

# Yew's Invited

## An Interview About Autonomous Forest Defense

yew seed

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**Q:** Firstly, I wonder if you could talk about what was informing your understanding of old growth. Particularly with regard to logging in the Walbran valley. Was it through an anarchist channel, word of mouth, affinity group? Perhaps was it something you decided you had to do on your own?

**A:** While I was somewhat aware of it already, Kax:iks (Walbran Valley, aka 'The Walbran', unceded Pacheedaht Territory) was brought to the forefront of my attention in early 2015, in conversations with anarchist comrades, as word spread that Teal-Jones Group had applied for cutblocks in the heart of Kax:iks. Some of these comrades have close connections to people who'd lived in the valley for extended periods of time. Around the same time, an old friend of mine also shared stories with me of their personal experiences of the fierce resistance in Kax:iks some 30 years ago now. According to a particularly memorable story, one of the treesitters smeared themselves in their own feces as a means of making it more difficult for them to be arrested. My friend also shared with me touching experiences of helping to relieve stressed out land defenders, by doing things like taking them for chillouts and debriefs in the forest, away from the action.

I attended a convergence at Kaxiks in the summer of 2016, where I first encountered Pacheedaht elder Bill Jones, who was there along with the family of deceased Pacheedaht warrior Harriet Nahanee, to dedicate a new trail to her. As I recall, the trail ran along the edge of one of the proposed cutblocks, and after the dedication ceremony, I hiked past a little karst cave, up into the cut lock with some friends, to see up close the ancient cedars surrounded by 'falling boundary' tape. I'd never met Harriet Nahanee, but was aware of her involvement in resistance to the 2010 Olympics, specifically her arrest for blockading expansion of the Sea to sky highway between the Olympic venues of Vancouver and Whistler. I knew she refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the colonial court that she faced-asserting her Indigenous sovereignty-and for this, was imprisoned for contempt of court. She died shortly after release, from pneumonia contracted while in custody. This colony has her blood on its hands. I've since been given to understand that she was on the frontlines of grassroots resistance to logging in Pacheedaht territory 30+ years ago.

At the 2016 Kax:iks convergence, the emcee of the trail dedication ceremony began by stating boldly and clearly, that Indigenous people and anarchists had been instrumental in successfully defending the territory back in the day, and that this solidarity was needed once again, to confront

continued threats to the land. I'd had the opportunity to be in other ancient forests for extended periods of time before, but Kax:iks had a different vibe to me. It was very obviously a site of ongoing resistance—a place that many people felt very connected to in the present—with a faded old mural under the bridge still visible from a generation ago.

Collectively, these learnings and experiences inspired me greatly to get involved. I also have to credit grassroots movements like Earth First! in the so-called United States, and similar efforts I've encountered in so-called Canada, as well as various 'green anarchist' publications and tendencies for much inspiration over the years.

**Q:** Was there a moment for you when being out in the world, bushwhacking maybe, or hiking trail—was there a moment when you realized your life had to involve these environs in a serious way? Was it a slow build over many years? influenced by a joy in solitude, or through family tradition? **A:** It was a family connection that first immersed me in ancient coastal forests in so-called BC, at a long term, off grid squat that I later learned had received permission to remain from people Indigenous to that place. I've also been involved in resistance to highway and port expansion, mining, and other resource extraction along the coast. Being in these places while engaging in resistance activity have all been eye opening, life changing, deeply transformative experiences.

They expanded perspectives formed while growing up in a suburban area, where the forests I walked through to and from school every day were replaced by seemingly endless sprawling subdivisions as the years went by. It probably takes many generations to know an ecosystem well enough to responsibly be a part of it, and I'll be happy if I have the privilege of feeling like I'm just starting to put down roots and getting to know this coast within my lifetime.

**Q:** Once you'd found yourself entrenched in that struggle, what was your perception of the media and/or left-wing organizations who made the Walbran their cause? What kind of people surrounded you, and what sort of power dynamics ran through that social space?

**A:** I was dismayed to see that NGOs like Sierra Club and Wilderness Committee were allowed to table at the 2016 Kax:iks convergence. Among many other misdeeds— and setting aside the wider problem of the treacherous, parasitic non profit industrial complex in general— just a few years prior, these groups went behind the backs of Indigenous land defenders to negotiate the

Sellout of the 'Great Bear Rainforest' (a marketing term they devised). The GBR deal ensured that a large percentage of old growth forest in those territories would be logged, while the grassroots movement was putting their lives on the line for an end to old growth logging.

As part of that 'Big Green' swindle, groups like Greenpeace have completely abandoned the matter of logging on the rest of the coast, including so-called Vancouver Island, having used it as a bargaining chip in their negotiations with the logging companies in their GBR 'victory'. Greenpeace was once at least some kind of player in wide ranging direct action against logging, dropping banners off the roof of the legislature and providing material support to blockades.

It seems as though a fierce, largely grassroots (at times with major anarchist factions/tendencies) culture of resistance to logging was a force to be reckoned with... from the first ever logging blockade in so-called BC—the successful Indigenous defense of Meares Island in the mid 80s—to Kax:iks, to the Elaho, to Bear Mountain, to the 2010 Olympics. As far as I can tell this resistance has dwindled in recent years... By my reckoning, due to repression (Green Scare, West Coast Warriors, Olympics, No Pipelines graffiti raid), gentrification (pushing people away from the coast, and making it harder to maintain grassroots/anarchist infrastructure) transphobia and TERFs sowing division, and.. Understandably, many people, including some anarchists turning away

from social movements towards nihilism. In this context, NGOs have taken up so much space and resources—that could otherwise be used for grassroots direct action—entrenching dogmatic white liberal reformist politics, thereby helping to neutralize and recuperate resistance. I want to do what I can to rekindle anarchist and grassroots resistance.

**Q:** Do you remember having anything like a ‘win condition’?

**A:** To me, direct action is all about taking responsibility for ourselves, and in my own mind is practically synonymous with the concept of anarchy. Resistance is life, and so on. I want to enjoy life and therefore, I enjoy resistance, and try to be a joyful, playful rebel.

Experiencing pleasure and fulfillment from these activities always feels like a win to me. Direct action is everything from learning about foraging and subsistence, to supporting a suffering comrade, to actively resisting industrial expansion. I formerly saw these activities as paths that occasionally intertwined; I now see them as continuous and inseparable from each other.

**Q:** Trees, potentially, are mysterious and powerful beings. Has your perception of trees changed much in the last 20 years?

**A:** My perception has changed greatly in the sense that I now know much more about the difference between an ancient forest and a tree farm, It seems to me as though science (and especially most recently mycology), has lately been affirming aspects of what we already should’ve known from Indigenous relationships with and teachings about the biosphere, and our personal intuitive understandings of forests and other ecosystems. It’s sad that some feel the need to clinically dissect these webs of life to understand them.

**Q:** The organizing around the Fairy Creek blockades is not an anarchist-forward process— although I believe it strongly borrows from principles rooted in anarchism — and it remains to be seen how this movement will be carried or influenced by various ideologies. What do you see happening on this front line, or what sort of things happen on other front lines that cause you concern or maybe bring you hope?

**A:** In a roundabout way, the pathetic, mind numbing routines of NGOs who do nothing to prevent old growth logging and as I described earlier, in some cases actually promote it) have helped created the circumstances in which something like the Fairy Creek blockades came to be. I’ve so far been impressed in my personal experiences by a few qualities of the grassroots people—many of whom are disillusioned former supporters of NGOs—that came together around Fairy Creek:

- accepting the presence of anarchists from the start, without question or debate.. And, broadly speaking, attempting to organize at least quasi-anarchically even if not self-identifying as anarchists
- knowingly embracing the importance of remaining nimble, informal and unaffiliated, not predictably self-isolating as “Friends of Fairy Creek” or something along those lines
- encouraging people to start blockades elsewhere on the Island or so-called BC rather than converge at a single place in Pacheedaht territory

Some concerns are a lack of decolonial analysis among some, and/or conflicting views of what that is, and an almost total absence of anti-capitalist analysis coupled with strong reformist tendencies. The open hearted invitation to the blockades by Pacheedaht elder Bill Jones, the presence of Tla-o-qui-aht elder Joe Martin (veteran of BC’s first logging blockade on Mares Island), the offers of rides for and increased involvement of Indigenous blockaders, the offer of free rides to the blockades from West Coast Trail Bus—these are all interesting developments—we’ll see what happens!

**Q:** Do you believe there will still be much work to do if and when we lose all island old growth? Is defending old growth, for you, getting at the issue itself? Or is there a deeper issue you seek to halt by involving yourself in a process like this?

**A:** What happens if we 'lose', what happens if there's no old growth left? As far as I'm concerned, life and resistance will go on. Some who lack an anti-capitalist and/or anti-colonial analysis, or perhaps fetishize the concept of old growth forest as untouched or uninhabited by humans, may feel that old growth forest is all that's left worth defending. There's also the 'respectability'/'public opinion' that weighs on some of the more liberal minded folks, who think we're riding a wave of popular opinion that supports protection of old growth. They see resisting other logging as a step too far, and seem unconcerned with resistance to non old growth logging that's been happening in various places on the coast the last few years.

I think it's been a bit of a stretch for some of these folks to move fairly rapidly from blockading logging in one small area, to trying to spark a movement to end old growth logging... It will be interesting to see what happens if some people take more radical and generally anti-industrial, anticapitalist actions against logging.

I invite anarchists who are interested in anarchist/autonomous forest defense, at Fairy Creek or elsewhere, to get in touch at [forest\\_autonomy@riseup.net](mailto:forest_autonomy@riseup.net)

For more background on Teal Jones logging in Pacheedaht Territory:

<https://bcblackout.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/smashtealjones2016-web.pdf> #OldGrowth-Blockade

-yew seed

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This zine was made by hands on the territories of the L'kwungen and WSÁNEC Peoples, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and the Saanich Nation. The interviewer is a settler, as is yew seed. The interviewer thanks yew for the generosity of their time and experience. "The Walbran Valley/River System" is the English name for Kaxiks in Nuu-cha-nulth. Be:tadt is the Diitiid?atx name for what in English is called "The Fairy Creek Watershed"

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