarely in the face. The police thought the defenders would fall apart or something, but they were undaunted by the stuff. Like roaches who are used to Black Flag, no simple spray can stop us! Humboldt County Sheriffs publicly denied the use of pepper spray in the woods, although it is detailed in the police report.

Next, we were surrounded. A spineless cop lunged from behind and tackled me like a football star. I tried to dive downhill, and we both went tumbling head over heels in a reckless out of control struggle until finally he released his grip on me and got control of his footing. I kept falling and landed safely out of reach. One cop was yelling, "I saw him hit you, I saw him punch you right in the face." Typical protocol. Protect each other and serve the dollar. Moments later our re-enforcements busted onto the scene, totally overwhelming the sheriffs and the fallers, forcing them to leave. We were glad as hell to see our friends. Victory was ours that day. Only one ancient tree was laid down. Its loss is heavily felt.

It had been almost three weeks since the first tree was felled on Long Ridge. We spent the time constructing huge barricades of stone and bone. Early on the

morning of November 27, a giant grader smashed through them. It was followed by fat old Carl Anderson, head of PL security, an individual with an extremely stiff upper lip. Following Carl was twice as many sheriffs and twice the Columbia crew as last time. We quickly made for the units and stood in solidarity with the giant trees.

Soon a massive barrage of cops and fallers on ATVs was roaring into the forest. As we engaged them in dialogue, urging them to have some common sense and go home before someone got hurt, we were mobbed by rookie sheriffs. They had not yet earned the privilege of riding ATVs. They had to suffer the unthinkable task of actually walking, which they seemed to regret.



Forest defenders play a game of cat and mouse with nearby loggers.

We continued to follow the thug-gish crew. It was bigger than ever and included special Columbia security, sheriffs galore and a few rather obvious undercover dressed as fallers. (What gave them away was they had cop suits last time.) During the ensuing struggle I found myself high in a tree directly in the fall zone of a tree being cut. Cops and Columbia security were unwilling to inform the fallers of my presence, and they sawed away, noticing me at the last minute and shutting down the saw.

Meanwhile, the other Mattole crew was trying to stop the other falling team. They hugged giant trees while chainsaw blades cut inches away from their bodies. Soon they secured strategic tree top positions and were able to shut down the crew. On this day eight ancient trees died, and the cops were again unsuccessful in apprehending us.

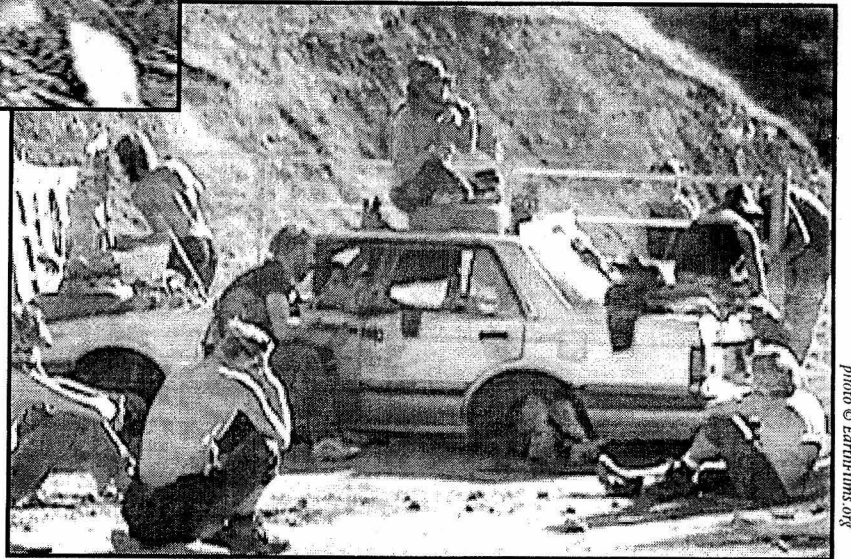
The next morning was cold and foggy as we prepared oats at "road camp." We had hardly said good morning when the massive grader arrived again. Soon our oats were part of the road, and 30 or more vehicles were driving over them. We were definitely concerned about the massive force assembled against us, but our crew feared not and was committed to defending this sacred land. We clashed with cops way down low on the ridge. They had a police line across a field, blocking us from the cutting area. Our crew decided to charge. One defender ran decoy, heroically sacrificing himself. He occupied enough cops so that everyone got through, and into the trees, but just barely. One Mattole had a crazy rookie on his tail who lunged and cracked him in the face. Bleeding heavily, he made it up a Doug fir in the fall zone. Out of the frying pan and into the fire. The tree he was in the path of had already been back-cut and wedged part way. It could have fallen at any moment. We quickly surrounded the area and rose up into the trees, causing the area to shut down completely. Cutting was stopped there. But we heard chainsaws in the other unit and had to split up.

Quietly four of us slid out of our trees and stealthed out of the cop-infested fall zone. We eluded them and ran long and hard back to the top of the ridge. All the way the sickening crash of falling trees fueled us up the hill. The plan was for two of us to create a distraction and two of us to take strategic positions. This was easier said than done as trees were falling everywhere! Columbia fallers literally ran around frantically dropping

trees as fast as they could. Columbia (and PL) were in total non-compliance with California OSHA and forest practice regulations. The carelessness with which they were operating was sending trees crashing in all directions. Often trees would land so haphazardly they would splinter off and explode, sending huge wooden shrapnel all over. The fallers paid no attention to our presence. Harsh reality set in as a ridiculously large force closed in, popping out from behind trees. They were dressed in black and sported nunchaku (for pain compliance) in addition to their usual tools of the trade—guns and spray cans. These fiends were hell-bent on catching us and were acting violently. They tried to mob us repeatedly and individually with as many as seven cops lunging for one person. We were totally outnumbered. Our video camera was lost. Trees were felled left and right.

At this point the situation reached critical. The three groups of humans involved—the cops, the fallers and us—were totally out of our skulls in an insane situation that was quickly getting worse. Anyone present that day could have been easily killed. The full story of events that transpired cannot be safely discussed at this time.

When the day was over 36 ancient beings were dead (now 44, total), and a large scar was visible in the forest. We grieved for our fellow animals who had lived there. Three women and two men had been hauled the 14 miles to jail. We wondered how effective our smaller bruised and bloodied crew would be the next day. We were still in the fight.



The "Blue Dragon," with a little help from some friends, blockades a logging road.

For a few days the ridge was quiet. In that time, friends on the outside were scheming. That's when the "Blue Dragon" rolled into effect, and our present day auto blockade was created. We now control multiple ridges and logging has been halted for over a month now. These hills that once lent themselves to the strategic defense of the Mattole Indians, now lend us their strength. We will not be stopped. Our struggle has just begun, and these ancient groves are still in great danger. Please come to the Mattole and stand in its defense.

For more information, contact Mattole Forest Defenders, POB 28, Arcata, CA 95518; (707) 441-3828; [www.mattoledefense.org](http://www.mattoledefense.org).

## A Not-So-Standard Disclaimer from the Mattole Forest Defenders

The free state and the Mattole Forest Defenders that are maintaining it are not the Northcoast Earth First! of the past. Some of the same people are involved, and some of the same problems exist, but there are real changes taking place in the internal structure of the group. And there are new tactics being employed. This is not the same old group of dogmatists trying to run the show. There is fresh young blood in the forest and it is exciting. Please come out and help us. If you can't come send us outdoor gear or food. If you can't do that then start a free state wherever you are. Let's take it all back right now! In the spirit of resistance, love and community.

—MATTOLE FOREST DEFENDERS