

Identity Crisis?

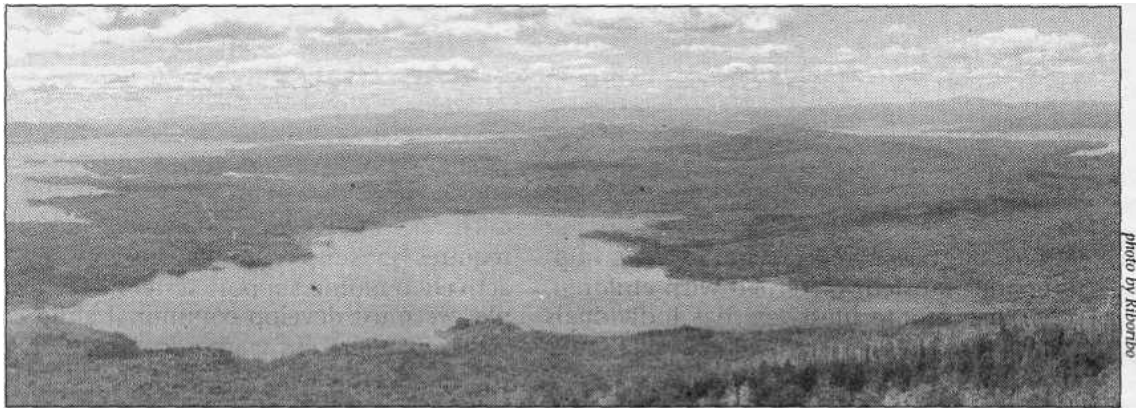
The Maine Regional Rendezvous Explores the Future of Earth First!

Fiver and Burlap

1 July 2008

Despite clouds of black flies and a little rain, the Maine Regional Rendezvous was an awesome success. A lot of great workshops and discussions took place, including one entitled “EF! Philosophy.” The intention of this discussion was to talk about EF!’s past, present and future. Looking at EF!’s history, we identified three distinct waves of change in the movement, and we attempted to identify what changes it is going through now. We didn’t make it to talking about the future, so we decided to have a second workshop to facilitate that discussion. These workshops are the focus of this article.

Many folks felt that a lull in activity has led EF! to relive early adolescence, as we once again try to figure out who we are as a movement. The first workshop defined some unifying points within the movement. People spoke of working to better ourselves while maintaining our identity as a group based on deep ecology, direct action and no compromise in defense of Mother Earth. It was clear that these unifying points still define many of us, both as individuals and as part of the larger Earth First! movement. We worked collectively to define where we’ve been, in order to work through the difficult times that we’re in right now.



Moosehead Lake, Maine, where the Regional Rendezvous took place

In the first workshop, we also discussed two major trends that characterize our most recent identity struggles. The first trend is the shift from wilderness defense to more of an anti-infrastructure strategy. Practically speaking, this means that EF! bases are migrating from rural areas into cities. Theoretically speaking, EF! is becoming more embedded in anti-capitalist and anti-civilization rhetoric and is losing a lot of its biocentrism. It is important to look critically at how this shift is impacting EF!.

The second major trend we focused on was anti-oppression theory and practice. Anyone who has been to a Rendezvous or has opened the *journal* recently is probably aware that there is currently a large amount of energy being spent on this topic. A major point of the discussion was how we could see less talk and more rock on the matter. Folks often ponder how EF! can grow as an increasingly diverse movement. But during our discussion, a different set of questions arose: How can EF!, as it is now, support a broader movement through campaigns like the Minnehaha Free State and Black Mesa? Based on an analysis of privilege, can we use our privilege as a tool and resource to accomplish common goals, while simultaneously working through our own shit so that we can be better and more accessible allies? How can we do this and still maintain the unique strategic spot that Earth First! has historically occupied?

During the second discussion, we addressed other trends, including repression and upcoming possibilities of creating new free states. However, the question of wilderness versus anti-infrastructure and the dilemma of how to move anti-oppression from theory to action are the main issues occupying and dividing the movement. It's unclear exactly how to get past this, but hopefully reflections like these, conversations at gatherings and the testing of new ideas will be helpful.

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