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FREE-WHEELING AND CONTROL-FREAKING

Maff, Bristol

I was out ‘hill walking’ on the day and night before the start of the summit, with a hastily assembled affinity group. Due to a chronic lack of planning, we ended up blundering around, *Dad’s Army* style, from one Section 60 search to another. The exercise was made far from pointless, however, by a chance meeting with two local kids, Paul and Gregor. We approached them for directions, got talking, and they agreed to take us down a lane not on the OS map that the police were not patrolling.

They played it cool and aloof for a while, but then started asking us questions about why we were there, and what we were protesting about. We told them the truth about the eco-village (a different perspective from the ‘G-Hate camp’ image of the local media), and illustrated how we felt the Western stranglehold on trade affected normal people, like them, on the other side of the world. In turn, they told us of the way the massive police operation in the area had affected their lives.

The day before, Gregor had been freewheeling past the countless riot vans in the village, giving a bit of front as any teenage kid would do. They would give him a hard-stare, he’d give one back. After several lazy fly-pasts, he started to get annoyed – these English ‘polis’, in his village, on his main street, giving him attitude just for riding his bike? So the next time he went past, Gregor gave them the finger, before wheelying away with his pride restored.

SHUT THEM DOWN!

Two minutes further down the road he was flagged down by a riot van, surrounded by eight polis in stormtrooper gear, and subjected to a Section 60 search. Section 60 searches are supposed to be used to search for weapons in order to prevent a terrorist attack. Here they were being used as an excuse to get revenge on a 15-year old kid who hadn't shown the necessary 'respect for law and order'. Gregor was humiliated and furious, as were Paul and the rest of their friends and families. So, when they saw us and heard our story, they were more than happy to help us out in any way they could.

So, to anyone who feels disheartened by having their own plans thwarted in the face of a watertight police operation, take heart from this story: they may have won the battle but every day, in every town, city and village, the control-freaks are losing the war.