

STANDING UP FOR THE CASTLE

BY NIGEL DOUGLAS,
AWA CONSERVATION SPECIALIST



*Rick Collier is arrested
by RCMP officers near
Beaver Mines.*

PHOTO: © D. THOMAS

*“They put you in a box so you can’t get heard
Let your spirit stay unbroken, may you not
be deterred”*

- Peter Gabriel, Wallflower

Rick Collier doesn’t look like a criminal. He’s a respectable-looking sort; early seventies, grey hair and glasses and a neatly trimmed moustache. But Rick and three other Albertans—Mike Judd, Reynold Reimer and Jim Palmer—recently spent four hours in a Pincher Creek jail cell. They were arrested February 1 for standing up for their passionately-held belief that the forests of southwest Alberta’s Castle region are worth more in their natural state than they are if they are felled and turned into so much garden mulch.

Thousands of people have written letters and made calls to the premier’s office to protest the Castle logging. Hundreds of people have attended rallies in Calgary, Edmonton and Beaver Mines. But how many of us would have had the strength or the courage of our convictions to face

arrest in defence of our principles?

“In jail, they take your belt, your wallet, your glasses, they put you in a solitary cell,” says Collier when we meet in AWA’s Calgary office to talk about the events of that day. “No looking out, nothing to read, nothing to do.” He looks around the office and points at the large, 9 foot by 3 ½ foot board table. “The cell was about twice the size of this table,” he says. “It was built to be hosed out, with a plastic mat to sleep on.” Collier reflects on how “you lose

*“What’s legal is not always what is just. And
what’s illegal is not always what is unjust.”*

- Rick Collier

your humanity” when you are thrown in prison. “You are being video-taped the whole time,” he says. “I had taken off my wet jeans, so they took them away.”

In fact Collier, an American by birth, has been arrested twice before. “Once was in 1961 in the U.S. doing civil rights work. The other was in 1967 in an anti-war protest down in the States.” But that

was all more than fifty years ago: “I’m not a radical as a pastime,” he smiles.

Collier describes himself as a “climber, hiker, backpacker, runner, skier...” He has climbed all but one peak in the Castle. “I know all the valleys, most of the ridges,” he says. And over the years he has developed a profound respect for this spectacular landscape: “Some of the most regenerative times I’ve had have been in the Castle,” he says.

So when he heard about the plans for Spray Lake Sawmills to clearcut log in the forests he loves, it struck close to home. “They had all their quasi-legal ducks in a row,” he says. “This one seemed such a travesty and so illogical.

There are other places they can get toothpicks from.” Which is when he decided that it was time to get involved. “I said to myself: ‘This is one I’ve got to put it on the line for’.”

There is no doubt that the logging program in the Castle—120 hectares of clearcut logging in a critical water catchment area—is deeply unpopular amongst Albertans. Two opinion surveys



The first Castle tree bites the dust, February 1 2012.

PHOTO: © D. THOMAS

carried out in southern Alberta in 2011 found that 79.5 and 85 percent of respondents respectively were “strongly opposed” or “somewhat opposed” to commercial logging in the Castle. Around 150 people attended a rally in Beaver Mines on January 22 to protest the logging; another 170 attended rallies in Calgary and Edmonton on February 14.

On January 11, despite bitterly cold temperatures, local residents established a protest camp in the planned logging location near the hamlet of Beaver Mines (see timeline). Collier travelled down from Calgary a number of times to lend his support, including attending the January 22 rally. By the end of January, it became clear that things were coming to a head. Protesters had been issued trespassing notices and a draconian court order by the Alberta government to leave the site. In fact the court order banned named protesters from all public land in Alberta: nearly 400,000 km² of land, or around 60 percent of the whole province! The startling court order read: “The

parties shall not occupy or use any other public lands in the province of Alberta unless otherwise authorized to do so.” The RCMP made it clear that, if protesters were still at the site on February 1, arrests would be made.

But as Collier points out, “what’s legal is not always what is just. And what’s illegal is not always what is unjust.” When he talked to staff from Alberta’s Forestry division on site, he asked them: “Is there a split between the head and the heart here? Are you a bit sad to see the forest destroyed?” But apparently there was no internal debate going on there. “They had a self-satisfied look,” he recalls. “One said, ‘no I like seeing this’.” Collier pauses as he tries to remember the old Upton Sinclair quote - *It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it!* His jaw then sets in a firm line as he says: “Maybe that’s where I decided (to get arrested). I knew the talk was going nowhere.”

February 1 witnessed a uniquely

Canadian protest. RCMP officers arrived with coffee and donuts for the protesters, complimented the protesters on their respectful behaviour, then informed them that anybody who remained after 8:00 a.m. would be arrested. “Those of us who would like to be arrested – where would you like us to stand?” asked one protester. (see the video at www.pinchercreekvoice.com/2012/02/logging-protest-arrests.html#more) Three protesters – Mike Judd, Reynold Reimer and Jim Palmer – remained on site and were duly arrested.

Collier took a different course. He left the site as requested, walked along the right of way until he could see the huge feller buncher machines ready to begin clearing trees, and then promptly went and sat down in front of one. “I sat right down next to it,” he says. “They are awful machines and it was terrifying with the noise.” The police moved in quickly to arrest him and drag him away. “I’m pushing 71,” he says, the emotion still raw. “I had tears streaming down my cheeks. It was a combination of the stress

of the whole morning and being all alone. Knowing this was the last stand, maybe for the whole area.”

The same day, Alberta government staff also issued the same shocking court order to five protesters to stay away from all public land in Alberta. Mike Judd, award-winning author Sid Marty, and three other local residents, Gordon Petersen, Tim Grier and Diana Calder, all became *persona non grata* in the province’s forests, mountains and public spaces.

Subsequently, the devastating court orders were removed and the charges against the arrested protesters were quietly dropped. This did not sit well with Collier. “I would rather have my afternoon in court and be able to say a few words if it would advance the cause,” he says ruefully.

So was it all worth it for Collier? “Personally it was worth it for me to have made a stand and done what I could,” he says. “Were there any alternatives? I don’t think so. We don’t have many options any more.” Collier has had plenty of time to reflect on his actions, and the situation in the Castle, and he sees it as part of a much bigger issue. “I’m beginning to see that all this stuff is interconnected,” he says. “It’s economics, it’s lifestyle, it’s consumerism. We deal with all the little leaks in the tent, but we don’t want to question all the values of our current lifestyle. You have to put the pieces together, do what you can locally, but not assume that’s enough.”

Ultimately, did all of the letters, the telephone calls, the protests and the arrests make any difference? Despite public opposition, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development continues to allow Spray Lake Sawmills to clearcut the trees. The battle was lost, but what about the war? Public opposition to clearcut logging continues to grow in the Castle and in many other communities that are fed up with this woefully outdated forest management technique. SRD’s justification of the need to save the world from the threat of rampaging wildfires or ravenous pine beetles looks increasingly shaky. Albertans clearly want a new paradigm for managing our forests and we want a role to play in how decisions are being made on our behalf. Hopefully you kept such thoughts about forest mismanagement at the front of your mind as you voted in the provincial election. 🐻

Letter from Pincher Creek Jail

“So here we sit today, four old men who have joined the thousands of voices in Alberta and around the World, the voices for wilderness, wildlife, water conservation, forest integrity, sustainability, healthy recreation, and everything that is good and beautiful in the Southern Alberta Eastern Slopes.”

“Why don’t you make the real change you promised, and that you have the authority to make, and stop this betrayal of the public trust?”

Letter to Premier Alison Redford from Pincher Creek Jail. By Mike Judd, Rick Collier, Reynold Reimer and Jim Palmer

Castle Protest. A Timeline

- **January 11:** despite the frigid temperatures, local residents set up a protest camp in the planned logging location.
- **January 19:** Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) serves the protesters a *Notice of Development* under the *Public Lands Act* to vacate their camp immediately.
- **January 22:** more than 150 people attend a rally near the proposed logging site to protest the logging.
- **January 23:** SRD issues trespassing notices to the protesters who remain at the site. The protesters file an appeal.
- **January 26:** RCMP and the SRD staff serve protesters with a Court Order to vacate the area and dismantle the camp. In fact, the order bans named protesters from all public land in Alberta, nearly 400,000 km² of land! The court order states: “The parties shall not occupy or use any other public lands in the province of Alberta unless otherwise authorized to do so.”
- **January 30:** a court order is served requiring the protesters to cease their “trespass” on public lands. Protesters are given until February 1, when the RCMP will begin making arrests.
- **February 1:** four protesters (Mike Judd, Rick Collier, Reynold Reimer and Jim Palmer) are arrested by RCMP for declining to leave the Castle logging protest camp, despite a court order to do so.
- SRD officers and RCMP also serve a Court Order against five more protesters. The Court Order was served against Mike Judd; award-winning author Sid Marty; and three other local residents, Gordon Petersen, Tim Grier and Diana Calder.
- Road clearing work at the site begins.
- **February 3:** the Court Order is appealed at the Alberta Court of Queens Bench in Calgary.
- **February 23:** in a negotiated agreement, provincial officials decide not to charge anti-logging protestors who were arrested on February 1. Protestors who were named in the related Court Order will not be appealing that Order in court. Lawyers for the protestors, and the Crown’s lawyer, reached an out-of-court understanding where no further action will be taken against those arrested, and where the Court Order will be allowed to expire.