



Ben White's Yucatan Diary

Yucatan Diary Day 1

Progreso, Yucatan (January 3, 2005).

Things are beginning to heat up on the Mexican seismic front. Today journalists bounced from back to back press conferences across the 16th century city of Merida, the capital of the Yucatan province. First, they heard from the government that the seismic experiment slated to begin this Saturday out from Progreso represents a huge leap forward for humankind's knowledge of the Chicxulub Crater, combining the intelligence of five countries of scientists. They were also told that even though the tests do indeed involve pumping almost unbelievably loud sounds (up to 255 db) every 20 seconds during daytime across over 3,000 kilometers for almost two months directly into the living oceans, the experiment will do absolutely no harm.

As for the whales, dolphins, turtles, fish and countless other creatures, the scientists say they will just move on.

Only since actually putting my feet on the ground here have I come to understand a little of the human tragedy involved in this venture.

Here come scientists from around the world in a ship owned by Columbia University through the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory—the Research Vessel Maurice Ewing. With bills paid by US citizens through the National Science Foundation, they come here to the northern coast of the Yucatan to make sounds so loud that they can penetrate many miles down into the earth's crust. Never mind the fear people have here that this kind of repetitive shock waves could trigger another horrific earthquake across this delicate peninsula of porous rock honeycombed with caves.

And never mind that almost everyone along this coast fishes for a living, except for the few who eke out a living from a struggling tourist trade. Twenty to 25 thousand fishing folk along this coast. All of the little villages along the coast are fishing villages, or trying to be. Catches have been down by more than half over the last two years. Catches of the preferred fish are down more than that. One thing is for sure about these seismic airguns- they do not benefit struggling fisheries.

One of the main sources of fish is Scorpion Reef just offshore from Progreso. The other source of almost everything small and essential are the endless mangroves that separate the true mainland of Mexico from the barrier beach strip where Progreso is located on the northern coast of Yucatan. This vast experiment will affect both.

When I have talked with people involved with seismic work about the consequences of their work with local fisheries, they elbow me in the side, give a wink and say, well it's actually good for fish and bad for fisheries- we just move them along. The fishermen shouldn't be whining anyway because they are the main source of decline of the fisheries, they say.

I wonder if they would be so cavalier if they actually met these people. I come into a little town absolutely raw—an old gringo in a jeep who speaks barely acceptable Spanish—putting my flyers up on telephone poles and talking to whoever will listen. A couple of old guys drinking beer in the cool of a Sunday evening. I come over, greet them and hand the oldest one my flyer with the big "ALERTA" across the top, telling of this killer ship coming to the Yucatan. I tell them about it. More people gather around us. Soon there are over a dozen. All the men are fishermen. They have heard of this, a little. They have no doubt that the seismic test is really for oil, not just scientific knowledge. They ask me how the scientists know it won't cause a tectonic shift like in Asia. I tell them I don't know how the scientists can apparently be so smart and so stupid the same time. I show them the number on the bottom of the sheet where they can call if they see anything strange- lots of dead fish or a stranded turtle, whale or dolphin. I say we really need them to be our eyes along the coast. At this they smile big toothless grins and promise to help. These folks have a visceral sense of environmental awareness and kindness. They pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Christian counterpart of the Mayan goddess of the Mother Earth. Unlike trying to curry support on an issue in the United States, they instantly get it and are eager for information and connection.

Now that we have a date when the blasting is slated to begin—this Saturday—a million strategic details must be ironed out, despite lacking large chunks of information. According to press leaks, the Maurice Ewing is not even planning on touching Progreso as planned and will be supplied totally by helicopter or launch. Hmm, I wonder why? Too bad. I was looking forward to the crew seeing all of the telephone poles along the little tourist strip in Progreso papered with our alertas.

So now we have to prepare a fisherman's boat to take us out and find them. Food, fuel, water, batteries, film. I went ahead and told the press today that I am planning on jumping in the water next to the ship to force them to turn their earth shaker off. Now a bunch of them would like to join us. Looks like there will be a couple of Mexican lunatic volunteers and myself to keep a human body in the water, one local fisherman driving his boat with a son or two to help, and the rest filled up with seasick journalists out on a mission to find the barco asesino, as it is called here in Mexico, after killing two beaked whales in Baja in 2002. I have arranged a small plane to fly out to find the ship and relay to us the coordinates.

After this journal entry is sent, I will go east along the coast road for a hundred miles or so to paper the poles of as many little villages as I can find. The sun is blasting, the iguanas and tarantulas are out, and the noreaster still flaps the flags and shudders the palapas on the beach. And this old activist is jazzed to be gearing up to battle again and happy to be getting such a warm reception. Win or lose in this fight, the argument will not be the same.

Thanks for everyone's good wishes. I wear them like magic amulets of protection.

Love and Revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 2

Yucatan.

Long day. Fifteen hours on the road. Yesterday I drove as far east as is possible along the coast road that runs intermittently across the top of the Yucatan peninsula, from Progreso to De Colores, stopping at each little fishing village to put up my alertas and talk to fishermen.

Imagine it—on my left is a narrow beach strip, first with fancy homes, then poor villages. On my right are endless mangroves. The perpetual ocean wind rolls across the road, thick with the smell of the swamp—salt, rot and fecundity. Frigate birds sail above, stark narrow commas with nary a flap. At one point I notice a pink smear against the dark trees above the water, stop the car and pull out my binoculars. Sure enough, hundreds of conch-pink flamingos, plus great white herons, cara cara birds overhead, white pelicans and clusters of ibises in the trees. The whole area looks like the Everglades did once long ago. Absolutely precious and irreplaceable. And it runs the entire length of the top of the Yucatan.

This time out I refined my sales technique a little. Coming into a village, I hit the little markets and chatted up the storekeepers, the nerve centers of the communities. Then I posted some of the alertas on the telephone poles. Worked like a charm. I realized that one of the reasons I am enjoying this most basic of grassroots activism so much is that it gives me a legitimate reason to approach these people who would normally be a little reserved being approached by the likes of me.

I walked into one place as a man was reading today's *Por Esto*. When I started telling him about the brochure, he lit up and said, "Oh, I was just reading about this," and turned the paper over to the picture of our Monday press conference with Rosario, my colleague in Merida, and myself pontificating from behind a table. Thus enshrined by the press, I was suddenly a rock star.

In another place, a tough old man sits in a dark corner of his store, his fisherman's face all sun leathered and wrinkled. I shake his gnarled fisherman's hand and give him a flyer. And he jumps up, tells me to wait for a minute, walks into a back room and brings back a very tidy manila file and opens it against the counter. Inside appears to be every article written about the Maurice Ewing in Mexican papers for the last year or so. You could have knocked me over with a feather. He then thanked me profusely for standing up for the pueblos in fighting this monster, grabbed my hand with both of his and asked for a bunch more of the flyers that he could pass out to everyone.

Unbelievably, the next stop was even better. I was working a zocalo, a village square, passing out the sheet and talking to fishermen. With one sheet left, I spied the local cop leaning against a pole talking to a middle-aged man. Thinking that I should give him one of the papers to let him know what I was up to, I approached the two of them and started my spiel. The middle-aged man introduced himself as Victor, the local school superintendent. "Would I be willing to talk to the kids at school?" he asked. "Sure," I said. "When?" he said. "Anytime you say," I replied. "How about right now?" he asked. "Vamanos, y mucho gracias a usted," I answered.

Minutes later we were at the school. Victor introduces me to the principal and calls all of the kids to crowd into one classroom. The teacher looks less than thrilled about Victor taking over his class, but the kids are happy about something new happening. About a hundred packed the room, with about 50 more giggling and shoving at the windows looking in.

I gave my speech, which was then elaborated on by Victor, who primarily seemed to be interested that anyone could actually make a living doing what I was doing. Indeed, I, too,

am surprised and thank my lucky stars that it is so. Turns out the kids are the children of fishermen. All of them were especially interested that we were asking for their help to let us know if any stranded creatures wash up; that we need them to be "our eyes" along the coast.

Now just about every single fishing village from Celestun on the west coast of the top of the Yucatan all the way to De Colores has been papered by the flyers, and at least some of the people have eagerly taken the flyers. Every single person I talked to thinks this seismic test is a bad idea being pushed by arrogant scientists with the collusion of bought-off governments.

Unh huh.

Much of this coast is an ecological preserve. The villages of De Colores and Rio Lagartos are smack in the middle of the mangroves and a big biosphere preserve with signs up everywhere to not dump oil or cut trees or shoot birds (and on how to avoid Dengue fever by controlling the mosquitoes). Many make parts of their living taking tourists out in their little boats to see the crocodiles, flamingoes and other swamp life. But all agree the fishing is just not what it was, and often the boats go out and return with only a handful of fish.

Now for the news, the rumors and the baloney flying about the imminent arrival of the Maurice Ewing. It appears that there are now serious concerns about this seismic study within the Yucatan government, at a time when the federal government is increasingly considered out of step with the states. Turns out there is one more stamped document remaining that the ship does not have. There may in fact be a way to stop this legally through the maze of Mexican courts. So today we scurry to do whatever we might on that front.

Now it is said that the testing may not begin Saturday after all. Apparently there is substantial concern that with an alerted coastal population, there will most likely be bodies found that will make the whole thing very embarrassing. The attempt is being made to pretend that this is all a study by Mexican scientists, but the truth about the heavy US involvement in the ownership and financing of the ship and the cruise is coming out.

Today we meet in Merida to plan strategy, see if we can find a volunteer pilot who won't charge us \$700 for two hours of arial surveillance, see if any local Mexican folks want to jump in the water in front of the ship with me and make sure the fishing boat we are renting is ready to go when necessary.

If any of you good people know anyone who might like to help finance this effort, we could use it. Any donation to AWI is tax-deductible. I estimate that it will take about \$15,000 to pull off this campaign, if we are lucky. That comes out to less than a dollar per whale and dolphin that the ship has a permit to "take."

Thanks to all for your help, for your prayers and for giving a damn.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 3

Merida, Yucatan.

Back to the big city of Merida. Like going from the pine barrens of New Jersey to the Big Apple. A turmoiled day full of good news, promises of breakthroughs, collapses and sobering news.

First, though, for the travelers among you, my hot hotel recommendations in Merida. My requirements are simple. Ancient yet serviceable. An open inside courtyard with lots of big tropical plants but no caged birds is a big plus. Cheap is good. Ability to get phone calls and access to the Internet is the holy grail.

Two places. The first is the Casa Mexilio, a several-centuries-old home restored by its North Carolinian owner to what it might have looked like then, with the addition of lots more plants and winding stairways and rooms tucked away on rooftops enwrapped with vines full of flowers. Very cool. But what convinced me to book it on the Internet was the names of three of their eight rooms: Chico Mendez, Rigoberto Minchu and Frida Kahlo. I figured that this owner might just be a kindred spirit, and he is. My only small complaint was the failure of the staff to notify me of the large cat opera planned for the middle of the night with lots of singers taking part in great emotional arias to lust and unrequited love, or something.

But now I have found a true jewel. The Gran Hotel downtown Merida, for about \$55 a night. A hundred years old, ceilings about 18 feet high, original tile floors everywhere, a balcony facing the park where I can step outside and pretend to be a dictator hoodwinking the peasants, big inside courtyard, water warmer than tepid and even a reading light above the bed—and a phone!

Okay, before anyone gets worried that I am having too much fun, on to the scary stuff...

The good news from yesterday was that there might be a way to file a certain type of legal paper called a *recurso* in Mexico courts to stop the Ewing from beginning. This angle is being pursued thanks to Juan Carlos Cantu of Defenders of Wildlife de Mexico and my friends in Cancun with Grupo Ecologica Mayab. But then I was told that the price of such a paper would be for us to put up the cost of what the Ewing costs each day to run, with no guarantee of getting the money back even if we win. The cost would be prohibitive.

Speaking of high costs, I also got a revised estimate of what it will cost to hire a boat and hire a plane. The boat will run about \$340 per day with crew—\$3400 for ten days. Even though it is more than I thought, I can't say it is unfair, especially considering the pressure the captain is under not to help me. Then I was told that the price I was quoted of \$700 for two hours of flight time in a Cessna to find the Ewing was a good price!

To rub it in, I spent the afternoon doing print and TV interviews in the lobby of my new fancy pants hotel. With every single Mexican interviewer that I have ever talked to, including those during the Solomon dolphin capture struggle and the WTO meeting in Cancun last year, their primary curiosity is how much our effort is costing, and who is paying for it. They are so accustomed to looking for the graft that it has become instinctive, I think. You have heard of this famous scam, haven't you? Environmental and animal activists, especially those who do direct action, are just in it for the money. All that passion and stuff is just a smokescreen.

Today Rosario, the excellent animal activist here in Merida who I am working with, told me that from everything she is reading, even though the Ewing lacks one final official approval of their daily agenda, it looks like they plan on beginning the blasting on this Sunday, the 9th. So, we are laying the groundwork to leave with the boat on Saturday, take a boatload of journalists along, go do an action and then bring the press back to land. Then we will return for as long as it takes, or until the money is gone.

The press has given me a new title that I considered using today when I returned my rent-a-jeep and had to fill out a form that asked for my occupation—escudo human, human shield. I like it. Sounds like a useful purpose for a body.

I realize that in a way I am playing a game with the universe. If I act like I am not worried about dying, if I can love this life and defend this world as flat out as I can without worrying all that much about consequences, maybe just to be perverse, the universe will choose to let me live long. Sort of like interviews with guys 108-years-old or so who give their secret to longevity: their cigars and whiskey.

Then I got another call from a good friend down here saying that a wonderful thing had happened and that someone important whose name she couldn't say on the phone was going to help us and that the Yucatan government was starting to rethink their approval and that she was sure that we are going to win. Yeah, well maybe. I take more stock in the prayers raining down somehow making a difference.

It does appear that the presence of the journalists and the publicity that we are getting right now will prevent an exclusion zone from being imposed around the boat. That means it is likely that I will actually have to pull this thing off and get ready to jump in the water next to the boat and stay there for as long as I can. If that transpires, and I am able to stop it for the time I am in the water, I will be putting out the plea far and wide for more people and more funding so we can last until the Ewing gives up and, like good Yanquis, go home.

I hope one good thing that might come out of the attention we are getting here is the power of small groups of unarmed individuals to stand up to big governments that have lots of money and still fight the right fight. From talking to all of the incredibly warm fishermen and their families over the last couple of days and observing how they treated me, they seemed to like most that what I was doing was opposed by their government (remember, there were small groups of Mayans still fighting the federal government of Mexico into the 20th century). I may have stepped into hot water on TV today when I was asked what I thought about the governor of the Yucatan saying a few days ago that he could do nothing to stop the Ewing. Stealing a line from my own Green campaign for commissioner I said that I couldn't see any purpose for a government except to protect the people and the earth. And if they were not doing that, what were they doing? The interviewer smiled at that one.

Well, that's how things are down here in Merida on this cool darkening evening just off the town square, where some kind of long tailed crow-like bird screeches in the treetops, where the sad horses stand in front of the dolled up carriages waiting for tourists, where the Indians spread tiny plastic sheets for displaying their kaleidoscopically colored shirts, sashes and little hippy purses, where the guy with the little stand twirls his orange peeler and fills the little plastic bags with the sections, and the bums take up residence on pieces of cardboard across the hard stone benches.

Keep them prayers and good thoughts coming. Many thanks to all.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 4

Merida, Yucatan.

Today is both Three Kings' Day and the 463rd anniversary of Merida's founding, so the main square is gearing up for a major shindig. Kids are walking around with cheap glittery paper crowns and costumes to represent the three "bad" kings that, I am told, skedaddled when Jesus was born (somehow we missed that part of the Christmas story when I was growing up). A sound stage is up and they are testing big fuzzy bass notes now, sort of like having one of those boom box cars the size of a church go by, or hearing the Maurice Ewing ramping up.

Speaking of my looming nemesis, rumors abound. The press has caught fire with the subject now and apparently they just can't get enough. The front page story of the Yucatan papers sold at one of the innumerable corner stands features a long article and picture of the Maurice Ewing (peaking out from all of the rows of bags of chips and lottery tickets). The article in the *Por Esto* from a couple of days ago has four pages in the middle on what the scientists say, what the government says, what our side says. It even carried the complete lists of dozens of international groups that have signed onto our statement opposing this seismic blasting of the Yucatan coast. Today they carried a picture of one of our alerta fliers (designed and rushed by Bryn Barnard) tacked to a telephone pole. Mexican activists have long accused the press of being bought, and indeed there was a time when reporters routinely collected checks from politicians and labor union leaders for favorable treatment. But I find the Mexican press 10 times more interested in environmental struggles than the North American press (you don't refer to the "United States" down here because this is the United States of Mexico).

Some heavy hitters weighed in on our side in today's *Tribuna de Yucatan* (you know, the side of the earth, of life, of the good red road, the side of the greatest superpower on earth—the people not aligned with Bush). First was the Director of Fish for the Government of the State of Yucatan saying that the fishing activity for the entire fleet could be affected by the activities of the Ewing. Then, believe it or not, they asked Archbishop Emilio Carlos Berlie Balunzaran what he thought of the big tussle over the Ewing. He said that the position of the church was that all is well forever when we don't cause harm to the natural eternal. He ended with, "Great is the importance of preserving the animals, and all that has life." Couldn't have said it better on behalf of the Church of the Earth.

So the effect that all of this press attention is having is to make those opposing the test speak up while those who have had the unfortunate position of approving it within both the United States and Mexican governments appear to be scurrying for cover. The idea that we are all being asked to swallow by these really smart geophysicists and officials is that even though this is admittedly a huge amount of sound being pumped out for a long time into a living system, it will cause no damage. Just today, I got through to a friend of mine who works for Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, the Columbia University research arm that owns and operates the Ewing. She said that the difference between my position and theirs is that I think that there could very likely be severe damage and they don't. So I asked if they think that there will even be light damage. They will not answer this one because they must keep the consistent line that it is harmless.

Today I went shopping—an activity I usually despise, connecting the thought of it with the dreaded mall. The back narrow market streets of Merida are like an ancient grimy open air run down mall with 10 times more people, color, passion and real life: orange slice in plastic bags covered with chili sauce with a lime to squeeze over, carts full of dulces—flat pralines, rainbow colored blocks of coconut and fruits made of marzipan. Oh, I guess I am just mentioning the food. There was also the lady with the beautifully (and expensively) embroidered huipil dress, flowers across the yoke against pure white cotton, who also had a baseball size goiter growing from her eyebrow that has closed one eye. She hit me up when I first got here and I gave her 10 pesos. Now I see she is quite successful with gringos, going up to them and leaning in real close with a kindly grandmother's smile. People can't dig money out of their pockets fast enough. Then there is the skinny scruffy guy who appears to be either enlightened or totally nuts. He sports a pair of crimson sunglasses, a huge grin and a double-A battery protruding from each hairy ear.

I went shopping for a big picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe made of wood that might hold up for a little while in the water. Took me about four blocks to find it. I am going to make sure with my Mexican colleagues that I am unlikely to offend folks by using her picture as my own shield and protection when I jump into the water in front of the Ewing. As the Mexican equivalent of Saint Francis or Quan Yin, the protector of all sentient life, it would seem appropriate. The power of the image in arousing powerful emotions of allegiance among those I am trying to reach is also not lost on me.

Usually when I travel, I try to cram my reading with stuff on the history of the country I am visiting. Right now I am reading two very opposite books. One is the *History of the Alluxes*, the mischievous gnomes of the Mayan who apparently loved to cause havoc among the Spanish in the 17th century here in Merida and across the Yucatan. They are all male, little guys made of mud, and really clever. You need to put crosses into your windows made of wood and huano (the palm fronds the old houses are thatched with) and blessed with holy water to keep the little devils away when your town gets infested. Keep that in mind.

The other book is called *Distant Neighbors* and was published way back in 1986 about the government, economics, and social structure in Mexico. Early in the book, discussing the national character of Mexican people, author Alan Riding has the following description:

"Mexico's mestizaje (racial mixture) began with the mating of Spanish men and Indian women, thus immediately injecting into the male-female relationship the concepts of betrayal by women and conquest, domination, force and even rape by men. Just as the conqueror could never fully trust the conquered, today's macho must therefore brace himself against betrayal. Combining the Spaniard's obsession with honor and the Indian's humiliation at seeing his woman taken by force, Mexico's peculiarly perverse form of machismo thus emerges: the Spaniard's defense of honor becomes the Mexican's defense of his fragile masculinity. In practice, this takes the form of worship of the female ideal, exemplified by the image of the long-suffering, abnegated and 'pure' Virgin of Guadalupe and personified by each Mexican's own mother, who is seen as the giver of life and therefore incapable of betrayal."

Now when I first read this, I thought that the writer must be awfully negatively prejudiced toward the Mexican people in general and I almost put the book aside. But the rest of it is so balanced and apparently compassionate to Mexicans it makes me wonder if his theory is correct.

Okay, here are the latest rumors:

-The expected start of the blasting appears to be pushed back at least two more days, from this Sunday the 9th to Tuesday the 11th (fine with me. If we get two days delay for each day that passes, we will be in great shape).

-The ship is stuck in Panama waiting for either permits or crew.

-Several more documents must be completed with the government before the blasting can begin (with the favorable press growing, so does the number of documents they need. When was the last time you felt served by bureaucracy?).

-All authorities quoted are saying that apparently they do not have the resources (or, I believe, the will) to stop this human shield guy. One article about Semarnat, the Mexican office of Environmental stewardship, is entitled "Lava Sus Manos," which means "Wash Their Hands"— that in the conflict between the Yanqui boat and the Yanqui human shield, they were just washing their hands of it and not getting involved.

-It may be that just the presence of the boat and a dive flag without someone actually in the water will keep the Maurice Ewing from turning on their airguns. Maybe, but it will certainly take an initial dive to get their attention. I was also told that the Lamont Doherty is well aware of what I have in mind and will turn off their noisemaker if I get anywhere close.

So we are still hoping for the best and preparing for the worst. I am feeling increasingly convinced that through the resonance of our arguments with the Yucatecan people, we are going to beat this sucker, one way or another.

Goodbye all. Hasta mañana.

Now Merida beckons. Think I will get a cab like a big shot across town and have a bowl of avocado soup at the Habichuela Restaurant. Hmm. Hope everyone sleeps well tonight knowing that the bad kings have split.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 5

No entry.

Yucatan Diary Day 6

Merida, Yucatan.

Executive Summary (for those of you without the time to wade through all the touchy feely stuff): The Seismic Vessel Maurice Ewing is en route, expected to round Cancun today or tomorrow. The government says all requirements are fulfilled, but fishermen, enviros and local police fight. We gear up for midweek confrontation.

Last night the kids took over the makeshift stage below my hotel room's third-floor dictator's window facing the park. Starting slowly, even quietly, with some kind of traditional call-and-response song to call the crowd in, the six drummers and the one guy with the shaker gourd, suddenly broke into a furious polyrhythmic assault too fast to follow. Behind them, up the marble steps and on the platform surrounding the pigeon spattered statue to Señor Peon, wiry boys competed in break dancing with impossible arm strength—handstand pushups with feet kicking wide, leaning *all the way backwards* until feet *almost* touch the ground behind their head and then being able to pull back into a vertical handstand. Wow.

The drumming intensifies. One by one solo dancers appear in the space between the crowd and the stage, some just with all legs and arms flying at once and some with those swinging fire slings. They danced with total abandon, as if they were gathering the world into their bellies and throwing it back out again. One of the lead drummers—shaved head, no shirt, brown and muscled with drum suspended from his neck with a wide sash—courts the dancers, male and female, drumming to their dance. Drum and dancer, sound and fury, they play off each other. Faster and faster the music spirals until the distinction of whether it is the musicians making the music or the other way around disappears. Drummers, break dance spinners, dancers in front, they are all riding the snake—Quetzalcoatl lives!—moving to life, to sex, to freedom, to eternal potential and to everything that isn't dead and cold and rigid.

I hope that force will be with us over the next few days, because we are coming down to the wire here. The bad ship, the Maurice Ewing seismic research vessel, is slowly chugging around from Panama with a whole slew of very important scientists from five different countries. Today or tomorrow, we expect a patrol vessel from the Mexican Environmental Agency Profepa to leave Cancun and meet the ship. when it comes into the waters of Quintana Roo. There they are expected to inspect the ship's papers to make sure all of the conditions of the Mexican permit have been met. It may be that all of the certification for their observers is not in order. It may be that a paper filed today from a Yucatan state representative asking for a delay might grab hold.

But I am expecting, one way or another, that the Maurice Ewing will be here tomorrow or Wednesday. Interesting timing. About a week ago, my friend, animal activist par excellence and Mayan high priestess Araceli Rodriguez, said that we would be helped by a big wind. Tonight a powerful noreaster is predicted to begin and blow for days. Hmmm.

Turns out one of the scientists from Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (the owners of the Maurice Ewing and part of Columbia University) has been visiting the fishermen of Progreso and telling them not to worry: they will go out first with a camera that looks below the ship and fire their smallest airgun one time. If there is any damage whatsoever, they will pack up their expensive guns and very important briefcases and go home. Sounds reasonable, right? Precautionary? Well, not exactly. There are twenty airguns measuring from 80 to 850 cubic inches. All together, whomping away in a deadly chorus, all twenty amount to over 8500 cubic inches of airgun volume. The little 80 decibel tweeter after one shot would show no damage, everything would be declared ready to go and then the array could go ahead and start smacking the surrounding water with over a hundred times more power and pressure every 20 seconds.

Even though I still expect a miracle (indeed there is little else), the ways that this seismic blasting of the Yucatan coast will be stopped by reasonable and legal and proper channels, are quickly slowing to a trickle. Academics at LDEO have the permission of two countries and

the applause of their geophysical colleagues, so they will apparently get the chance find out exactly how the Chicxulub crater was made, no matter what the normal citizens or fishermen have to say about it. It seems to me they have laser-like tunnel vision to so adamantly seek information to salve their curiosity regardless of its effect on the living world.

Scientists seem to have become our modern equivalent to priests because they have shown they can, thorough medicine and technology, save and extend lives. So we have given them carte blanche to screw with the world however they wish as long as they find us a free pass—a way for us to avoid the consequences of our collective abuse of this place. It's a devils bargain. In exchange, they are above us, with more latitude and less responsibility for their actions than the rest of us mortals. You and I are not permitted to play with brutal toys the size of this one. Blessings on those scientist friends of ours with the courage to challenge this moral corruption of their profession and stand up for the whales at great professional jeopardy.

The boat is ready to go. We are making the dive flag to fly and the pole mount for the Virgin of Guadalupe. We may have other fishing boats along with us, especially the first day. My daughter Julia is flying in tomorrow to help hold the AWI video camera and drive away homesickness.

I know that this confrontation will come out just fine. But even in the contemplation of jumping in front of this boat, I start to see life as if it were finite, just a temporary gift. The little detail we all successfully forget. That makes ordinary color and movements and nuances stand in relief. Makes me grateful. Makes me wish I spent more time with my family.

Peace to all. Please send good thoughts or whatever else you have lying around.

Love and Revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 7

Merida, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: The Maurice Ewing is coming, but not here yet—thumpa thumpa thumpa—like the shark in Jaws, ever closer. It's expected tonight or tomorrow in test area north of Yucatan. Press coverage leaps international, thanks to this diary. Alert grandmothers and their contacts. Still looks like Thursday is Get Wet Day #1.

What is it about color in the tropics? Is it just me or does there seem to be twice the number of primary colors down here as in Washington state? Is it that there is just 10 times more light in the Yucatan than the northwest, and that it splinters into jillions of micro-colors upon striking the hard ground and flies into the eyes of artists?

At the market, some vendors sell nothing but habanero-almost-too-hot-to-eat peppers. They sort through a huge pile of both green and orange ones and then build these tall delicate pyramids of the fluorescent shiny orange ones, looking like a psychedelic version of that dripping cathedral in Barcelona.

All of the traditional women walk about awash in colors all the time—little pools of bright flowers across the front, back and shoulders of their white outfits, with just their kind brown lined faces floating there, graying hair back in tidy buns, tied with more bright colors.

I have been building and translating a chart to give an inkling of the depth of our global collective ignorance on the subject of what effect a pulse of sound the volume of 255 decibels (like the Ewing hopes to hit the ocean with every 20 seconds) would be expected to have on the creatures that live within the big rectangular test area across the top of the Yucatan.

Across the top of the graph, leaning to the right like dominoes about to fall, are the names of some of these creatures. There are, of course, hundreds of species. But lets say we pick 20: beaked whales, sperm whales, bottlenose dolphins, boquilete fish, sea turtles, benthic organisms, rays, sharks and on until we get 20.

Across the left side of the graph are horizontal columns with questions. Like, at what point does one hit with this sound cause a startle response? Injury? Death? How about multiple hits? How many times might one creature be hit by one airgun discharge as it bounces from the shallow bottom to the surface and back again? What are the synergistic effects between the seismic airguns and the two active sonar arrays the Ewing has also blasting away at more than 200db?

It will be easy to think of at least 50 of these questions. When you combine the questions with the particular answer for each species, that gives us a thousand things we don't know, just to begin with. And the answers to any of these questions might take years to figure out even if we are cruel enough to try.

But after this sad exercise, the question that jumps out to me is why is the burden of proof on us normal citizens of two countries and more to prove this thing is unsafe, long after the bodies have been washing up? Why isn't the burden of proof on the scientists to prove their big whomping toy is safe before being allowed to play with it outside of their sandbox?

In the realm of governmental controls, they are allowed to do this stuff through the smokescreen of the word *mitigation*. The same word is used for why it is ok to destroy 2,000 year old redwood forests in California as for why it is ok to put enough sound to permanently shiver your timbers into the living waters around Mexico. All they have to say is that we are going to do all this stuff to minimize the effects, we are going to do absolutely everything we can to be careful, except of course for limiting the amount, volume or distance covered by our blasting.

Their (the bad guys) entire claim to safety is based on a concept they know is wrong: that the onset of problems with sound and marine mammals is at a minimum 180 decibels. They figure, with perfect concentric spreading, their source diminishes to 180 after about a kilometer, and with marine mammal "experts" looking hard into the waters, they will be able to see any before they come into harms way. Baloney.

The US Navy and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) collaborated on a modeling of the sound that killed the beaked whales in the Bahamas a few years ago and came up with 138db as the median level of sound that hit those whales. Many stranded. Not one of the population was ever seen alive again. The sound the Ewing puts out is above 138db for far beyond the horizon from the bridge of the ship. Plus, the people in the world most expert

about beaked whales say that with their inconspicuous blows and dorsals, the chances of spotting them on a perfect day is about 1 percent. It appears this detail didn't overly worry the permit givers in the United States (in the NMFS part of the Department of Commerce), who permitted the ship to work at night, too. At least the Mexican government stopped that.

You don't have to prove your mitigations work. You don't need to do any population studies before or after. You just state clearly your little fantasy of how easy it is to clean up your big mess, how you are going to try real hard to reduce mortalities (at least of the glamorous megafauna), then you can blast away until you learn what you want to, and then get your selves back to your nice homes in the States. Its the awesome arrogance of the thing that gets to me.

In 1971, my teacher Rolling Thunder told me that it would be okay to hang around him for a while. I stayed for 18 months. When I first got there we were sitting in ragged old overstuffed chairs in his living room. He made me nervous by looking at me in a piercing way from under his huge wild eyebrows, squinting against the tobacco smoke rising from his corn cob. Finally he said,

"You have an inherited spiritual disease. Your people have already taken our land, our health, our sacred things, our ancestor's bodies, and now you want our knowledge. You are arrogant and all full up with yourself. You have to humble yourself and cure your arrogance before you will free up space to learn anything. See that hill? I want you to go up there and find the worst, ugliest, scraggiest bush you can find up there, whatever is ugly to you. Then I want you to sit there and look at it. Moving. In the wind. Drenched by thunderstorms, lit by lightning, and stung by sandstorms. I want you to stay there until you honestly believe that old bush is at least as good as you. See you later."

Arrogance.

Like an addiction, I am still not healed. But one of my self-treatments is direct action. To try to serve, stand under: understand.

I think about the Mayans who live across this hard land. Many have lost their little chunks of barren limestone where they could at least plant corn and beans. Many have been forced into the cities to work at the lowest wages in lousy jobs (a new friend here works seven days a week at the fish market, 10 hours a day, for less than \$50). But many still make their living from the sea. And almost all are held together by their rock steady devotion to the old ways, by the grandmothers and by the ceremonies that connect them to the land and the spirits.

The Maurice Ewing has every intention of coming and taking without asking or getting permission from the people who will be affected, much less the whale and dolphin or urchin nations. Then it leaves. With knowledge derived by raping a whole sea. No. Unh-unh. Not this time, Maurice. Go home. Call it a day. Figure out better ways to find out stuff.

We are all set, ready to go. Tomorrow we buy food, take it to the fisherman's boat that we are using, pack some blankets and a couple of towels. What else? A book, wetsuit, Virgin of Guadalupe, cameras, coat. Trailing all of your prayers like flowers on the waves.

Ready to load up the journalists early the next morning and head out. Anything can happen.

Stay tuned.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 8

Merida and Progreso, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: The Progreso port Captain changes his mind and declares Manuel Jimenez's boat, the Alacran Reef, prohibited to take human shields and reporters out to confront the Maurice Ewing. Further, he sends a message to all of the fishermen living along the entire northern coast ordering them not to assist us. Maurice Ewing is here, but as far as I know, not yet cleared for blasting. We explore alternative means.

This land has suffered such a long history of successful brutality, only a fool would think that the forces of life and beauty and wonder would triumph today over pure brute power and money. Yesterday I learned about the huge 16th century stone cathedral that dominates the main square in Merida about 50 feet from where I now sit typing. It was built on the same site as a destroyed Mayan temple. Using the same stones stacked by Mayan slaves.

Last night we got the word that Captain Alt Luis Isauro Contreras Garcia (capprogreso@hotmail.com), the captain of the port of Progreso and all of the other ports in Yucatan state, had decided to just say no. He refuses to issue permission to fisherman Manuel Jimenez to take six journalists, three human shields and crew out in his boat, the Alacran Reef, to meet the vessel. Plus, he has ordered all of the collectives and fishermen along the coast not to help us.

Then this morning, gleaning the morning crop of newspapers, I discover that Captain Garcia also was quoted as saying that the Ewing was, for the moment, prevented in beginning experiments. So, for the moment, stalemate.

Except that I expect the Ewing will be cleared momentarily. And the threat I have had explained to me is formidable. The Mexican Navy is allegedly planning on "protecting" the Ewing from the likes of me and my other mojado (wet) brothers. If I jump into the water next to the Ewing, their plans are to immediately haul me away. "To deport?" I asked. "No," I was told, "Just take and keep."

I think about the time we were trying to stop the cutting of Rocky Brook old growth forest near the Dosewallips River in Washington, that last day when 200 of us broke through the police do-not-cross line to march to the little 55-acre forest in jeopardy. Rocky Brook was a refugia, the last area in the whole watershed with the original flora and fauna, to be left for all time to re-seed the surrounding clear-cut National Forest. This is what they were cutting, the seed bank of life, leaving no trees, right down to the salmon stream.

Once through the line, we started marching the five miles or so to the forest. Got just far enough, rounded a corner to find a line of police dogs and a hundred cops with bunches of those plastic handcuffs hanging like garlands from their wide leather belts. We scattered. Pursued, I climbed a tree, of course. They were able to cut Rocky Brook with the might of lots of guns and dogs and cops. The armed might of the state.

Fight like water. Water doesn't fight back, but it surrounds its obstacles. All those little drops of rain. Insignificant little things. One by one hitting the ground, or the old buildings here in Merida with the melting stone faces. Water perseveres. It never has to hurry. Water always wins. We are as water.

Sometimes we win by losing and our opponent loses by winning. If the Ewing and Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory pull off this assault on the seas over the objections of just about all of the Yucatan peninsula with the use of the Navy and multiple flyovers, with the world finally paying attention to the drama, they lose. They cannot put this particular genie back into the bottle now.

I leave Merida tomorrow to look for other boats we can use. I will go back to talk to the fishermen in the little ports along the north to see if they have been so pervasively intimidated as reported. I will not choose, however, any action that could lead to an even tougher life for any of them—if they or their boat is threatened. If anyone out there knows someone with a boat in the Caribbean or Florida that they would like used to protect the life of the Yucatan, please have them contact Susan at AWI in Virginia at 703-836-4300. If prevented from leaving a Yucatan port, maybe we can come in from somewhere else.

The news coverage is, perhaps predictably, rising to a fever pitch, just as I wish they would go away and let me figure out how to go around the obstacles and carry on. Agence France, London's *Guardian*, AP. Radio interview tonight. Big press conference tomorrow. My picture is in the *Por Esto* today with the headline, "BENJAMIN WHITE—YES I AM SCARED." I am weary of it all and just want to join this battle. But never before has a seismic test anywhere been so hard fought, with the din of battle being heard around the world. I see from the Lamont Doherty Web site that the amount of seismic shots has been reduced 38 percent from that "originally planned" in order to reduce the potential effects of their sound blasting. We have the seismic industry scrambling to clean up their act, which is highly in need of it.

I will do anything that I can think of to get out next to that blasted blasting ship. Even though I generally distrust true believers of any path, I have not the slightest doubt but that this seismic experiment is a really bad idea. But if I am unable to stop the ship with this mortal coil, I will start patrolling the northern coast for bodies of my brothers and sister critters who have no choice but to be too near to the ship. I will increase my canvassing of the fishermen for their help. My understanding is, with only an Incidental Harassment Authorization in hand, the death of one whale, dolphin or turtle would exceed the ship's permit from the United States and cause the "re-initiation of the public consultation process," meaning the jig would be up. I called the Office of Permits of the NMFS from Merida last week and asked for an explanation of exactly the things that could shut down this study. For example, if we find an endangered turtle dead from no apparent reason on the beach, is this enough? Or will there then be a big argument as to whether the Ewing caused it? I have learned not to trust the process. We'll get right back to you, they said. A week later still no answer.

I am in this for the long haul. After over 30 years of activism I shall not be daunted by a bad day. I want to stop the Ewing from blasting these waters. But I want more to get international regulation of the release of manmade sounds from seismic, sonar and ship traffic. Weirdly, a brutal victory of the Ewing here could generate such global antipathy for this antiquated method of obtaining information that it will serve the greater effort. I hope so. We will be going to the UN this year to make our argument. Of course, it hasn't escaped

our notice that we are stepping on the toes of the oil and gas industry as well as the military industrial complex.

But what's the fun of going after easy targets?

Mexican culinary mysteries to close the page:

Why is it that Mexicans only eat sea animals (fish and shellfish) during the day, never at night?

What are those roots for sale that look like giant garlic?

How does the twirled leaf I bought from the Mayan grandmother cure nose and throat problems when swirled around the mouth (but not bitten) 9 times?

Why is lime and pepper put on everything, especially sweet things?

Like other tropical places, the curtain of night doesn't fall slowly but of a moment. It is light and then it isn't. I give thanks for the lessons of another day. Death has no struggle. Give this fool life.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 9

No entry.

Yucatan Diary Day 10

Merida/Cancun/Merida, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: Maurice Ewing is still frozen, rocking and rolling from noreaster. The issue goes to Mexican Senate. Our side holds a little demonstration in Merida center. Brer Fox? He lays low.

Not all of the picturesque characters down here are Mexicans. I haven't even touched on the eternal primary source of amusement for many Mexicans—the bony kneed, shorts wearing, oblivious, heavily drinking, money disgorging gringos from the North.

The other day this guy came roaring across the flat cobblestones of downtown Merida, frightening tiny horses with blinders pulling carts wrapped with pastel plastic flowers and dispersing flocks of children from Chiapas selling crafts: He was an old geezer gringo riding an vintage *Easy Rider*-type chopped Harley trike with the front forks raked way out in front, long white hair and beard, the latter streaked with chewing tobacco juice. Sunglasses, big round belly. But behind him his family, a lovely Mexicana and two little ones, rode in cushy comfort under a very cool curved metal canopy that sprouted from the frame and stretched above and in front of their heads like a jack-in-the-pulpit flower. He advanced with thunder, the lord of his domain.

Julia and I just rented a jeep and drove the four hours to Cancun and back in order to be filled with optimism by my friend, the Mayan shaman Araceli Rodriguez. I came away as if I had feasted.

When I asked her about what she understood to be happening with the Ewing, she told me that the port captain (whose email address I may have accidentally-on-purpose inserted into an earlier diary entry) had not yet given permission to the Ewing and did not plan to do so until he was sure it was safe for it to operate. Therefore, although the ship can move around (and is now reported to be about 50 miles north of Telchac, just to the east of Progreso) it still does not have permission to begin. It is still, so to speak, frozen.

For what its worth, it turns out that a bunch of Mayan practitioners of hocus pocus may be responsible for keeping the Ewing frozen. This was accomplished by taking pictures of the Ewing from the paper and putting them in their icebox. But they didn't want the people on board to suffer, they wanted their experience, even though their work is frozen, to be "sweet." So they put some honey in with the picture. I am not kidding.

Araceli gave me an old Mayan frog whistle to blow for help, an owl feather for seeing through things, and a piece of paper with a picture of the Angel of Beauty to show me a way through. She gave me a primer on how to listen beyond all of the static and attention and fear to my heart.

Okay now boys and girls, we are going to try our own magic. A noreaster is now battering the northern Yucatan coast and is expected to continue for a couple of days. Meanwhile, hopefully, the Ewing can not let out their airgun arrays in the heavy seas. The weather coming here comes from western North America. But regardless of where you live, I need you to go outside, face the Yucatan peninsula and blow. Nice long breaths, how about ten of them. Imagine them rolling on down here, through the Texas scrub, across the palmetto, over the heads of the dolphins (who are in the loop) until it arrives to the Caribbean coast of Mexico, where it disappears like a zephyr, except for keeping the Maurice Ewing in a gentle state of rock and roll—just a little too much to work in.

Tomorrow I will take all of the details I have learned about this study of the Chicxulub Crater and attempt to meet with port commissioner and Navy Captain Luis Isauro Contreras Garcia in Progreso. Plus all of the studies I have accumulated which document the problem with intense underwater sound and living creatures. I ask for all of whales, dolphins, fish, turtles and eels that could be affected by this blasting to speak through me to this man. You be my muse and I will translate into Spanish.

The whole fight has now taken on more twists and turns than a DNA molecule. Greenpeace and Defenders of Wildlife in Mexico City came out last week saying that the real purpose of this experiment is to look for oil. When asked about whether the information obtained from this study could be used for that purpose, apparently the UNAM (University of Mexico) head of the project, replied, "Pues, si" ("Well, yes."). Personally, I just don't know.

It appears that Greenpeace and Defenders had more than a simple reason for bringing this up. Part of the Mexican Constitution (article 27?) says that Mexican citizens are the owners of all Mexican resources. If the Ewing, a US flagged vessel, is secretly looking for oil, it is a contravention of Mexican law. Today's *Tribuna de Yucatan* carries a story that Senator Orlando Parades Lara is denouncing the presence of the Maurice Ewing in the National Senate of Mexico and will in the next few days present a notice of nonconformance

concerning the vessel because of the strenuous objections of the citizens of Yucatan to the presence of the ship. This movement is in addition to a similar one within the Yucatan Council of Deputies, where five have now taken up this cause.

Rosario and her group, Yucatecans for Animal Rights and their Habitats, held a rally in downtown Merida this morning. When I asked her if she wanted me to speak, she said no, I had better not. More noise is flying around about the possibility of my being deported, and I couldn't be seen doing anything that might be interpreted as political. So, I was holed up in an Internet cafe nearby, getting ready to write this, when she buzzed my (much hated, infernal, brain irradiating) cell phone. "Come over quick, okay?"

The press was hungry and wanted new meat. Rosario warned me first to be careful and not say anything about us protesting or about my plans to jump in front of the Ewing to force them to turn off their sound because I would then come across as a radical or a terrorist. Boy, we have really fallen into the bottomless pit of newspeak if that T word has now been stretched to include unarmed human shields trying to stop the use of tools of unimaginable violence. And I don't even use the word protest anymore even in the states. I am never protesting. I am affirming. Life. Personal responsibility.

So when one of the heads looking out from the mass of arms and tape recorders and cameras asked me what I was going to do now to stop the boat I said that I had great faith in the leaders of the people of Yucatan that they will do the right thing, stop the boat and protect their people and waters. And that the purpose of my coming down to Mexico was to work with the people here to stop the ship. I have no particular necessity for going swimming if the ship can be stopped in other ways.

This whole project has been jammed down the throat of the Mexican government and I think they would be happy to find a reason to cancel it. For a country of such size, importance and pride, Mexico has been treated poorly almost automatically by a succession of US administrations. This seems more of the same. We are coming. We want. Step Aside. Thanks (or not). See ya.

Julia and I went swimming yesterday in a cenote halfway back from Merida, just outside Valladolid. Our little guide led us into a dried out cave, the formations long since deprived of their lifewater. But then he turned a corner and the big blue lake lay before us. The original cathedral, the original kiva. Huge domed ceiling arching to the five foot diameter hole in the center, softened with ferns. Tree roots started at the ceiling small and then branched and branched until they became a big root mass club right at the water, hanging down a good 50 feet. The stalactites taper the other way, fat at the top and skinny at their blunt bottoms, looking exactly like the suspended arches in the Canterbury Cathedral ending in the incongruous pagan greenman faces looking down at the faithful. The cenote is, of course, sacred, but it had the atmosphere of a neighborhood pool with the local folks cooling off in the clean sweet water.

Questions from the peanut gallery:

This weeks winner of a genuine magic AWI decoder ring is Mark Palmer from California for his question concerning the use of crosses made of hueso (thatch palm) and sticks, blessed with holy water to keep the mischievous little Aluxes mud men from causing havoc with your neighborhood. Ever the perceptive smart alleck, Mark asks whether the same can be used to protect neighborhoods from Republicans. I certainly understand the need and

desire, but my understanding is that the specific remedy for such a plague is different: Dreamcatchers soaked in patouli.

Folks, I never would have believed how this campaign would have taken root with the Yucatecan people or how this diary would resonate with anyone. Maybe its easier for me to open my heart to all of you because I don't see you. But I sure do feel you. And I believe that one way or another, we shall prevail. Please keep all of that good energy flowing.

A special hello to Susanna and all of her students and 10-year-old Stephen.

All right now, everyone go outside, face Mexico and bloooow.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 11

Merida and Progreso, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: Obliging, the noreaster shakes the palms. The Port Captain still has not given the Ewing permission to operate. They wait, with permitted days running out, spending \$30,000 of your dollars a day. I have a meeting with Port Captain tomorrow to show harm.

The wind from the north is blowing and blowing. The local Yucatecans have bundled up in jackets and sweaters. Lovers huddle closer in the parks, pigeons grip their little positions on the facade of the old church even harder. Out in Progreso the waves come rolling in, all churned up with sand. And straight out there somewhere rides the crew of the uneasy Maurice Ewing, cooling their heels.

A middle-aged man grips the worn steel handle of the wooden cart, pulling it heavily laden with living plants, root balls swaddled in black plastic bags, palms and carnations and roses sticking out the top, buffeted by the wind. When the traffic stops, he stops, standing in line like a dray horse behind the motorcycle without a muffler blasting him in the face with a rat-a-tat-tat nasty leaded gas exhaust. He just waits, implacable. The traffic goes, he leans into his load, and heads towards the central market.

Really good news today, if it pans out. I have set up a meeting with the Port Captain of Progreso for tomorrow morning to show him all of the reasons I believe that the airguns of the Maurice Ewing constitute a legitimate threat to both the ocean life and the families that rely upon fishing along the northern Yucatan coast. This was the man who decided not to allow Manuel Jimenez, the head of one of the local fishermen's unions, to take several of us out to go swimming next to the Ewing accompanied by the press. But he has also, so far, refused to grant a permit to the Ewing to work, saying he had not yet been convinced that it is safe. My mission tomorrow is to demonstrate that any reasonable person reviewing the history of the ship and the latest scientific studies would conclude that it indeed is not.

I will also suggest that if he decides to allow the experiment, he do it only after requiring the posting of a fianca (a bond) to assure that the ship does not damage the fisheries. This would involve the placement of a large sum of money—say sufficient to cover the loss of a year's

fishery—under the control of the Mexican government until a good while after the completion of the study and zero loss of creatures could be demonstrated.

A spokesperson for the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory was quoted in one of the local papers as saying that this particular experiment is not a big deal, that they have done 50 like it and that the only difference this time is that they are working under the glare of those NGOs. That's us, folks. Stand up and take a bow (and for those of you who haven't picked up on this acronym-speak, an NGO is a non-governmental organization). He also said that the only way he can see the tests being stopped now is if some Mexican politician picks up the drumbeat from the local newspapers. Yup.

I am so psyched about my meeting tomorrow I am trying not to set my expectations too high. I know that still, anything can happen. I may sit with my translator all day like a potted plant. But I hope that I get the chance to lay out the argument. I have many doubts about many facets of my life, but not my ability to convince a fair minded person given the time. This man strikes me as fair minded. Just hope I actually get in to see him.

Even though I cannot complain about my living conditions, I wish this battle would end in victory so I could go home. What nut would trade lovely and sunny Merida for chilly and rainy Friday Harbor, Washington? This one. My home, my kids, my dog, my boeia plant and the foundation of my future home to finish. Even the endless drip, drip of the rain and running out to get firewood from under the tarp.

But until the Ewing retreats northward like a cruise ship without a party, I will be here. Driving, walking, even sleeping, I wrack my brain for what detail I have forgotten, some approach I haven't tried, some person I could meet with, or that one more document I need to translate into Spanish. Yeah, I know, obsessed.

I am hoping to hold another press conference this week with Rosario to give them the same translated evidence I am giving to the Captain (much of which can be found on the awionline.org website under marine mammals/noise/seismic).

At the market, I sit talking to Veronica at her job selling mariscos (shellfish). Her friend is there, too, with her year-old son. I am showing them how to use a digital camera. Veronica is taking pictures of the little boy and both of them are cooing and sighing over how he looks on the back of the camera. The boy has not only a severely deformed lip but the split also continues into his upper palate, pushing out his teeth in all directions. At his mother's urging, the boy smacks his hand with his lips and throws a kiss at the camera. My heart breaks. Like in India and other poor countries, the plight of the poor is hidden less than in the United States. There is no welfare or medical aid to the poor here. They are right out front, doing the best they can.

But my Lord these people are kind to me. Many living around my hotel have now seen me blah-blah-blahing on TV and in the daily newspapers and greet me by name as I pass. The shop owners and hammock salesmen have even stopped hitting me up for a sale because I started teasing them that just because I am a gringo didn't mean I was a tourist. I live here, I say. Maybe it's because I grew up in Spain, but I have always warmed to Latino people. Their faces are so open and their eyes such warm brown pools that I feel like going swimming in there for a while.

Luis, the hammock salesman from a little town 45 minutes away, is almost exactly my age. I sit with him on the iron railing surrounding the park trees as he halfheartedly tries to drum up business from the gringos headed to their hotels. If he doesn't sell a hammock that day, he doesn't earn the 10 pesos needed to buy a bus ticket to get him home that night. I have told him if he runs short to let me know and one night he did. He catches the last bus home at 10:30 and catches the first one back in the morning. So much for the racist and elitist fantasy that the poor are just lazy. He tells me about his 11-year-old son he lost two years ago. I ask him if he can at least grow a little food for himself and his family and he patiently explains that he could until his pump broke and he can't afford a new one at 2,500 pesos (\$250). He wasn't hitting me up for the money, just telling the story of his life very matter-of-factly. Before I leave this hard and beautiful land, I would like to arrange to get a pump for Luis and his family, if anyone out there would like to help me do it. I don't care much for her music, but Sheryl Crow is right when she says that, "Everyone has a story that will break your heart."

Please stay with me tomorrow (Tuesday) when I talk to the captain. Bring me all the power of all of the creatures of the world to convince this man to take a leap of courage against very powerful forces. Sometimes words can be magic. If the good captain decides to say no to the Ewing, then we all get to go home. Otherwise, I continue to look for a boat that can take me out and prepare to look for bodies along the beach. Keep your fingers crossed.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 12

Merida and Progreso, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: The Maurice Ewing still rocks off the coast, equipment ready, but not deployed. Blow wind blow. This pilgrim meets with the Port Captain. He listens carefully, says to take my evidence of harm to others in government. Okay. I will.

I write in my normal Internet cafe right off the main square in Merida. Cold fresh-squeezed orange juice with a straw at hand, the Beatles playing "With Love, From Me To You." Dark. Photographs of old Merida with Model T's and guys with Pancho Villa mustaches. Just outside, a busy sidewalk raised over a foot above the cobblestone road, jam packed with businessmen in their guayabera shirts, hustlers, Chiapas Indians selling rainbows, mothers shepherding kids in classic traditional wear—little boys with hair slicked back, little white panama hats with black bands, no collar white shirts and white pants. The girls with long huipil dresses with gardens of flowers embroidered around their necks.

Okay, for those of you just tuning in, here is a brief program to go with the ongoing play:

This is a story about the people of the Mexican state of Yucatan fighting the attempt of a bunch of scientists, mostly from the United States, to blast away at their northern Yucatan coast with seismic airguns in order to study the Chicxulub Crater. Such blasting uses sounds up to 255-262 decibels and penetrates many miles down into the Earth's crust. The echo of each blast, when caught by streamers towed by the same ship that makes the noise, gives an image of what the strata of the earth looks like down there. The sound also flies through anything living in its way.

What gives the story poignancy, in my biased opinion, is the lopsided might of the opposing sides. On the one hand we have the taxpayer funded National Science Foundation (4201 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22230, USA Tel: 703-292-5111, info@nsf.gov) footing the bill in this ill-advised quest for knowledge. Then we have the Research Vessel Maurice Ewing owned and operated by the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University (President- 535 West 116th Street, 202 Low Library, Mail Code 4309, New York, NY 10027 USA Tel: 212-854-9970, Fax: 212-854-9973). These are biggest of bigwigs among the US scientific establishment, the bluest of blue bloods. And, ranked up behind them like the evil hordes in *Lord of the Rings* are the real sources of resistance to stopping the emission of intense sounds into the oceans: the US military (who likes its sonars and dislikes change- especially when called for by citizen mortals), and the Oil and Gas industry (who, with fifty-dollar-a-barrel oil has great incentive to pound away anywhere they can looking for it, especially if they don't have to deal with the consequences, like now.)

Ok and on the other, heroic non-Goliath side we have a beautiful ex-dentist in Merida named Rosario Sosa Parra and her little Yucatecan Animal Rights group, a force of Nature disguised as a regular housewife and Hotel owner in Cancun named Araceli Rodriguez and her group the Mayan Ecological Group, a renowned Mexican poet and writer and his once-American wife Homero and Betty Aridjes, a huge fisherman from Progreso who heads up one of the fishermen's unions- Manuel (El Grande) Jimenez. And one middle aged lunatic (moon-lover) activist from the states thrown into the salsa mix. And all of youse guys up there and over in Japan, and Europe and down in South America rooting for us and blowing up a storm.

The Ewing was permitted to work down here since the 3rd of January and was ready since about the 8th. With a combination of old fashioned flyers spread all along the coastline in almost every fishing village, good luck, lots of prayers, deputies in the Yucatecan legislature, Senators in the federal government, awesome international press coverage, the growth of a rock solid opposition movement in the Yucatan, Rosario's contacts and poise, Araceli's magic and positivity, Homero's editorials, a good man in the position of Port Captain, and lots of wind coming down from the north, the ship has still not emitted one peep from its seismic airguns. And now it looks like the Ewing's research plans are slowly dying of a thousand cuts. The official word is they have all of the permits they need and can proceed at any time. But when people in Mexico really don't want something they have a way of being difficult to push around. Like everyone else on earth who eventually gets a bellyful of being told by others what to do, they tend to get the slows. They can see a lot of ways they can be harmed by the Ewing and no way they can be helped.

I met today with the Port Captain of Progreso and the entire Yucatan coast to give him all of the evidence and information that I have showing that the use of twenty seismic airguns banging away at 255 decibels or more will harm fish and fisheries and marine mammals and turtles. Before I went, I was working on the order in which I would present my argument. I picked up this little piece of paper Araceli gave me the other day with the Mayan frog whistle and the little owl feather. On it was written:

"The frog as a goddess represents the vessel of transformation that is initiated by the power of your voice. Your voice can heal your heart, heal others and teach the long-silenced language of the Goddess. Tell your story. Let your own voice, your own rhythm fill the world. Speak the words that can set the energy in motion for global change. Say the words—make it so. And listen carefully to how the wind brings your reward back to you. Speak from the

center of your heart, use your voice to import feelings of strength, honor, sensuality, courage, sacredness, joy."

Now I don't know or care if Araceli wrote this. The importance to me was that it was exactly what I needed to hear and resonated just right. Always did love frogs. Maybe that's why I have ended up flapping my mouth for a living.

I went to see the Port Captain bearing just-translated documents showing many studies of how low frequency sound wrecks fish and fisheries. I explained how the Ewing should not legally have received an Incidental Harassment Authorization from the US government because it is a shorthand form of permit only allowed when there is no *possibility* of severe injury or death. This cannot be honestly asserted in this situation.

I showed him the paper from the prominent US scientists who found the bodies of the beaked whales in 2002 that the Ewing killed, who point out that the level of sound that killed the whales in the Bahamas (138db) extends 15 miles from the Ewing, assuming simple spherical spreading of sound energy. By the way, one of these scientists told me that when they found the whales they radioed out to the Ewing for help in towing the whales in to have their bodies necropsied. "Sorry, no," they had said.

I told him of the resolutions in the International Whaling Commission, the European Union, ACCOBAMS, and the World Conservation Union over the last eight months that have unequivocally recommended limiting intense manmade noise released into the oceans.

I spoke the best I could, and I took an interpreter with me to make sure it was clear. I left confident that this man will do the best he can. But he also recommended that I take the same documents to the person in Semarnat—the Mexican Environmental Authority—who signed the permit for the Ewing to work. The Captain also told me, after Ken Hollingshead at NMFS waffled on the issue, that if a body is found he could temporarily halt the project (assuming it is ever allowed to begin.)

The wind is blowing so hard in Progreso that no one is swimming. The tourists off the tour ship rocking at the end of the pier huddle on the concrete benches, heads down below the blowing sand. The grass lays flat, showing its silver backside. Some kind of spiral legume pod blows rolling across the road, looking like big brown worms that have discovered a new and faster mode of transportation than the standard stretch and catch-up method. The gulls hunker down above the surf. The palm trees click out a fast telegraph. The flamboyant trees, bereft of their fluorescent orange flowers till May, shake and shudder their lacy Mimosa fronds.

Aspects of this long fight against this particular scientific experiment have taken on the feel of both a passion play and a black box problem. Sometimes I feel like I am trying to see without eyes and grasp what can't be felt, trying to spot that ship out from the coast, when it certainly rides beyond view, trying to read the thoughts of my opponents and get there before them, trying to understand the world like I struggle with fluency in Spanish, looking for hints and gestures.

What I am trying to protect is much more real, concrete, here. These people have it hard enough without having it harder. Unless these really smart scientists can promise the people here that not one creature will die in their quest for more knowledge about the Chicxulub Crater, they should just bugger off. How dare they mess with this place? Precious, fragile, life

already on the edge. I am reminded of what Edwin O. Wilson said about the idea that one could rebuild a tropical rainforest in a different place using the components of a wrecked forest. He said that would be like shaking the bible out into all of its component letters into a big pile on the floor and then fitting them back again, with no guide, into how they used to be. Can't be done. We hardly know anything (so lets make some kind of killer machine to find out!).

The morality play aspect is this: this little tempest in a teapot down here is one of a million struggles to take back this world from the machine, from the sick psychology that this world can be both our uncontrolled toilet and sacred spring, and that it will still continue to be here if we forget all of the levels of respect that we have been taught by our old ones forever- yep even us gringos. This is one of the thousands of places around the world where we are saying that here we draw the line, just us regular folks. No more dams, no more flooding of ancient villages, no more clear-cutting, no more jailing and murdering of our leaders like Martin Luther King and Ang San Su Kyi. We will fight peacefully but with Oriental tenacity. And if we die, more will fight until we win. Remember Dien Bien Phu? It heartens me to think that perhaps only now when the fat cats are at the trough in the United States, and the corporations are going for the whole shebang, that the entire civil movement of the world has been woken up. Maybe the threat needed to become global for the solution and the healing to become global. Don't try to tell us anymore that seismically blasting a coastline is good for humanity because a few of our scientists might have their curiosity satisfied. Don't tell us anymore that environmentalism, animal protection, and human rights are different or opposing struggles. We have your number. We don't believe you any more. Go play with more creative toys.

This diary is now going all over the place and I am very grateful to everyone for their kind wishes and prayers. I walk brushed by the wings of angels. I have never felt more on point and blessed, and I think it is due to your support. I will try each day to deserve your kindnesses.

This campaign and my salary are being paid for by the Animal Welfare Institute. Tax-exempt contributions (Thanks, Deb!) can be sent to Animal Welfare Institute, Box 3650, Washington, D.C., 20027.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 13

Merida and Celestun, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: Fishermen report that the Ewing is laying out cables preparing to begin blasting. I talk to fishermen in Celestun, get good leads. Still windy, still cold. We translate and get ready for Friday press conference on evidence of harm.

The lotus is a Hindu and Buddhist symbol of enlightenment, a flower of exquisite beauty that grows and unfolds from the darkest mud and foulness. I nominate the orange as the equivalent symbol in Mexico. Like the Israeli sabra, the desert flower that comes from the toughest spiny plant, the orange grows well across the shallow Yucatan limestone soil. On the hottest days, it presents such unlikely spheres of sweetness tucked away in there

amongst the long green thorns. When they have nothing else to sell, the poor folks line the road with their pyramids of oranges—Mayan enlightenment—whole with their skins, peeled to their white inner velvet, or cut up into a bag with, of course, lime and hot pepper.

Reminds me of the story of a whole big family of people in Europe during World War II cherishing a very rare orange they happened to get on the black market. Maybe it was Ann Frank's family. But what I remember was the joy at being able to have an *entire* slice. And to enjoy a skinny bubble of flavor at a time. Plain old oranges. All of the commonplace miracles around us!

This morning I was a little saddened to hear the Ewing was reported to be readying their gear just as I was watching the trees out in the courtyard from my room *not* being buffeted by the wind. But I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions. By the afternoon, you folks had woken up and started your daily constitutional of blowing towards Mexico to gently rock the seismic ship Maurice Ewing just enough so they cannot begin blasting the life of the Yucatan with their airguns. Still no word from the Port Captain or other government officials that all is in order and the Ewing can begin. Every day that passes, we win another day without the assault by sound.

Thanks to Bud Abbott of Strategic Environmental out in California for hurrying me information about the effects of sound in the water that I could share with the Port Captain. Bud works with Caltrans, the California Department of Transportation, to reduce the effects of their bridge building on fish, including building bubble curtains to catch some of the pressure from pile driving. Bud reminds me about the snapping shrimp that filled my ears one night when I was trying to break the orcas out of the Victoria B.C. marine park after they had been sold to Sea World (but before they were moved).

Snapping shrimp are the big gunslingers of the Spongebob Squarepants world down there. They go up to things they want to eat like benthic organisms and plankton, cock their claw, and let it slap shut. Pow! The little things die and get eaten, at many orders of magnitude less powerful levels of sound than what the Ewing is using. Bud says, concerning the Ewing guns, "I suspect the impact on the food web could be very significant." And, "If the skipper of the research vessel is willing to put his head underwater at 5 meters from an airgun and let an airgun go off then I guess there is no reason to forbid them to do their work." Sounds imminently fair to me. What ever happened to do unto others? Did that admonition exclude benthic organisms?

Back in the early 1900's when the Pope was asked to intervene on behalf of horses subjected to cruelty on the streets of New York, the Holy See responded after a while in the negative, explaining that horses have no souls. Guess they never met a horse. But benthic organisms and planktonic creatures are such a generator of different forms of life, it seems that a good argument could be made. Maybe to someone else.

Speaking of tiny life, my daughter Julia and I took a boat out into the mangroves near Celestun today to spend a little time together before she has to fly home on Friday. If you look down into the coffee-colored water, it is like looking into soup a-swim with lots of squiggling things. Microscopic minnows fill the spaces between the mangrove roots that grip the mud. Ibises and great white herons, white pelicans launching and forming into a V, immature flamingoes not yet pink, osprey overhead cruising, pterodactyl-like frigate birds with forked tails soar, throats white against black bodies. An 8-foot alligator with mouth agape lies on a chunk of concrete protruding from the water as if pretending to be dead so

we come and put our heads in his mouth. And dotting the shallow water as far as you can see is a strange sight, men down in the water leaning against their little wooden boats, catching shrimp. Seems they throw out a net with its mouth held open by a triangular frame. Ropes coming off each corner of the frame are attached to the barquito, which is then pushed in front of the man walking in the water, theoretically scooping up the shrimp. I was told they do alright for their long day in the water—on a good day catching 5 kilos of shrimp, which they can sell to the local restaurants for 100 pesos (10 dollars) each.

If the ship has not started its pounding of the coast by Monday, I will probably go to Mexico City, here called Day Effie (as in D.F. for Distrito Federal), to deliver my translated evidence of the harm the Ewing can be expected to cause. I need to go see both allies and the people responsible for signing the permit allowing the Ewing to work. Need to unruffle some feathers too. Greenpeace is apparently objecting to the fact that the papers keep saying that I work for them. We are in agreement in this, I would much rather that my real employer Animal Welfare Institute get any credit or attention generated. But no matter how many times I tell them, they still write that I am with Greenpeace. I guess forever more they will be the only group associated with trying to stop a ship at sea with their bodies.

Not really all that excited about going to the big city. The *really* big city—with the most humans of any city on Earth. Of all places! Over 7,000 feet high, so everything has to be shipped expensively uphill, like water. And when they built it, they filled in the lakes of Tenochtitlan, wrecking the floating gardens that helped make it the most lovely city anywhere in the world at the time. So now when they build, everything sinks. They have even engineered the subways so they can flex with the falling level of the soil. But Day Effie is the crazy head of this big country, and it is there that some people could pull the plug on this foolish gringo study by the Barco Asesino.

Give me the countryside and the little villages any day. As soon as you get beyond the ring of industrial plants outside of Merida, the real Mexico begins. In most of the villages, the passing car is outnumbered 10-to-one by bicycles—both the regular two-wheeled ones and, much more numerous, the ones with a broad seat in front between two wheels, pedaled by someone behind in front of one. Often with a surrey on top, just like the old song. These are used for everything from taking grandmother to the store, all tidy and wrapped up in a shawl against the cold, or for picking up bags of rice. We saw a young woman today pedaling with her baby riding in front, wincing against the wind and gripping the metal rail with both hands. Couldn't have been more than 18 months old! In one town some kids had been picked up by trike taxis and were being wheeled home past the ones walking.

Lines of flags, cutout and colored paper of different designs, flutter in the wind across the narrow streets and from the dry ground to the top of the old cathedrals that preside over each town. Speed bumps, sometimes just fat poly ropes, keep the scarce traffic slow. And on either side of the road, the predominant form of home is almost the same as two hundred years ago: stone ovals with the longer side facing the road with a door in the middle. Roof thatched with palm fronds (hueso). Often no windows. Look inside and you see a door leading out the back directly opposite the front one, with a hammock strung on either side. Dark but cool The only bow to modernity is the corrugated tin sheet tied along the peak to take care of the first shedding of water. The stone walls are whitewashed as are, for some reason, all the big trees up to about 4 feet high. Old campaign slogans fade against the whitewash.

We are still looking for a boat to take us out to the Ewing should they begin their nastiness. Lots of leads. Other than this tease, I will keep any progress in this direction to myself until we are ready, for obvious reasons.

One more day of peace for the myriad creatures of the Yucatan. I hope it stays this boring.

Thanks for everyone's interest, prayers, love and good wishes.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 14

Merida and Progreso, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: The wind fades. Ports of Progreso and Yucalpeten open for the first time in six days. Rumors abound, but there is no report that Ewing has begun. Chuburna is up in arms.

I've been thinking a lot about sound. It's strange to be fighting the use of an instrument whose job is the generation of unbelievably huge amounts of sound. Like creating the heat of the sun here on earth and extolling its ability to find out things.

Sound is music, wind through trees, a lover's whisper, the trickle and gurgle of water, a Water Ouzel's trill, plates being cleaned in another room, a crackling fire, a mother's coo (now figured out to have a specific neurological function), a silverback gorilla roar, the banshee scream of a hurricane, Tuva throat singing, all the throat and mouth popping sounds you learn as a kid, a dolphin smacking you with a door creak echolocation.

But we are just pikers in the sound world, us visually oriented critters. Imagine living all your life underwater. Everything is sound and pressure. Everything.

It is said that once upon a time, before ship motors, blue whales might have been able to hear each other all the way around the world, their whole bodies acting as sounding boards, the sound traveling to their jaw, then ear then brain. Maybe using the LOFAR channel down deep to transmit with very little loss like a fiber optic cable.

Ever heard of acoustic daylight? The Navy is very interested in it. The idea is that with a sensitive enough instrument one can "see" with sound by picking up on how shapes interrupt background (ambient) sounds. So you have this continual white noise made of millions of clicking shrimp and waves and whale songs and croaker chirps coming at you and the shape of a turtle passes between you and the static. You "see" the outline of the shape of where the sound isn't. Some people think that this is the primary way that many whales and dolphins perceive underwater: Doesn't matter how deep or how dark. Maybe that's what those big melon foreheads are for. We don't know nothin'.

The best idea of what happens to a deep diving whale when hit by intense manmade sounds like the Maurice Ewing produces goes like this: take a Couviers beaked whale for example, the clearest example of a sonic canary in the oceanic coal mine. When the whale dives, the size of the air in its lungs is about the size of a football. But at 6,000 feet deep, the air

compresses to about the size of ping pong balls and gets squeezed out of the lungs to a little area by the ears. Some of the whales found in the Bahamas that were driven ashore by US Navy mid-frequency sonar had ear hemorrhages leading to brain hemorrhages- about as close to a smoking gun as one can find ("Besa me mucho" plays in the background, "Baysa, baysa may moocho"). But still, Dr. Darlene Ketten (Office of Navy Research funded scientist and apologist and perhaps foremost whale ear specialist) still asserts that the whales died of stranding, not provably from a sonic event. Which prompted Ken Balcomb, legendary friend to whales, to say that Darlene's evasion was like saying that, if I shot you with a 45, the cause of death would be loss of blood?

It sounds like even now, the US government wants to set noise criteria for marine mammals based only on physical injury to ears. A corollary would be for a community to decide that the only noise they would limit is that loud enough to cause either temporary or permanent deafness of its citizens, as if there is no harm from repeated or chronic exposure to sound. Sure, none of us mind at all to be stopped at a light with a jackhammer pounding away next to our ear. Or a car alarm going off. Or a (someone else's) baby screaming next to us.

I have told you all, incredulously, that the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, in explaining why this ship is harmless and they are not total jerks, say that fish and other creatures will just move when the sound starts up. But I haven't shared some of their equally cogent reasons such as:

this is a down fishing season so the fishermen won't be harmed (wrong, this is the most critical season for octopus); they and others have used seismic airguns for years and their is no proof of harm (wrong); there are lots of loud sounds out there like earthquakes and icebergs calving, what's wrong with a little more? (huh?) ; in the grand scheme of things, individuals don't matter, just populations (OK, we wont kill everyone, just your mother); the Gulf of Mexico has been pounded by airguns for years and seems okay (except for the big dead zone).

We need, it seems to me, to step back and think about what it would be like without a living ocean. Once, years ago in this long fight, a vice admiral once told Mac Hawley that if Low Frequency Active Sonar (LFA) could save one American service man or woman on an aircraft carrier then it was worth sacrificing the life of the oceans. Seems like there is a basic misunderstanding of how the world works and the proper ordering of threats. The ocean is our mother. Losing it would not be losing the place we go sunbathe. Losing it would end human life on earth.

The oceans are in big trouble. They only look like they can take anything we throw in them forever. Over seventy percent of the major fisheries are either collapsed or collapsing, despite ex- Representative Helen Chenoweth's incredulity about the fuss about endangered salmon "when you can buy it at any grocery store."

This threatened sound blasting of the Yucatan by the US scientific establishment is not occurring within a vacuum. It is happening when we are desperately trying to figure out how to save some of the fish, the corals, even the krill. Ninety percent of the large prey species are gone already. What morons.

There is a great poem by Gary Snyder in his Pulitzer winning book *Turtle Island*. It was a poem he delivered at the Stockholm Conference for Peace, I think, in 1972. It says something like,

"Rise up ant people, deer people, turtle people and pull back your giving from the arrogant head heavy bureaucrat robots who run this place."

Indeed.

What would happen if we all just stopped cooperating anymore in the funding or supporting of violence? Tomorrow when we wake up. Violence in the name of research, peace, religion, oil, water, clothes, love, drugs, our children, or food. Violence disguised as commerce, efficiency, curiosity, order, security or education. To use our best natures, in harmony and love with the rest of Nature, to walk away from our habits that are eating this world alive. What would happen to Bush and his gang of thugs if we didn't need them anymore?

We don't need our taxpayer dollars going to fund the Research Vessel Maurice Ewing to seismically blast the Yucatan coast and impact the already-struggling thousands of fishing families that live here. And we are not going to just let it happen anymore.

Volunteers today brought in the names of dozens of fishing families in Chuburna on a petition to stop the Ewing. They are apparently really riled and want to raise a big ruckus, have a big demonstration and bring their families. Good.

Another day without blasting. Sometimes the best blessings are the absence of things. Like pain. Grief. Noise. Addiction. Abuse. I give thanks for one more day of just normal life for the creatures here. No big deal. Just plain old life.

Thanks for everyone's prayers and good wishes. It ain't over.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 15

Merida, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: The Ewing begins blasting on Friday, at 6:30 am. Rosario and I hold another press conference in Merida to present evidence of harm (and whine). I go looking for boat that can take me out and accidentally discover a hidden paradise.

Note: Every fifth day of this diary actually includes Friday, Saturday and Sunday and material is gathered for it over those three days.

As the Ewing releases noise on the northern Yucatan coast, I am blasted in Merida by a battle of the bands on every corner. Just outside where I write a stage is set up and some guy is going on and on very loudly. The only difference between it being pleasant and, as now, almost unbearable, is simply volume. Of course the volume outside is probably no more than about 115 db instead of 255db.

With the Ewing experiment begun, forget going to Mexico City. Too late to talk to officials to convince them to change their mind. Like water stopped, I now flow along the coast looking for a way out to that damn boat. West to Celestun, I am told there are no tourist boats.

Progreso tells me maybe, but not now. Finally a good lead in Holbox. I drive about 200 miles there on Saturday, get close, but no cigar, and then drive back to Merida today, Sunday.

I feel like I have been tied to the ground with government red tape and made to watch the rape and murder of my mother ocean in front of me. As I have wondered for years, what is the response of a reasonable person watching the rape of their mother, as all of us are at the moment? I really don't know, because being a lunatic, I do not boast of being reasonable. Anger, denial, resignation? Stuck in the anger phase, I want to fight back but in a way that actually works, not a harmless flailing away. The only cure goes to the root. We have to change how we think about this world.

Just out there beyond the horizon of Progreso is the Maurice Ewing, paid for by myself and my neighbors, waging war against the creature of the water and the fishing families of the coast. And, at the moment, there is not a damn thing I can do about it but object.

Sheer objection is less than I want at the moment, it doesn't satisfy. Rosario and I held our second press conference on Friday morning, just after the Ewing fired up the old airgun array (at 6:30 am). We vigorously presented all of the couple of dozen studies that show harm from airguns to fish, fisheries, snow crabs, squid, turtles, giant squid and sperm whales.

Even though it was well attended, I think the general response was a weary "So What?"

I felt that in our seriousness, and in the irrelevance of our objection and information to the fact that the Ewing was going right ahead, we reduced ourselves to just more activists trying to get attention about something. I hate being just part of a conversation society. I want to act.

Do you know that smaltzy song "Walking in Memphis," (I love smaltz—can't get enough) where the singer is being wooed by an evangelical beauty who asks "Son, are you a Christian?" and he answers, "Ma'am, I am tonight."

I had a similar moment at the press conference when I was holding up a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe that I would take with me into the water (if I could ever get out there). One reporter asked me if I was Catholic and I said, with a smile, "Soy hoy," which means, "I am today," to which he responded to with a knowing smile.

I am noticing the little statues and pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe wherever I go, being held aloft into the clouds by a peasant child. But isn't that a black crescent moon she is standing on, with her cloak of stars? Everything I have learned about the power of spirituality (and physics) over my half century tells me that the question of whether the object of reverence is "real" or not is totally irrelevant. What makes it real is the belief, and the more belief, the more real. There is a heck of a lot of belief across this poor white-rocked land in the Virgin of Guadalupe. In front of almost every home there is a little shrine. I am told that she will listen to me if I pray to her and, with a lot to pray for, I have started. And indeed, she is everywhere. I don't know if the image of this old gringo embracing the power of this image to help protect the sea creatures of the Yucatan is corny, or hackneyed, or what, but I am assured it isn't disrespectful. But at least it is innocent, I come to her like any other fumbling mortal.

Unable to get a boat out to the Ewing, and unable to swim, fly, or walk to it, I pursue leads, all the way to Holbox. Now I have always had this theory about the geographical drift of

wackos—that they tend to go as far as they can until they are stopped by a sea somewhere and there they tend to accumulate in little eddies of interesting folks. Such as Key West, Provincetown, Venice Beach, Nome, Alaska. Under this system, Holbox should be the wackiest, it is so off the beaten path. But it is outstanding in its pleasant normalness.

If you were able to hack through the jungle and mangroves to the west of Cancun, the first little road you would get to going north would be heading to Solpherino and then Chiquilla. Solpherino is home to three "millennium" trees, at least a thousand years old each. I am told that these trees still harbor the children of the alluxes, the little all male (children?) mud pranksters of the Mayan. Looking up into the massive grey elephants feet trunks into the clusters of bromeliads and dark junctures of branches, I have no doubts.

But if you keep going north to Chiquilla and then take a boat (\$4) 20 minutes to the north, you will find the most perfect little Mexican Caribbean town that I have ever blundered into. Pure white (crushed shell) soft sand lapped by the most turquoise of waves. Friendly people without the attitude of those long abused by tourists. No cars! Just a few trucks and a bunch of four wheel drive golf carts. No big hotels, just beautiful thatched palapas at the edge of the endless beach. A working beach, filled with launches with flags out the back of different colors (a code?) Friendly dogs so well cared for I enjoy giving them a good scratch. Standard of living maybe double of the mainland Yucatecan towns. Their secret? Ecotourism and environmental protection. And the whole community is into it. To top it off, in July and August they play host to whale sharks, both babies and adults.

I was late getting to Holbox because I was so sick I couldn't move Friday night and Saturday morning. Felt like one of those butterflies I mounted in a box when I was a little kid with a pin through their thoraxes (the approved way for kids to study nature at the time, complete with killing jar—yes, I am a sinner). Maybe one can carry this cultivation of empathy too far. The creatures of the waters of the Yucatan get blasted so I feel like I am shot through the stomach. But I eventually recovered enough to make the long ride east and then north to Holbox, just in time to meet with an Italian hotel owner who owns a boat and Juan Carrateca, Araceli Rodriguez's island contact.

I laid out the problem of the Ewing and then the plan. He brought out a nautical chart and scrolled it across the table so we could see where the whole thing was happening. I told him what I knew about the Maurice Ewing and why they were doing this. Like almost everybody else in Mexico that I have talked to about this, he was absolutely certain that it was connected to Pemex and its search for oil. He thumped the chart in places where Pemex has already said it wants to drill, one of them right next to Alacranes (Scorpion) Reef. He was upset and angry that the Mexican government would allow such a thing and understood perfectly the threat it presented to his little paradise.

But, when it came to using his boat, he just couldn't. He was a foreigner running a business. The Mexican government has a way of cracking down on those who oppose it in any way. He could lose his boat, his hotel, he said. This was a good looking, strong young man with a very successful hotel on one of the most remote spots in Mexico. And he was intimidated enough by the federal government to demure in helping me even though he clearly wanted to. If it was in Italy, well.... in a heartbeat. I didn't even blame him.

Juan Carateca agreed to meet me in the morning to talk out other ideas. The Italian's boat was a hefty zodiac with a 200 hp motor, but still, he recommended that we needed a real

tourist boat with two motors and at least 9 or 10 meters that could go a long way. And still we need permission from a Port Captain for exactly what we plan to do.

I immediately liked Juan. Tall, a long face, kind eyes, Juan works as a guide to take people out to see the whale sharks and other miracles. He bent my ear for awhile about how hard it is to keep drunk idiots from riding the shark like a horse, buzzing them with jet skies and slicing their dorsals, getting in the way of their feeding on the surface. Juan tells me that one way or another, we will find a way out to the Ewing. And I believe him. Tomorrow, after I take care of business here in Merida, I will head back to Holbox. Juan says, "This is *our* campaign. I am a warrior for the animals, they are all I care about." My kind of guy.

A little more about sound:

The last time I was in Merida was on a trip I took by myself about 25 years ago. Before marriage or kids, before Sea Shepherd adventures, before my second career protecting critters. I signed up for a cheap flight from Miami to Merida that only left twice a week. Hitching from Virginia to Florida, I hit it wrong and had to wait for three days in Miami, where I secretly camped out along the water in the back of rich people's estates, tying my backpack up in a tree during the days. Living on the streets.

When I finally got down to Merida, I headed north to Dzibilchaturun to explore my first Mayan ruins. I then spent the next two and a half months exploring the Mayan centers in the Yucatan, Belize and Guatemala.

It is ironic that this sound attack is going on along the Mayan coast, a people who had a real and unusual interest in the properties of sound. Following a guide leading people who could pay him through Chichen Itza, I watched him clap his hands in front of pyramids. The echo from each one was different and some very strange. One sounds like a rifle ricochet. One has now been discovered, according to a new paper to the American Acoustical Society, that was designed to sound like the call of the sacred bird of the Mayan, the resplendent Quetzal! How do you figure out how to make the echo from a sequence of steps sound like your favorite bird? Our present technology seeks other challenges (like how to more efficiently kill Iraqis).

And then there was the first night I got to Tikal, the huge Mayan city tucked away in the deepest Guatemalan rainforest of which only a little bit has been uncovered. But part of that little bit is a grand square with the two tallest pyramids in the New World facing each other across the square.

Well, the car full of Israelis I was hitching with didn't get to Tikal until dusk and it was already closed. But I have never been much for rules, so I squeezed under the chain across the road and walked to the main square, howler monkeys making my entrance anything but stealthy. I climbed the steep steps of the tallest pyramid, sliding my hand up the cable affixed to the crumbling steps. All the way up to the little room at the top, with its stone frontispiece going on up into the sky. At about 200 feet up, I was above the treetops, just crouching there, listening to a strong wind whishing towards me, rolling across the treetops. Somewhere a jaguar screamed. And then the wind hit the pyramid where I sat, reverberating the frontispiece and using the little room as a sounding board. As clear as a bell, a distinct tone was produced that rang out across the endless Guatemalan swamps, as it has, I guess, for centuries. It seriously spooked me, raising goosebumps on all limbs. As quietly and inconspicuously as I could, I climbed off the pyramid, crept down the road to the

campground where I climbed into my old army mummy bag and pulled it close around my face.

A strange place to be messing with sound. Here where the Mayans clearly used and understood it in a way we haven't a clue about.

The beach patrol for bodies has begun, with two big fish washing up in Progreso on Friday. If I am totally shut down getting a boat I will be relegated to the death search. But I am going to exhaust every single possibility first. Lets all visualize me getting a good fast cheap boat operated by a gutsy believer.

For the moment, I am not succored by the rationale that one can lose by winning, whether the rationale is from me or others. Although, being in the critter saving business, I am used to losing, my intent is still to shut the bastards down.

What we have now is what has always happened—they eventually get their test off. But this one was delayed over a year and has now received attention world wide. Yeah, that's good. But not good enough.

Thanks for all of the kind words, good wishes and prayers coming to me from all over. I am blessed.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 16

Merida and Holbox, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: Maurice Ewing pounds the coast, Day Four. I finish paperwork to extend visa another 30 days (while not at all sure they will allow it) and return to find a rentable boat in Holbox. The struggle continues. The wind picks up again.

"Ah hiv ah always relahd 'pon the kahndness of strangers," Blanch Dubois, *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams.

Ain't that the truth. Without dedicated local folks, outside agitators like me would be worthless. We now have fishermen and volunteers along the coast looking for bodies, Araceli and her group making magic, the Mexico City groups bitching up a storm, and Juan in Holbox scouring the marinas for a boat to take me out to confront the sound monster. But, like most distant disasters, you can't hear it or feel it from the land, so what could be wrong? Remember the part in Star Wars when Obi wan Kenobi picks up on his psychic radar the destruction of a world? That sense would be buzzing like crazy right now.

This assault makes me think about property rights, that buzzword for the unreasonable right, who see the taking of a strip of land out of your backyard to put in a community nature trail an outrageous theft of personal rights. Who does the ocean belong to? One would think that, within territorial limits it belongs to the people of that country, is held in trust for them. And beyond that? Is it the tragedy of the commons—a free for all?

But what happens when governments sell off their responsibility to protect those waters and lands for the benefit of the people? Not just here off the coast of the Yucatan but when the water system of Cochabamba, Uruguay is sold to Bechtel, or the lands of the western United States just handed to anyone who wants to mine, or when the state government of Washington gives permits to the refinery at Cherry Point allowing them to dump toxic material into the air and water and our bloodstreams. To me, that is a treasonable offense. We are not children, nor weak. We do not need government except to protect us and if it specifically not doing that, it is time that it be changed.

My conversation of last week with Ken Hollingshead, longtime employee of the NMFS Office of Permits, still haunts me. He is the one who chaired the public hearings over LFA sonar, and helped the Navy prepare its Environmental Assessment for its future review by....guess who? Ken Hollingshead. As far as I know, he has never turned down a Navy or Lamont-Doherty permit request. In our conversation, Ken made these points:

-Even though it is true that the Ewing's Incidental Harassment Authorization does not permit the lethal taking of one marine mammal, the finding of one during one of the tests would not necessarily call for even a temporary suspension of the tests.

-With manatees, since they are handled by Fish and Wildlife, the death wouldn't even matter.

-The precautionary principle (where, if all data is not known about a conflict between a human endeavor and a creature, that deference is given to the creature) is not the policy of his office and never has been.

-The active sonars on board the Ewing would have negligible effect on anything even though they are over 200 dB.

-That, essentially, any creatures I were to find on the beach dead would be treated somewhat suspiciously by his office because I am "just trying to shut down the Ewing."

I always try my best to be polite to Ken, even though he makes me grit my teeth. This time when we hung up, me calling from a booth in downtown Merida after his office refused to return my call for ten days, I felt like saying, "You know, Ken, it is your business if you don't give a damn about whales and dolphins, but you shouldn't have your job."

Both the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which came into being partly from the charisma of AWI founder and my mentor Christine Stevens, under Richard Nixon to boot, are as revolutionary in their way as the Declaration of Independence. For the first time I know of, we promised as a country to put the consideration of other beings above our individual wishes, for the good of all. To say that some dams and roads and developments would just not be built if it adversely affected wild creatures—whoa—that's powerful. And the MMPA saying that we will set a goal for the death of dolphins in fisheries at a zero mortality rate goal; that every year we would improve a little. Helluva promise. And then comes decades of watering down by the very industries who hurt whales and dolphins: the public display folks like Sea World, some fishing interests, and now, in spades, the US military in their demand for exemption from environmental law. Poor babies. Have you noticed? They are sooo picked on.

Did you all hear about one of the cases used by the military to argue for the Range Readiness Act last year that they were being hampered in being battle ready because they were not able to practice bombing and playing army everywhere they want. For example, a bunch of pansy-ass birdwatchers objected to the Navy bombing a little island out in the Pacific full of nesting birds just because the Navy had no permit under the International Migratory Bird Treaty (one of our oldest international wildlife protection agreements). What a bunch of whiners! They just want us to be unprepared the next time we go looking for Osama bin Laden.

Well, then no one catches the Navy sleeping. They sent, apparently, one of their brightest legal minds to argue the case against these dweebs. He pointed out that the Navy bombing of the island actually helped both the birds and the birdwatchers. It helped the birds by making people reluctant to walk on the island as the bombs fell, and the birds don't like people walking on the island. But the next one is the beauty: He said that it benefits birdwatchers because they prefer watching rare birds- and the Navy was making them rarer. Impeccable logic. The judge said that the Navy's arguments were "creative but not convincing." Wimp. I expect Scalia and Thomas have taken care of the likes of that tree hugger judge.

This evening as I was taking the passenger ferry boat from the mainland to Holbox, I saw in the west a celestial display like I have never seen. You know sun-dogs? The prismatic spots that occur in the sky sometime on either side of and at the same height of the setting sun? I remember in the Deer Hunter, De Niro says they have some particular good luck symbolism (just before they all get sent to Viet Nam, tiger cages and Russian roulette). Well, this was like that but bigger and right above the sun, which was sinking into clouds like behind an agate. A big round colorful prism spot about 10 degrees above the sun. And the sun was setting over there towards where the Ewing paces back and forth, firing their big guns every twenty seconds.

Driving long days back to back for three days has made me as grumpy as a DC beltway commuter. But I have noticed a couple of things:

Mexican villages tend to have their cemeteries, full of little houses, just to the left as you drive west out of town. For some reason, that seems perfect to me—dying into the sunset—lifting wings and flying away.

Mexican working men don't take lunch breaks like Norte Americans. Instead of taking each individual lunchbox out and going by themselves somewhere to eat in peace, Mexican workers put all the food in the middle, draw up stumps or stacks of scrap wood as seats, and eat with their hands all from the same big spread. Like around a campfire. Talking, waving, nodding.

Many of the trees look like they were designed by Doctor Seuss. Tall spindly ones with no leaves at all until bright yellow flowers appear on the ends. Lush green big trees with long stalks full of crimson flowers. Strange beauty.

Well, I've got to run. Juan is here to take me to talk to the guys about the boats, and one won't be here tomorrow. Wish me luck.

Much love to all, and to all a good night.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 17

Holbox, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: Maurice Ewing pounds the coast on Day Five, just (tantalizingly) visible about 4 miles north of Progreso. Boats and gung-ho skippers found. Great expectations.

Stopped by computer glitch from filing my daily missive; I discover how attached I am to it. This is an odd and unasked—for conversation we have begun, you and me, and I am very grateful for it. Somehow, like dreaming, my telling you helps me make some sense out of my day.

I left off this diary running out the door to meet with fellow guerero para los animales Juan Carrateca and the two boat captains he thought might be willing to rent us a tourist boat to get out to the Ewing. They were waiting outside the Internet cafe in the town square underneath the spreading flamboyant trees. We walked a half a block to the Viva Zapata bar and restaurant and sat down upstairs under the raised palapa roof. The two boat captains ordered two tequilitas (just little tequilas) and we got down to business. With Juan nodding, I told them the whole story of the Ewing, but they already knew quite a bit and told *mehow* upset the fishermen along the coast were with the Ewing totally ignoring their livelihoods in their search for ???

These guys were into it—totally, and had already cleared their rental to AWI and their taking me and some journalists out. Now that doesn't guarantee the Progreso Port Captain will agree, but we have jumped every hurdle he has given us to make this trip out to the Ewing legal. So, I guess you folks can stop visualizing bringing to me a committed skipper and a legal tourist boat. Now, if we are able to actually shut down the Ewing for one day, it may actually come down to funding to see if we can persevere. I guess the new thing I need visualized is dollars falling from the skies into AWI so I can continue this struggle.

When it came for setting a price on the daily rental, the captains had to check some things the next day and get back to me at eight that (Tuesday) night. So, I was stuck in Holbox with nowhere to drive or people to agitate for a day. Tough luck. Cut adrift in island paradise.

I walk out of my palapa at the Hotelito Mawimby, hit the water and take a right, headed toward the long curving beach beyond where the cabanas stop and I can see no human being. Nothing hurting, nothing wrong (except for the Ewing working, Iraq, Bush and all of the dark world beyond). But at that moment at that place, it was just the blue-green water swishing in, the wind rattling the palms and palmettoes, ospreys whistling, and the sun warming up the land and spreading the clouds. I walked for hours.

When was the last time you walked a beach? I live on an island surrounded by beaches that never fail to blast me in the face and make me glad to be alive. But I hardly every go. Maybe this is one reason why we find it so easy to dismiss the ocean, stop protecting it. We are not listening to it very often anymore. Seems we only really protect what we feel is part of us—our family, our home—and these frames of reference are shrinking. Now if we saw all people and all creatures as part of us and the streams and lakes and oceans as bloodstreams

and rain a miracle and each moment of sunlight glistening a personal gift from a kind universe, maybe then...

At one point in my walk I accidentally disturbed a big mixed flock of seabirds, each with their own distinct personality: perturbed and whistling oystercatchers, dowdy gulls not wanting to move and the sleek, racing model terns.

I have been asked by some of the people reading this daily diary to hand out some assignments, give people a way to help other than just hitting them up for scarce dollars. I hear you. So I am going to try something, a tiny task a day, sort of like your own chance to do something very small, but important when combined with everyone else. The thing we can all do today is to contact Mr. G. Michael Purdy, the boss of the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

Now, Mr. Purdy seems like a nice guy, but he is about to make a big mistake. LDEO is about to retire the Ewing—that's the good news. The bad news is that they have bought a bigger and better ship to do the same damn thing all over the earth. In fact, the RV Marcus G. Langseth will have even more power to blast the oceans, although out of the goodness of their hearts, LDEO has promised to go no louder than the Ewing. It is intended to obtain more information with fewer passes because that is environmentally safer. Why, one must ask, if it does no harm whatsoever? Why try to reduce the number of passes?

But the mistake is that instead of retiring this stupid old heavy handed way of obtaining information about the bottom of the ocean, they are putting into a new package and just carrying on, as if the world doesn't have their number already. Once dynamite was used to perform a similar function as intense blasts of sound now do with the Ewing. We need to graduate to the next generation of tools. Maybe it would help to let Mr. Purdy hear from us. At this minute the Langseth is being fitted in Narragansett Bay Rhode Island to do more of the same as the Ewing. LDEO has a brilliant chance to change directions.

I suggest that we email Mr. Purdy in whatever is your operative language, and put in the subject line of your email, "SHUT UP, MAURICE," or "MAURICE, WOULD YOU KINDLY BE QUIET NOW," or "MAURICE, YOU CAN SHUT UP, NOW." Something along those lines. And then ask him to lead the world in developing creative ways to find out what they need to know—be in front of the curve instead of behind it. His phone number is 845-365-8348, his fax is 845-365-8162.

Maybe a good story to share with Mr. Purdy is that of the conversion of F.J. O'Reilly, the CEO of Heinz a few years ago. At the time, the tuna boycott was hot. American tuna boats were killing tens of thousands of dolphins yearly by encircling them with fishing nets to catch the tuna beneath. Many of us whale activists were going around to schools to urge kids not to let their moms and dads buy tuna fish. It was enormously successful. One of my colleagues, Shawn White of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society in the United Kingdom, spoke one night at a fancy girl's "finishing" school in Ireland. Unbeknownst to him, one of the girls in the audience was O'Reilly's daughter. When his talk was over, the story goes, the girl promptly had her dad on the line back in the states and asked him, "*Daddy, are you killing dolphins?*"

Within a little more than a week, O'Reilly held a press conference to announce that Heinz (Starkist), the largest packer of tuna in the United States, was no longer going to buy tuna caught by encircling dolphins. And they haven't. And within another week or so, the other

two major packers in the United States, Bumble Bee and Chicken of the Sea, also flipped, forced by the market. Since then, dolphin-safe tuna has been worth far more on the international market than tuna that is still caught by encircling dolphins, and the number of dolphins killed has dropped by many tens of thousands to a number still too high (both methods, of course, are still fatal to tuna—a whole 'nother discussion).

Mr. O'Reilly was smart enough to listen to his daughter, make an unprecedented and bold decision and come out of it leading the industry. Beauty. Maybe Mr. Purdy can be convinced that it is just too late in the life of man on this earth to be using such a device as seismic airguns to find out about stuff (now that the Paris conference just announced that species are disappearing at 10 times the rate of the fastest extinction ever known by Earth.) And don't let him convince you that their pounding is more necessary than ever after the horrible Asian tsunami, in order to find out about plate movement and, presumably, save us the next time. For LDEO to offer such succor at this time is as intellectually dishonest as if I swore to the people of the Yucatan that the Ewing would certainly cause earthquakes. It is the eternal carrot held out by science- we will save your lives- just give us a blank check. Scientists will not be able to accurately predict earthquakes in time to save lives for a long time, no matter how much banging away they do.

Why some science has to have such a heavy hand has always been one of my curiosities. I once developed this theory that there seem to be two schools of field biology working today- the Marlin Perkins school (spokesman for Wild Kingdom years ago on TV, where they would always wrestle the anaconda into submission and cut open its stomach to check its contents) and the Jane Goodall (or Paul Spong) school of research where one goes to where the creatures are, parks oneself there as inconspicuously as possible for the rest of one's life and just keeps track of what goes on with free creatures being what they are. I finally met Jane at lunch at AWI one time and asked her what she thought of my analogy. Never willing to say a bad thing about anyone, she said, "I think you are being a little hard on Marlin." Hah.

At 8:00, I meet with the boat captains and sloe-eyed Juan again. How much will it cost?

More soon about snapping shrimp and acoustic daylight with new information back from our far-flung friends.

Things are getting interesting real quick. Don't go away. Thanks for all of the prayers and good wishes. Oh yeah. Start blowing again on Sunday.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 18

Holbox and Merida, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: Maurice Ewing is somewhere near Sisal; sound attack on Day Five. They apparently cut fishing nets yesterday (oops), which is not surprising as LDEO insists this is a fishing hiatus. The rental boat for us (the forces of good) is contracted and, so far, cleared. We're a-coming, Maurice. Dead fish get turned into (I mean relinquished to, not transformed into) priest of Progreso.

With a contract quickly agreed upon between the boat skipper and myself, we sat talking for an hour about the strange and wonderful critters of the world with the other willing skipper (standing by) and Juan Carateca. I didn't get all of it, but they gave me the Mayan and Spanish names for some of the birds I had seen: mockingbird (who they say has eight, not seven or nine, songs), the brilliant black and fluorescent blue bird with the long tail like a cross between a magpie and a Stellar's jay, the Baltimore Oriole and the two types of hummingbirds (colibri) I had seen on the island. Also stories of the whale sharks that visit (up to 40 in the late summer!), how those other folks over on the mainland take largartos (crocodiles) much too small in order to sell for shoe leather. About the two types of monkey that live in the woods. And yes, of course, about the Mayan goblins the aluxes, or "duendes," as one skipper called them interchangeably, whose existence is as sure as this fleeting life.

I made them laugh describing my bewilderment early in the trip when, one morning scouring the papers for any mention of our tussle with the Ewing, I saw a picture of lots of little things up beyond the treetops in the sky with a caption talking about langostas (lobsters). I was trying to look real hard to see if they were actually lobsters flying around and wondering how the hell they got up there when I finally figured out they probably call locusts lobsters too. Seems appropriate, as opposed to the way many north Americans drool at the thought of lobster or crabs or shrimp but become bilious at the thought of eating, say, locusts. 'Course they're all bugs.

Driving back and forth from Merida to Holbox and back and forth along the little fishing villages of the coast makes me think of the search for petroleum, which is the force behind this seismic airgun technology I am fighting, and my complicity in racing all over the Yucatan peninsula burning that poisonous black stuff. As if to emphasize my dilemma, an odd thing happened at one point in the middle of the long straight road down from Holbox that slices for miles through the jungle. I am just cruising along, my arm out the window, no traffic for miles when, with no warning, WHAM!, a bird hits the window frame behind my left ear and ricochets into the space between my back and the seat—instantly a lifeless mass. Totally against character—I will even stop to look at newly killed wildlife just to see how they are put together and admire them—I quickly grabbed behind my head and, without even looking at it, threw it as far as I could into the trees, with a shudder. Little feathers were everywhere. I looked at one carefully. It was the loveliest green. That is one little person my trip to the Yucatan did not help.

So I start trying to dodge everything. Mainly yellow butterflies with the size and erratic flying of bats. The sun is intense, and as I drive along, long silver snakes of mirage in the road in front of me glitter, slither, and then disappear.

I want to tell you about a restaurant in Holbox. And in case you are wondering how I can do things like enjoy food and walks on the beach when something as horrible as the Ewing blasting is going on just over my shoulder, my only defense is that this work is what I do all of the time, not just now and then. I try to exhaust any opportunity to stop the bad guys, but once I have done that, I try to steal some time to invite my soul. I have learned that I must grab bits of happiness on the fly. Maybe, for me, it's a way to keep going for 36 years of activism, taking mini-vacations of an hour or so.

La Isla de Colibri (the Island of the Hummingbirds) could be a restaurant run by my gourmet chef friends Kate Stone or Laurie and Tim Paul of Friday Harbor. Tiny, just five tables. Snappy polyrhythmic salsa on the CD player. Two sets of double doors fold open during the day,

revealing original and strange folk art. One has a Mayan hieroglyph with faces spelling out the year the restaurant opened (1996). One has a standing green man with brightly colored birds flying out of all parts of his body. One has a play on the Mexican legend of the Eagle with the Rattlesnake tangling above a shell. And the last is a painting of a green guy with horns, arms upraised like a tree, with sprouts and berries coming out of his feet, sides and arms. The waiter, it turns out, is the artist, and he told me it is the spirit that watches over, and brought us coffee. Good on him. I told the waiter about the Green Men of England with the vines growing out their eyes and mouth and ears, pagan symbols representing the male counterpart of Mother Earth and (oddly) found in cathedrals all over Europe. He had never heard of them.

The walls are covered with framed art prints and photographs: Diego Rivera, the God-Adam touch from the Sistine Chapel, watercolors of Mexican homes, the old medieval picture of the guy with a face made of vegetables, Guernica, a Picasso of two women running hand in hand, arms outreached along the sea, one breast on each flying free, a big wooden cross with those little flat copper charms tacked on, the sweet Gustav Klimpt picture of a mother cuddling her child, a photograph of a Mayan girl jumping for joy, and, just as you are leaving—above the door, a final note to endear me to the place—a stern picture of Zapata and a grinning one of Che playing golf. Over in the corner sits an exquisitely carved little bar, maybe 5 feet wide, with a cross centered above all the bottles of booze.

I knew when my warm avocado soup came it would be awesome. And it was.

Why is it that it sounds so strange to so many that one might take a stand to protect the living creatures of the world that might entail physical risk when we take so matter of factly the apportioning of a percentage of our poor youth to die in stupid and unnecessary wars? Mexico is no different than the United States in that we teach our children that it is high honor to fight and die for your country. But only, it seems, in the abstract, if the actual reason for taking the risk is vague. Just how will killing this man (or this old woman or this schoolgirl) in Falluja help protect my home and family? But the idea, to many of the journalists talking to me down here, that I would plan on shutting down the Ewing by getting in the water, makes me an extremely odd duck. Why don't they ask 18-year-old inductees why they are willing to risk their lives to go far away and shoot bullets at someone with whom they have no grievance? At least I know why I act, and why it must be peaceful.

It seems to me like our threats are changing. No longer is it just the barbarians, or Vikings, or Gringos coming to murder us and carry away our children. Now it is poisons just as surely stealing our loved ones through Cancer. Real smart guys like those at the LDEO accepting a little collateral damage to the seas because they want to find out something. The Navy plays around with active sonar and somebody else plays around with HAARP to see if Tesla was really right about being able to control things on earth by bouncing energy off the stratosphere. Our government takes our protection money and funds those we need protection from- the US military and their corporate buddies. The government does not even serve the purpose that the feudal lords once did and give us, in exchange for our servitude, a safe place to run to when the hard rain begins to fall. They lead the world in the manufacturing and export of hard rain.

For what its worth, I think that the only thing there is to do right now, is to fight for the diversity of life—every single thing—every face, every being, every creature's home. That is what I think the Mother Earth is asking us to do in our dreams and in our moments where we stop the busyness for a second and let the waves and birdsongs reach our heart. I think it

why we feel scared—not because of Bin Laden but because we know deep down in our guts that what we are doing to this place, and to our own true selves, is building up a debt we can't ever pay. When I feel best, the most alive, is when I am directly involved in a campaign to save life somewhere. Even knowing that I will never completely succeed. That I can do this for a living is a huge blessing.

"Every man dies but not every man truly lives," William Wallace (Well, actually Mel Gibson) a.k.a. Braveheart.

We are going out with our own rented boat to challenge the Ewing in the next few days. But I won't say which day until we have pulled it off. So stay tuned, boys and girls, things are going to get heavy quick, and there's a spirit a-moving over this land, as the old spiritual says.

Thanks for the kind wishes, prayers, blows toward Mexico, pictures of tacos with the Virgin of Guadalupe miraculously painted on, attaboys and Go Bens. I am such a glutton for praise, I enjoy every one.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 19

Merida, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: The Maurice Ewing continues blasting, leaving a trail of dead fish. The fishermen say that now there is nothing to catch. Nada. Legal Denunciation filed with Semarnat by Rosario Sosa for a bunch of things, including having no agency ready to do necropsies to determine reason for death. I get ready for action.

Over 30 years ago on a bus from Ann Arbor to Charlottesville, I was reading the introduction to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* by Lama Anagarika Govinda, a German who went to India on pilgrimage and became a holy man. He wrote something along the lines of, "If you believe in reincarnation and believe in evolution, then you can see that we hold within our genetic memory what it was like to be every creature that ever existed, right back to the stones."

Now, the part I am not sure about with reincarnation is whether we travel through different lives the same little soul package. It seems to me that is our operative illusion, that we are individuals, instead of just one of the pairs of eyes and hands used by the one great consciousness, that also looks through all those other eyes of vireos and lizards and scorpionfish and whale sharks. I see nothing in modern physics to argue that we are really individuals, any more than each separate arm of an anemone is an individual. Putting that quibble aside, I really liked the image and it rung true to me: that sometimes when we are especially carried by the movement of a creature, say a cardinal swooping through the underbrush or a dolphin turning its head sideways from the bow wave, it is more than just admiring the creature, we are, I believe, *remembering* our cardinalness and our ancient dolphinness.

Just back from the market where I got a haircut for \$2, plus a \$1 tip, bought some more fabric for a dive flag, bought some kid's scissors and a notebook to cut up all of the

newspaper articles and keep track of everything. And I bought a plastic bag with both peeled oranges and slices of jicama, with the ubiquitous mixture of powdered red pepper and salt dumped on top ("One scoop or two?" "Oh definitely dos, por favor.") plus the lime, the juice upon which Mexico runs, poured over the whole shebang. MMMM. Probably gave money to eight or more beggars on my route. A big fat 10 peso for each, to their delight. To those traveling gringos that frown on such a practice: I think they can shove it and should go back home and sit on their money like Scrooge McDuck. Now I have been places in India where it turned out to not be such a great idea due to the pure onslaught. But here I have never seen giving to one bringing in more. All kinds of twisted limbs, sad faces, wounds, blindness, little kids, people who can't get off the ground. Yeah sure, its just a racket. In the evening they get up and dance home to their fancy digs. Hardly. This is real rock bottom, and yes, except for the grace of God, it could be and might still be me one day. So I give to everyone who asks, if I have it. Makes me want to throw up on their white bwana suits to hear pompous wealthy travelers sniff at the miserable poor.

I saw an old man with deep creases in his face and hands, a deep dark brown, threadbare clothes, shoes with the back heel stomped down, and the most noble, handsome face. Tell me it is anything but happenstance that he has lived his life trying to eke a bare living out of the poor Yucatan soil, and now has spent upwards of 60 years doing his best, instead of living as a stockbroker in New York wearing fine suits and cologne. I remember clearly the moment when I lived in Spain when it dawned on me how lucky I was to have been born, well, middle class and white and American, at the top of the heap. Now, after working against the big cheat of globalization for a few years, I have come to believe it was precisely that contentment with my position that is the problem. Until we see the ones who make our clothes and pump our gas or care for our children as our equals, even if they are in Sri Lanka, there will be no peace, and should not be. The next revolution must be a global one.

Before you get my 20th diary entry, a lot could happen. If anything like jail or deportation stops me from filing, I will when I can. We are going to try to go after the Ewing again, with a boat licensed to take out tourists all loaded up with crew, a bunch of journalists and me. The thing I don't want to happen is that we drive all over the place looking for the Ewing with the reporters thinking about how stupid they can make us look. So please visualize us taking off from shore and going right to the Ewing, bobbing there in the waves to the north. Some people say that the Mexican Navy is maintaining a 10-mile perimeter around the Ewing and chasing away any vessels that get close with helicopters. If that is so, we will stop when told. We are going on the premise that ours is just another Mexican boat hired out to Gringos out for a day of sun and sea, with all t's crossed and i's dotted—legal. Other fishing folk say they have been able to get right by the boat, so we will see.

Like last time, when it comes down to actually making the move, getting in the water and hope they keep their blaster off, I start getting very nostalgic about this life that I am still fortunate to be living. The littlest of things: child's faces, shadows of palmettos thrown large against buildings, the full moon rising, the taste of the first sip of coffee in the day, good red wine, being kissed by someone who loves me, being able to walk down the block, being able to hear someone singing their heart out, being able to hear my mother's voice, hugging my children, watching the shadow rise on the building as the sun sets, the almost overwhelming tumult of the market, watching an act of sweetness from one person to another—all of these ordinary little shimmerings of life that don't normally stand out that much until you think about never experiencing them again.

Now to all of you kind people worried about me, I ask you, please don't be. I have zero death wish. I have planned this meticulously and believe that all can be done with no risk to anyone, including me. But, as a tree climber, my frame is a little different from landbound muggles. It is a learned skill, absolutely not to be confused with any sort of heroism, that enables a tree climber or rock climber to hang by his or her fingernails and do the job. So it has been also with cutting loose whales and dolphins at night. You just get to the place and concentrate on the job at hand. No big deal. Business as usual.

I find these crowded streets absolutely chockablock full of unsung heroes who will probably never be recognized as anything special. Just for starters, poor Catholic moms with a bunch of kids—how in the world do they pull it off? People with disabled kids, or disabled parents and kids. Guys like Louis who come into town every day to sell hammocks because that's all there is and he (at almost exactly my age) explains that he is far too old for any company to want to hire him. To me heroes are people who are scared, have no idea how they will carry on for themselves and their family, and do it anyway, day after day, forever.

On the other hand, I came into this world with nothing and have been given everything: true love, healthy and brilliant children who I adore, relatively good health of my own, steady sustenance, parents who love me, a supportive brother and sister, persistent passions to carry me along, the gift (from my mom) of a love of nature strong enough to nourish me in loneliest of times, true friends, a hungry mind, and the resources to keep it curious. So, for this favored son at play in the fields of the Lord, it is the bare minimum I can do to try to give back—to serve. Not my will but thine, O Lord, be done in me. I have learned that it is true: it is the giver who is blessed.

Thanks for all who have hung in here with me. Its crunch time. Think good thoughts. Peace to all.

"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace," St Francis.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 20

Merida, Sisal, Chuburna, Progreso, Telchak Puerto, Celestun and Merida, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: I'm shut down, grounded, screwed, blued and tattooed. The scientific experiment turns into military occupation of 1,600 square miles of ocean. Fishermen report dolphins and turtles are dead on the tide. Two more turtles are found on the beach. We begin the deathwatch. The fishermen are royally pissed off.

I hit the road on Friday from Merida, checked out of hotel and loaded up wetsuit and picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe and cameras into the midget rent-a-car and headed out of town. Our rented legal tourist boat was on its way from Holbox. I wanted to ask along the coast coming toward them from the west what the latest rumors of the Maurice Ewing were among the fishermen.

My first stop was Sisal, a town only reached by sea or a road all to its own that cuts north through the mangroves from Huacma, near Merida. Driving right to the partially destroyed

wharf, I had the good fortune to immediately find Sisal's harbormaster and port captain. This is a man who not only knows a lot about the local fishing, currents, political machinations of Pemex (the Mexican national oil company and major polluter) but who has had 14 years in the job to think about how things fit together.

For example, showing me a really good map of the Gulf of Mexico hanging on his wall, complete with ocean depths, he gave me his theory that the meteorite that caused the Chicxulub Crater was actually centered dead on in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico, and had raised the Yucatan up out of the sea, thus explaining the depth of the water and the shape of the whole thing, a big hole with one side almost joined by the convergence of Florida, Cuba and the Yucatan. He also said that the currents come in from the east to the west both along the north coast of the Yucatan and around the bottom of Florida headed toward Texas. And that there is an area in the middle of it all where the tides feed in and do not escape. Mariners have always avoided the spot, he says, keeping to the coastline whenever possible. One yachtsman, boat wrecked by a storm, was caught in the hole for days. Every direction he went, the currents pulled him back.

Oh, and the captain said that the Ewing was last spotted about 15 miles off Progreso headed west. Some of the fishermen from his port found themselves close to the Ewing the night before, wondering what the heck it was. The Ewing responded by smacking them with a bright searchlight and telling them to get away quick, that they were not allowed to be there, that the whole area was closed.

Then I pulled into Chuburna to talk to the Commissario of police, who I was told was a big advocate of the anti-Ewing movement. He wasn't at the office. One of his officers went off peddling his bike to find him, while I sat on the little wall to shoot the breeze with the guys hanging out there. One drove one of the myriad little vans that take Chuburnians to their jobs in Merida and back to the little coast town every day. When I started up about the Ewing his eyes got big. "Are you against that ship?" he asked. "Sure I am," I said. He jumps up, runs across the sandy street to his van. He said he had a pamphlet to show me. I figured it was one of ours and was happy it had gone so far. No. Even better. It was one he had written up himself to both send into the paper and agitate the folks he transported in his van. He asked me to read it to tell him if he had all the facts right. It basically said, "At this time with all kinds of problems and uncertainties with the oceans and the fishing families, why allow this ship to come into our midst?" Great job. I saw he had my name listed as the escudo humano who had come to stop the ship. I pointed at it and told him it was me. He was so happy to meet me that I felt like Mohammed Ali.

I pulled into Puerto Telchac right after Captain Alberto Santanna, the other skipper whose name I never learned, and Juan Carrateca, had docked our spiffy rental boat, the Cecy. The hungry press had already been notified to meet us at the port at 8:00 in the morning. When I drove in, they were talking to the port captain of Telchac, obviously nervous. They called me into this office to talk through a little open rectangle in the thick bank teller type window. He asked my name. I told him and waited until the next question. Trying to look like all the world like another stupid gringo just wanting to go for a boat ride. I watched the guy on the other side of the window. He didn't ask me anything else, but just very carefully outlined my name again on top of the first time with a pen. Then he did this a third time. Not a good sign. I was beginning to wonder if I had taken a wrong turn and wound up in Moscow, or Washington, D.C..

"Go to your hotel," he finally told my hosts. "We will come give you our answer in an hour after we check with our boss, in Progreso." We went to the little cinderblock hotel with the torn curtains and the imprisoned parakeets and waited. An hour went by. Then two. The deformed waning moon rose like a bright blood orange. Three hours. Finally someone from the captain's office came and picked up Captain Santana and Juan. Another hour or so passed, and they returned with the bad news. The wait was for a representative of the Port Captain of Progreso to drive to Telchac Puerto to personally handle the situation. This was the word:

1. No way in the world would permission would be granted. A 40-mile by 40-mile exclusion zone had been imposed around the Ewing and was being enforced by the Mexican Navy. Nobody enters, not to fish or anything. So there.
2. They were ordered not to take any *estrangero* (foreigner/tourist) out on their boat until the Ewing leaves on February 20!
3. The Captain was not even inclined to let them leave the port of Telchac to go home to Holbox until at least Monday, a two-day wait for nothing.
4. Whenever this king-of-the-seas decides they can leave, they need to radio him from every fueling port on the way home to show him they are really on their way home.

Juan was furious. He said the government was the Mafia and treated them like children. Over the long wait, I had already gotten used to the news and decided to head to Celestun the next morning to look for bodies. My trump card was gone. Actually the only way they could stop me from shutting the Ewing down by getting in the water was to close the whole area. I could fight the ship and win, or so I thought. But I couldn't fight the whole Mexican Navy. There is still a chance we can shut it down by finding enough dead bodies, but it looks increasingly like it will have to be a very high number. Two more turtles were reported yesterday, one in De Colorados and one in Progreso.

I called Rosario in Merida and cancelled the early trip to the port by the press.

The whole drama made me think about to what extent the Ewing, and the National Science Foundation and the Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory of the Columbia University are willing to exert military and diplomatic muscle to push through seismic blasting over the will of the people who live nearby. Remember the salt-gathering scene from *Gandhi*? The men he had led hundreds of miles reached the sea and began illegally gathering salt, and the British police clubbed them down one by one. And they just kept coming and kept getting clubbed to the ground and then dragged off and nursed. Martin Sheen plays the reporter on the scene filing his report from a phone, aghast at what he was watching, saying that the British Empire just lost India. And indeed they had. His perception was the Brits did not have the stomach for the brutality they would have to exert to subdue the ocean of people Gandhi had mobilized to march. Peaceably, sure. But by the thousands.

Right now the people who live in the Sakhalin Island of the Siberian coast are taking to the streets to protest the devastating effect the search for oil has had on their island and the fish they depend on. The seismic blasting and rig construction and leaks also threaten the rare population of Western Gray Whales, numbering less than a hundred. All over the world, it is fishing folk and whales against big oil. Next week sometime, it looks like there may well be an angry planton (demonstration) by the fishing men from along the north Yucatan coast

who are, like me, being made to watch the daily bombardment as they are kept to shore. If the Ewing, and every other seismic ship is dogged by protests every time they apply and then every time they show up, with the permits from the government and the opposition of the locals, and they must apply to the Navy for protection, how long will they continue this kind of global siege? How long can they justify it?

After the bad news in Telchac, and saying goodbye to my Holbox friends, I drove to the other side of the coast to Celestun. Walking the beach, I found the place I wanted to stay, a really simple Mexican hotel called Maria del Carmen with a third floor room that looked through an Australian pine and a coconut palm down to the beach. Some places just have a good feeling from their kind owner, and this was one of those. Upon arriving, I told Carmen who I was and what I was up to and she immediately gave me this room, at no charge, and blessed my efforts. I walked upstairs, looked out the window, and fell fast asleep for four hours. Must have needed it.

This morning I rented a small boat with driver and scoured the coastline for bodies from Celestun down to Arena del Campeche, quickly becoming aware of the complexity of the search. Much of this section, and the next section down to Campeche, is mangrove thicket. Even cruising 10 feet away or flying above, I wouldn't be able to find a body.

But it was a fine morning. I stood in the bow and tried to let the wind blow away my sadness, my frustration, my anger at the brute strength of the state allowing a bad thing once again, my feeling of impotence at being reduced to petitioning one of two unhearing governments with the pathetic remains of their slaughtered wildlife, like holding up the head of John the Baptist. Tellingly, there is no one down here looking for bodies in the direction the current would take them. There is no one ready or able to perform necropsies if bodies are found. And the US/NMFS/Ken Hollingshead rule says that if you can't prove it was the ship beyond any shadow of doubt, the status quo rules and the ship keeps blasting. Don't like it? Sue. Who do you think you are, son? We're the guvment!

Ever see flamingoes flying? What an improbable sight! Nothing can have a neck that long and crooked in front of legs that long and crooked. And both white and brown pelicans, (the birds that remind my daughter of my mom because of her great love for them) come flapping toward us just a foot off the water, and then when they glide, it is as close as possible to the waves, like their chest feathers and wingtip fingers are just lightly trailing in the water. Skimmers with their heads hanging down, ospreys struggling with silver fish, hundreds of frigate birds spiraling, and every hundred yards or so along the beach, tall irritable great blue herons standing like put-upon schoolmasters irked with the general intransigence of the world. Couldn't agree more.

Been thinking about the power of words and what they mean, how they define how we see the world. I have three friends trying, on a little scale or big, to change our use of a word. My friend Mac probably 10 years ago told me that he tried not to use the word "animal" because it had the immediate implication of "the others" instead of "us," and that it accentuated that phony separation. I decided he was right and now avoid the word. Elliott Katz, the gutsy director of In Defense of Animals (which once backed my successful trip to Japan to cut loose whales and dolphins caught in the drive fishery slaughter and destined for amusement parks), is working on getting people to stop calling the creatures they delight in sharing their houses with "pets" and replacing it with "companion animals" (which calls to mind a bumper sticker I saw a couple of months ago near Seattle that said "ALL MEN ARE ANIMALS, SOME JUST MAKE BETTER PETS"—which combines both words needing change).

Then there is my Friday Harbor friend Jim Nollman with his campaign to get people to start calling sperm whales by their original and much nicer appellation: cachalot.

I need the help of your collective minds to invent a new powerful use of words—a new "meme." At the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) and other important international fora where decisions are made that protect or doom species, the measuring stick by which harm is measured is whether or not the use of the animal or plant in question is a "sustainable use of a natural resource." So, our side (the side of good, diversity and Nature) is relegated to arguing whether or not the use is sustainable or not, which to me is like arguing about how exactly to divide the body—not about saving the life. We are playing on a field whose goalposts and rules are made by the wise-users, and using their definitions. Therefore even when we win it is at the margins. Where does one argue that the wild creatures of the world, are not resources at all but self-aware tribes worthy of protection for their own sake, not because their demise may mean ours someday? Seems to me the only things in Nature not considered resources (here to be used by humans) are those considered sacred.

So we need a different way to measure harm to wild creatures and their habitats which is centered on them not us and embraces their sacredness. Let's see, how about you can use that mahogany, or those caiman or whale sharks if you honor their culture, ask permission of any incursion, accept their advice and control our own numbers and activities on a sustainable basis.

I am now trying to decide what I do now in trying to defeat the Ewing. I am not sure if this diary will be interesting enough to all of you without a major showdown looming on the horizon. I will write at least one more diary entry as a culmination if I decide to stop reporting on a daily basis. The fight goes on. And on and on. Love to all.

Oh yeah. Major norte predicted for the coming week, which could both shut down the Ewing at a very good time and shuffle some bodies to the beach. So blow, blow Mariah blow.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 21

Executive Summary: Two dead turtles are turned into Semarnat. Research The Ewing bangs away. I goof off in Merida, waiting for my son to fly in. Tomorrow we leave for Campeche to check the coast north to Celestun for bodies. The ghouls patrol.

One of my favorite quotes comes from Wendell Berry, the farmer who writes so clearly it seems he is using a scalpel instead of a pen. Wendell Berry is one of the best spokesmen around for old time American wisdom, of smallness and the importance of the soil and the people who work it. Coincidentally, his cousin, Father Thomas Berry, is probably the foremost ecotheologian in the country, and my kid's godfather (This occurred when my wife wanted our kids baptized. I refused, not wanting anyone mouthing such blather over them such as being born into original sin. We needed a priest who was both a Catholic and a pagan. Father Berry blessed my kids out of the stream behind my house, addressing not only Jesus but the Father Sun and Mother Earth. A wonderfully peaceful man.)

Anyway, the quote is found in a book of essays by Wendell Barry called WHAT ARE PEOPLE FOR, I think in a chapter called A Poem of Difficult Hope. It goes something like, *"the goal of protest that succeeds is more modest than changing the minds of everyone, it is to hold onto that within our hearts that dies from acquiescence."*

Maybe it's because, in the fight to protect the wildlife of the world, we almost always lose the battles we are fighting, even if eventually we do sway enough minds globally to make a difference. But if the reason you volunteer, or work to make dogs and cats lives easier, or the forgotten old folks at the home, is for you, because it makes you feel better, then it doesn't matter if anyone else does it or even if your contribution goes unnoticed.

I have come to believe that the fight for the last free wild creatures on earth is the same fight for the last indigenous cultures and the last pure water and the last place where people can politically choose their own destiny, and the last place that you can breathe air right out of the sky and drink water right out of the river without it making you sick. I fight this fight so I don't die a little in my heart every time I surrender a little. Yeah, that ship is going on down there, but what can I do?

Okay. So the Ewing is being able to blast the bezesus out of the Yucatan coast with impunity (ask Agatha Christie—the sea is a great place to hide little murders). And I am foiled in my attempt to shut them down by getting so close to their boat either with my body in the water or in a boat flying a dive flag. So, did they win? Did I lose?

Yes. For sure. And no.

They got:

-Their study finally on the road to completion after a years delay.

-Information about the Chicxulub Crater.

-Worldwide bad publicity.

-The enmity of the entire Yucatan coast of 30,000 fishing families who are not only kept from going fishing right now in the 40 mile by 40 mile exclusion zone around the Ewing but must put up with a diminished catch for at least a while, with nary a by-your-leave from the US scientific establishment.

-A debt owed to the Mexican government for having handled this regional crisis with a heavy hand.

We got:

-Worldwide favorable new attention to the problem of intense sound hurting whales and fish.

-A 38 percent reduction in the amount of seismic pulses used by the Ewing from their original application (LDEO website).

-A curtailing of night work (demanded by the Mexican government).

-A year delay from two separate earlier wins blocking the cruise.

-The restriction of Ewing on board sonar from all the time to just when specifically needed (change pushed and won by lone sane LDEO scientist).

-A little bit of new pressure on Columbia University (boss of Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory, owners of the Ewing), the National Science Foundation (funders of the Ewing) and the NMFS (US government regulators who protect sound generators instead of doing their job—which is to protect marine mammals, fish, and fishermen.)

-A further stitching together of a worldwide populist fabric that began for me working with labor to shut down the WTO in 1999, then a trip to Venezuela in 2003 for the first conference of campesinos, an indigenous people fighting globalization (hosted by President, and US bête noir Hugo Chavez), then the march against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas in Miami of 2003 and finally this collaboration with poor fishing families to stop the Ewing.

-A much better understanding of what to look for in the next application to blast somewhere, especially in regards to the conditions under which a permit is pulled and an applicant is made to stop what he is doing.

To me, the moral of this story is that pressure works. Just never as much or as fast as we want.

Today I indulged in a little crowd and flower therapy. Walked to the market just before noon, probably at its loudest, busiest, peak of human chaos. Bought a little plastic bag of sliced up pink grapefruit with—you guessed it—hot chili pepper mixed with salt. Weird. But good. A little bag of pepitas. A splendid round avocado. A bunch of sweet onions. A bag of salt. One Roma tomato. Then I found a lady selling some kind of really sweet smelling white flowers that look a little like honeysuckle but aren't a vine. Then a half dozen of the brightest red gladiolas I could find along the whole row of flower sellers. Then there was this one old lady with just a tiny table sitting down close to the ground. She had clumps of gardenias for sale—one of my all-time favorites. I rushed home to my room in the Gran Hotel to find a vase for them before they got any droopier. But I couldn't help going through the main square.

The clown has come back to the square to perform, this time bringing a friend. Shouldn't really call him a clown because he looks so different than the standard American white faced and bug eyed exuberant and pushy clown that has always scared the piss out of me (If I am ever finally captured by the CIA/LDEO/NMFS/ Sea World/Office of Navy Intelligence/Monsanto/Knights of Templar/Trilateral Commission cabal of bad guys and tortured, they will bring in a clown squeaking pieces of Styrofoam on either side of my head strapped to the chair. I will immediately spill the beans and tell them that it was all Susan's idea and that I was just a patsy of animal rights extremists.).

But the guy who performs in the park is pint-sized, with a stuck-on nose that makes his swoop forward and up like Nixon's but more so, the big galoot pants with the shoulder straps, goofy big-toed boots and a little face paint. This time he was accompanied by a similarly dressed yokel who played the part of a whiny student supplicant. Every time the main guy would start his shtick, the student clown would interrupt with something stupid and need to be upbraided, or smacked with a folded up piece of cardboard that made a

great WHACK. Then the student would get led to the edge of the roaring crowd by his ear with all the exasperation of a weary mom trying to control her rowdy kids for the umpteenth time. Even missing maybe half of the very fast colloquial Spanish, just the ridiculous body language had me shamelessly reduced to giggles right there in front of God and everyone.

Leaving the park, I see the tiny shoeshine man I have seen before. At night he sits in his own chair, head down, arms hugging himself against the chill, hands gripping withered biceps. During the warmth of the day, I find him still sitting in his own chair, long past worrying about business, fast asleep, head back, mouth agape, his skin stretched tight against his cheekbones and his knuckles, dark deeply creased shiny skin just like a gorilla's.

Those of you who have traveled to Mexico know that most of the trucks have names, often emblazoned in huge letters in silver across the top of the front windshield. My favorite so far is: "INOLVIDABLE AMOR." I believe this literally means "UNFORGETTABLE LOVE," but I prefer reading it as "UNAVOIDABLE LOVE."

My son Ben flies into Merida tonight (Lord willing), and we will take off in the morning in search of the great elephant (this time whale) graveyard (eddy) where all the things killed by the Ewing go to die. Of course, there probably is no such thing, most things would just die and sink. But maybe we can get the evidence we need. Sure am going to look.

I am going to keep going with the diary for a bit, although the definition of a "day" may become a bit looser and include a couple of days. I will end it either when I come home or when things get so placid and peaceful that I worry about boring you. Thanks for all the notes, good wishes, random kindnesses, blows toward Mexico to rock that damn boat, letters to Mr. Purdy and contributions to AWI.

Love and revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Day 22

Merida, Celestun, Campeche, Celestun, Yucatan.

Executive Summary: The Merida norte moves in, strong enough to cause the Ewing to pull in their killer gear? Don't know. My son and I go looking for bodies, talking to fishermen. I've exhausted what I can do here. I'm going home to get ready for the next one.

Ben Jr. and I awake at dawn in Celestun to meet up with Hector and his barca rapida for a long trip along the coast. Like all lucky morning mariners, we walk under Ulysses' rosy fingers spreading across the baby blue sky. True to his word, even after I advanced \$60 for the fuel, Hector is waiting for us on the beach, hands us a couple of life vests and we are off. Great little boats, fiberglass, long and narrow, the ones for tourists fitted up with a steel canopy frame and a tarp advertising Sol beer laced onto it to keep the sun from the pale arms and bald spots of delicate gringos. They get in gingerly holding their cameras high with promises of flamingoes, crocodiles and the ojo del agua, the eye of water where fresh water bubbles up into the mangrove swamp and colorful fish swim by, backlit by pure white sand. The fishermen use the same boats but without the canopies. They are already as brown and wrinkled as it is possible for human skin to get. Their complexion, I suspect, is the least of their concerns. Our morning mourning journey along the northwest corner of the Yucatan is

an odd one in which I both hope to succeed and hope not to. We are looking for the bodies of sea turtles, whales, dolphins or fish left by the nights receding tide. The Research Vessel Maurice Ewing, the death star of our story, runs its explosive transects to the northeast of Celestun, around the corner of the Yucatan which we were about to search. If the Ewing killed anyone and fishermen reports include dolphins and turtles, then they might go west on the current and eddy around to this coast. Or go straight out into the gulf. Or just sink. Or maybe, miraculously, there were no large creatures anywhere around and the only ones that got pulverized were the ones that couldn't swim away on the bottom.

By now, most of you have probably heard about the recent mixed species stranding of whales on the coast of North Carolina that just happened to "coincide in time and space" with the testing of some unnamed Navy sonar. But it couldn't have been them, they say, because the whales stranded over 200 miles away from the test. Funny, that is the same thing that the Ewing said about five years ago when there was a mass stranding of beaked whales onto the Galapagos Islands right after their seismic sound bombing. The area off North Carolina, is the same place the Navy wants to put one of their two sacrifice areas for the testing of their word-shakingly important active sonar devices. This is a critically important place for the life of the Atlantic, where the Gulf Stream turns and mixes with the coastal shelf water, causing a lot of life to bloom. Big place for dolphins and migrating whales, even Northern Right Whales. And this is where they want to play with their sonar. The other area is in the Channel Islands of California, not exactly bereft of life either. AWI is just now gearing up for this fight. The first move will be to challenge the Environmental Impact Statement the Navy will try to get us to swallow.

We fly across the water in the barca rapida, sitting in those cheap white plastic yard chairs that have spread around the world, but these have their legs cut off and are tied, too loosely to the boat, so we bounce around a bit. We pass as close as we can to the beach without going aground and still stall out the outboard a few times. Clouds of pelicans, cormorants and terns explode upwards around us. Terns can just leap from the water directly into the air, but the cormorants and pelicans struggle, flapping hard and running as fast as their feet can move across the top of the water before they can launch and get a full wingfull of air on the downbeat. I ask their pardon for our intrusion. Just out of Celestun, around the corner from the Ewing, the birds are clearly fishing successfully. Pelicans soar with noble and aloof strokes until they spot a fish, whereupon they open their enormous long mouth with the weird baggy bottom, point it around the silver shape beneath the waves and just follow it down, collapsing all of an instant, neck awry, jabbing at an awkward angle, and slamming into surface like a ton of bricks. The terns spear the sea from such a height and speed that I wonder how such a little body with so little muscle can take it. Every time, when I catch the splash out of the corner of my eye without noticing the preamble plunge, I think in is a little whale blow, or the spurt of water, the "rooster tail" that comes up from the dorsal of a Dall's porpoise on the move. The birds aren't the only ones fishing. We pass clumps of men stringing nets out from the beach and then pulling them in hand over hand. Others are just coming into the shore when we leave, having been fishing all night. You can see their lights like a shiny necklace at night, every few degrees along the horizon from Celestun. Even though these men kill for a living, and it's my job to protect the lives of sea creatures, I feel like I can relate to these men. Maybe it's because my grandfather was a boat builder and my other grandfather was a guide to duck hunters and fishermen in Back Bay, Virginia. Maybe it is because I would choose a life of relative freedom of catching fish over the imprisonment of an office, or the servitude of the tourist industry. We stop and talk to them. Everyone has heard about the Ewing and my attempts to get out to the boat. Hector brags that I am the

escudo humano. They shake my hand in thanks with gnarly paws toughened by passing hundreds of miles of net across their palms.

At meetings of the International Whaling Commission and the Convention for International Trade of Endangered Species there is a great lie being pushed by those who want to keep uncontrolled their use of wildlife or the trees they live in (such as Disney, the pet trade, the lumber industry, Anheuser Busch, zoos, Japanese hanko stamp (ivory) makers, the trade in exotic medicines). The lie says that any attempt by the likes of folks like me to improve the lot of wildlife internationally is a form of cultural imperialism. My experience over the last six weeks with Mayan fishing families reminds me of the intense and personal love of diversity and nature that I have found before with indigenous folks. It is not a hands-off love. They see no contradiction between both loving and using. Loving the fish and killing it to eat. But at their core, it appears to me, lies an overriding biophilia, love of life. I believe that this point of view is our home- all people, where we belong and where we feel most at ease. In a position of daily adoration of the world. It seems to me, at the risk of offending my purist abolitionist friends, that we are missing a great opportunity globally to embrace subsistence farmers and fishermen as allies throughout the world in opposing the corporate industrial monster that is eating the world. If your desire is to decrease the suffering of creatures at the hands of mankind, the most screaming urgencies are those posed by massive, industrial operations: Smithfield farms replacing family pig farms that use straw for bedding with 500,000 pigs in huge buildings with concrete floors that get hosed into toxic lagoons; dragger fleets that pull massive rollers across the Alaskan ocean floor, destroying whatever lives there, Japanese logging operations that peel the trees like living skin from South Pacific islands; the grab for oil or the power from dams, no matter whose homes or fields or fish get in the way. The wise users at these meetings cry that, say, by stopping the killing of elephants for ivory we are taking food from the mouths of the poor. But increasingly, it is the poor, like the villagers in the Philippines taking tourists out to see whale sharks, that are profiting from the protection, the "non-lethal use" of the glamorous megafauna that they are lucky enough to live near. But my thought is that, at base, all people originally share an instinctive love for life, nature, this magical home we have been given. The idea of protecting it comes from their oldest remaining elders- not from outside. Au contraire, it is the Americanized Mexicans, who seem to have the least time or patience with giving respect either to the other beings they share the world with either two legged or four or finned.

The Distant Neighbors book I was reading about Mexico says that nowadays Mexico is uncomfortable because it has a new (Americanized) head grafted on a very old body of ancient tradition and beliefs. And that the key to whether Mexico will thrive as a vital and unique place will depend on how much it will be able to honor the old body, and the old sacred ways which are still the glue of the society. Tom Hayden (yes, that Tom Hayden) has a great book called the Lost Gospel of the Earth in which he shows how all of the world's major religions had their beginning as religions of the Earth. What we see now is the corruption of many of these into the protection of wealth and power. But there are lots of glimmerings of hope and the renaissance of the original religion, Animism, the belief that everything is alive. A few years ago a Christian Evangelist group called the Noah Project was formed to help protect the Endangered Species Act. Their premise was that the parable of Noah says that every creature was made by God and therefore every single one must be protected: that it is a sin for human beings to allow the disappearance of something we had no hand in making. Despite searching for hours, scrutinizing every rock and rolled up seaweed for signs of turtleness, Ben and Hector and I found nothing. Two days later, during a rainy noreaster now blasting the coast, I gave one last walk along the beach looking for one of my dead friends, Nope. I am frankly just as glad. I'm going home. I have covered this

coast like a blanket for six weeks. The fishermen can look for bodies much better than I, and they would love to nail the Ewing as much as I would. The Port Captains have all been talked to, all the way south to Campeche. And there are lots more screaming crises pushing in at the door.

Two notes from frequent readers and friends—Bryn Barnard, amazing graphic artist, green propagandist and buddy from Friday Harbor sent this back about snapping shrimp: "They create bubbles that implode, a process called cavitation, the sudden collapse of gas bubbles in a liquid causes temperatures and pressure to soar inside the shrinking orbs. Under such extremes, the gas inside the bubbles momentarily incandesces and reaches temperatures as high as 20,000 degrees centigrade. They use snaps to fight rivals (take *that*), find mates(?) and even stun prey." And Jim Cummings of the excellent Acoustic Ecology Institute (check out www.acousticecology.org) sent in this about acoustic daylight: "Its not just that the turtle 'blocks' the static, but that all of the ambient noise bounces off everything (like light bounces off trees and hills and Frisbees) and offers and acoustic picture by way of the echoes. It is also known as 'ambient noise imaging.'"

Cool.

I have been so overwhelmed by how far this diary has gone and how many people it has apparently touched. Thanks to all the teachers and their students that have found something in them to value. Thanks for Tom Munsey for sending it to the papers in Friday Harbor, Thanks for Susan of the Animal Welfare Institute for receiving the first blush, editing it only for major spelling errors and major gaffs, Peggy Sue and Janet for bucking me up when I needed it, Edie for giving me the voice of a friend over so many miles, Ann for keeping a safe place for the kids, my kids for their forbearance at my perpetual absence, thanks to my Mexican colleagues Rosario Sosa Parra in Merida, Araceli Rodriguez in Cancun and Homero and Betty Aridjes in Mexico City. Thanks for those able to send, or pledge, the bucks that rented the cars and boats and printed up the leaflets. Goodbye coway birds that come screeching into the little park by my hotel every evening. Goodbye to the drummer kids and the clowns. Goodbye to the old ladies selling oranges will chili powder. Goodbye to the old shriveled man sitting in his own shoeshine chair. Goodbye Yucatan clouds that look like those in the opening credits of the Simpsons. Goodbye open faced, old soul fishermen. Goodbye, I hope, perpetual stomach ache. Goodbye Yucatan. Goodbye moon. Hello to the soft and rainy San Juan Islands, where family and dog and friends and building project awaits. Based on the reception of this series of diary entrees, I intend to do it again the next campaign. Those interested can keep in touch with me through the Animal Welfare Institute.

Hasta la Victoria Siempre. Or, more likely, until the next fight.

This campaign has been dedicated to my friend Yolanda Alaniz, longtime champion of the ocean creatures of Mexico. Long may she shine.

Love and Revolution,

Ben

Yucatan Diary Postscript

Okay folks, just one more. I felt like I left a few loose ends with the 22nd diary entry. I promise after this I will not inveigle myself into your email box until the next adventure. Twenty three is a better number to end on, anyway.

First:

A pilgrim journeyed far to meet a Zen master. When he arrived, he saw a strange scene. The old master was standing in a shallow river trying to rescue a scorpion that had fallen into the water. The master would pick up the scorpion, who would sting him. The master would jerk his hand back and the scorpion would fall back into the water. Whereupon the master would pick him up again and be stung again. When the scorpion was finally safely to shore, the pilgrim asked the master why he kept picking up the scorpion when it kept stinging him. The master said, "Because it is in my nature to try to rescue, and it is in the scorpion's nature to sting when frightened."

The Battle of the Ewing in the Yucatan: In a Nutshell.

The story of trying to prevent the RV Maurice Ewing from blasting the Yucatan coast actually began in late 2003, when I received an email about the "Incidental Harassment Authorization" applied for by the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (LDEO) for the Ewing cruise. Even though the email said that "small numbers" of marine mammals were involved, I requested a copy of the 100-page document and was floored by the sheer numbers of creatures involved—thousands of whales and dolphins that the LDEO was requesting to "take" through harassment.

When I found out that the Mexican government had approved the seismic study based on just a few pages of information, and lacking the list of creatures LDEO had asked permission to "take", I quickly forwarded the US application to the Mexican embassy in Washington. They were not amused. When the Ewing showed up in Progreso to begin their cruise last year they were boarded by the Federales and told to take a hike. The reasons given by the Mexican environmental agency Semarnat sounded familiar: the study could not be justified due to the harm it would cause the sea life, the ship had been involved in causing whale deaths already in Mexican waters, and that the entire Mexican coastal waters had been declared a sanctuary for great whales.

Then in June 2004, the project reared its ugly head again in two day back-to-back hearings in Merida on both the Ewing permit and one for Pemex (the Mexican national oil company) for seismic testing at another site. Working with my Mexican colleague Araceli Rodriguez and some of the heads of the fishermen's unions, I sent down a bunch of studies done over the last 30 years that show that seismic airguns damage fish and fisheries. The government hearing administrator asked to see these documents in the night between the two hearings. After reading them he declared the next day that both permits had been rejected.

I found out in December that the project had been propped up again and had been approved by the Mexican government after partnering with scientists from UNAM, the Mexican National University. We scrambled to head it off through government agencies or by suing the NMFS, but to no avail (On the last point—the permit that NMFS granted LDEO for the cruise is an IHA, an incidental harassment authorization which is a quickie short form only usable when there is absolutely no possibility of the research project causing severe injury or death. That is just impossible to claim in cases such as this when emitting pulses of

255 decibels.). I got ready to fly to Merida to engage in a peaceful direct action to stop the ship—the last resort.

The idea was simple. To get into the water near the ship to force them to turn off the seismic airguns unless they wanted to be responsible for my death. I had organized volunteers to join me in just such an effort in February of 1998 to oppose a Navy test of Low Frequency Active Sonar on whales in Hawaii. That time, we were not prevented from going to sea and were able to shut down about half of the broadcasts attempted over a month of tests. As it is not illegal to go swimming at sea and the Ewing claimed that the device is harmless, I couldn't see how I could be stopped.

Once in Merida, I worked with graphic artist Bryn Barnard to quickly put together a flyer in Spanish and English warning about the arrival of the Ewing. In the couple of weeks before the Ewing arrived I covered the coast with these, hitting every fishing village along the north Yucatan rim to huge support from the locals. The hubbub that ensued caused the issue to be in the newspapers and television for weeks and delayed the Ewing from starting even after it was reported waiting off Progreso. A big wind from the north also helped.

When the ship arrived, I contracted with Mexican fishermen Manuel Jimenez to take some press and me out in his boat to shadow the Ewing. We met with the Port Captain and explained what we had in mind and he saw no problem. All we would need to do is give him the names of everyone going. The very day before we were to go out, and the day the Ewing started up their big guns, he rescinded the permission, saying that we needed a boat licensed to take out *estrangeros*, foreigners, that a fishing boat wouldn't do.

So I spent about a week finding such a beast along with a willing skipper and crew. I found all in Holbox and contracted them to come down and connect with me and the press in Puerto Telchac on January 28. Once there, they were told to wait for permission from the Port Captain before leaving early the next morning. Hours later they were called before the representative of the Progreso Port Captain and told that they would never receive permission to take me out because a 40 by 40 mile exclusion zone had been imposed to protect the Ewing. Plus they were told that they would not be able to ply their trade and take out tourists on their boat at all until the Ewing leaves on February 20. At that point I realized that, unless I was willing to jeopardize both the boat and the freedom of those willing to take me out, that I was shut down in my plan to get into the water by the Ewing.

Over the next week, after getting reports of dead fish, turtles and dolphins floating on the tide to the west of the Ewing, I spent hours searching the beaches to the west and south and talking to fishermen and Port Captains all along. They are now primed to report any more bodies (four turtles have been found to date since the Ewing arrived) found on the beaches to both my Mexican animal protection colleagues and the government agencies responsible. Unfortunately, these agencies are Semarnat and Profepa, the two responsible for signing the permission for the Ewing to work.

With all of that in place, and unable to get out to the Ewing, I decided that I might as well be working from home than from Merida. I had done every single thing that I could think of to stop this test for over a year. It was time to fight like water again, slide sideways and tackle them in other ways.

It is an endless debate among activists as to what method is most effective to bring about change. To me, we need them all, whatever direction each person feels compelled to

pursue. Personally, after all polite appeals, governmental procedural methods and legal challenges are exhausted, the only way I know is to put myself as close as possible to the point of injury and try to get the story out.

In this campaign, at one point I had a clear strategic choice: do I tip my hand and say what I am planning to do in order to get more widespread coverage but also allow them time to figure out a way to stop me? Or do I just try to get out there without telling the press, knowing that the Ewing itself already knew what I was up to? I decided to announce that I planned to enter the water as a human shield. And sure enough, that is what was compelling to the reporters. I have found this before. The press is generally not interested in advocacy issues; they want the red meat of confrontation. If someone might die (me), all the better. For the first time that I am aware of, controversy over an imminent seismic cruise went worldwide on the mainstream media.

So far in trying to stop war, the wearing of fur, the capture and confinement of dolphins, the extension of corporate control over the world through globalization, the killing of harp seals and whales, the destruction of ancient trees, the abuse of creatures in zoos, circuses and aquariums, the sonic blasting of whales and the construction of nuclear power plants, I have lobbied, spoken at hearings ad nauseum, marched, sat-in, taken over the offices of Episcopal bishops and aquarium directors, hung banners above fifth avenue in New York, climbed flag poles dressed as Zorro, rappelled off the roof of the Spokane arena to protest Ringling Brothers Circus, dressed up as clowns with legendary animal rights prankster Bob Chorush and my kids to infiltrate the Shriner's circus, deployed 240 sea turtle costumes onto people and helped shut down the WTO in Seattle in 1999 and 360 dolphin costumes at WTO in 2003, locked myself onto the railing at Sea World to play a tape of Corky's family to her, appeared on Good Morning America debating Sea World, faced 6 years to life for saving seals in Canada, been beaten by cops at Ontario Marineland while peacefully leading a demonstration, cut loose captive dolphins and whales at night, been gassed to unconsciousness, been shot at and punched, been arrested over a dozen times protecting wildlife, slept in a tree for three days and nights and jumped in front of a sonar ship to stop its blasting of whales.

Obviously, I will shamelessly pursue any stupid gimmick if I think it might help reduce the amount of suffering we cause. But after all this, I confess that I do not know how to stop big bad things. I don't argue that direct action is the best way. It just is, at one point, the only way left. I believe in it personally as a way to refuse to acquiesce to hopelessness in watching our living magical world be pummeled into nothingness and to feel like there is not a single thing we can do about it.

I have not and will not give up on stopping the Ewing on this and future cruises, as well as all other seismic and active sonar ships. But it will be a long-term tall order, like fighting the waging of war and the subjugation of some human beings to others. In trying to regulate the intentional emission of very loud sounds into the ocean we are stepping on the best heeled and most influential industries in the world: the military industrial complex, the petroleum companies and the American scientific establishment that serves the first two. The only force stronger is the combined power of the global civil society: us.

Now AWI is going to follow the money and take the fight directly to Columbia University, the National Science Foundation and the NMFS. We are also going to the United Nations with our international anti-ocean noise colleagues to petition for worldwide restrictions on the deliberate injection of intense sound into the oceans.

If anyone has any idea of an approach that I have missed, I am all ears. Better yet, you do it and I will help you.

Thanks so much to all of you who stayed with me during this campaign. It is just one chapter in a very long book. This diary was originally intended for about a dozen friends also working on this issue and it snowballed into reaching hundreds. Your kindness and support has meant everything to me.

With the blessings of the gods that I am allowed a little while longer in this garden, and the help of those who feel as I do, I will keep on doing this stuff, just because it is my nature to do so.

Love and Revolution,

Ben