

TAP CONVOY: SUPPORT THE FLORENTINE



As far as I know, it started out as an off-the-cuff idea at the last TAP (Tasmanians Against the Pulpmill) meeting. The Upper Florentine had got a mention and Bob McMahon said 'Why don't we go down there and show our support? So we stumped up \$30 each and hired a coach. We took presents, letters, best-wishes and were able to donate over \$500 to the cause.

I've several times heard Bob saying that this pulpmill thing requires guerrilla warfare tactics, and that's a fair call when you think about it. He's not talking about weapons, or violence, mind you, he's talking about being flexible, about how this is a struggle of the community against its political and business leaders. And as people are now realising, this pulpmill thing is just one theatre of war, that we are fighting the same fight as those 'frontline' campaigners in the Florentine. Some are fighting in the courts, like Bob Brown did over Wielangta, like Lawyers For Forests are doing over Turnbull's conditional mill approval. Others write letters, go to meetings and attend rallies. For some, a bumper sticker is their way of helping. There are those who have attended training days in forms of peaceful community protest (PCP) and those who volunteer their precious time and staff shop-fronts such as the Wildos on Charles, Launceston. There are the campaigners for the right to breathe fresh air, and those who fight for our streams, for the right to pure water. When you think of it, there is constant struggle by the members of the public, the people in the community, to protect the natural values of this state. This is the tragedy: Year 5 of the pulpmill campaign sees the police acting as stooges for Gunns and Forestry, Howard's broken promise remembered - the only constant is the lies and the inconstancy.



A little after 7:00am we're on the bus for a long drive to meet and express support for the frontline troops. It's a sad thing to see the state of the land as you drive down the Bass Highway. Gorse the most successful grower, the dry conditions not killing it. The fire, escaped from the feedlot, burning through miles of grassland and fringe bush, the Simmons Plains petrol-heads accelerating their vehicles in conjunction with global warming. There were strategic 'convenience' stops on the way,

which was good for the ciggy lovers. Ross was nice, New Norfolk had a fountain and we were getting so much closer all the time.

Now and then we got a glimpse of jagged mountain peaks that made the Great Western Tiers, Barrow and Arthur look just that bit tamer. We seemed to be getting a bit higher, but how could you tell in this big, comfortable coach. There started to be bush along the sides of the road, and ahead down the way we could see a log truck, stacked to the hilt, coming our way. We passed each other without incident, in good driving hands. And finally, there was a line of cars ahead, parked on the tiny strip of space between the road proper and the bush. On the road itself, were people walking the same way as us, and looking right ahead, you could see others walking in from the other direction. The coach slowed and we came to where the people were gathered thickest and there were tents, and marquees, banners and information/directional signs. They were all waving at us, and we in the coach were waving back.



It was funny, I thought they'd bulldozed the campsite. I'd seen photos/video on the Forestry website showing the 'squalor' of Camp Flozza, just before they'd bulldozed it, showing things in disarray, the people that looked after it forced out, then the photos of the camp after it was bulldozed and the Forestry text calling it the "Camp Florentine Cleanup" as if the mess they were cleaning up was that left by the Flozzas. What a nerve! Trashing their campsite, photographing the resulting mess and then Forestry using the photos to blame the campers!



How Forestry trashed the first camp

[<http://www.forestrytas.com.au/topics/2009/01/upper-florentine-valley>]

The coach drove on through and found somewhere to turn and came back and parked as you do, at the end of the line. We got out, getting from the luggage hold those of the packs and bags that weren't taken onto the coach. Among this were gifts for the Flozzas, food, drinks etc. What do you call these people? I've called them frontline troops. Activists? Forest defenders? Heroes? We walked along the road.



A lady greeted us. She was a member of the local community. She was thanking us for coming and handing out pamphlets. We walked on to where a large group were gathered at the intersection of

this road and one at right angles, that they have begun into the far reaches of this forest. Where no road has existed in the history of mankind, between the giants bestriding an understorey of wonder, they are forcing this road through to the heart of the bush. The speeches began and Martin, one of my companions on the bus, later told me that they were all good, but that Ulla Majewski's was particularly inspiring.



Geoff, standing against the silvan backdrop. I left him, so I could check out the new camp just down the main road a bit. So I missed most of the speeches. I was taking a special banner which was to hang there for the occasion. Last year, you might remember that Keri and young daughter Clover, walked from Canberra through new South Wales, along the coast down through Eastern Victoria to Melbourne, then over on the ferry, and from Devonport through Launceston and up the Tamar to Rowella, opposite the site for that pulpmill.



This banner is on a bluey satin material, with the words: "Save Tassie Forests."

It had been carried along the journey from Canberra, by Winneatta, who was bringing it from the aboriginal tent embassy. It later was taken down to Camp Flozza. Keri called the epic march the 'Walk against woodchips' [<http://woodchipwalk.com/>] I spoke to the people at the Florentine camp, telling why we had come down. They helped me put up the banner and I chatted with the various people present. I told them that we were here to let them know we supported them. That for whatever range of reasons we couldn't do what they were doing, that we were grateful for the sacrifices they were making, that we too were carrying on the fight in other ways, up there in the north and so on ...



On this Valentine's Day, Be My Florentine!



The Field Kitchen

I tried to respect their reticence to be photographed, the knowledge that at every action, meeting, rally, there are the spies, observing, taking photos to pass on to the cops, to Gunns for their next lawsuit... that sort of thing. I discussed this with W----- at the camp and she advised me to ask before I took photos of anyone. I did this, and there are many photos that could have been taken, and weren't, those that were and are not shown here, and of those that you see, I hope their use doesn't cause any problems.



In the pic (above left) is Chops, the camp dog. I even worried about whether I should ask Chops if a pic would be okay. Yumi, (above right) from Japan, told me she was doing seasonal work, fruit picking. She showed me a banner that she and her friends had brought. She translated it for me. It said: "Keep Carbon in the Forest and the Forests for the Future."



After the speeches, people went along to the camp and also up this new road of Forestry's. What can one say? The bush was amazing. Sassafras, myrtle, and regnans, the monarch of the glen. There were different obstacles placed on the road, in defiance of the juggernaut that would be returning after the weekend to continue with this wretched road. Token piles of wood across the road, posts in a line for some metres along it.



A car placed across a narrow part of the road. A man will be chained inside it. This is how it is happening, probably as you read and view these photos.



Defending the Upper Florentine against the mechanized onslaught that will come Monday morning. Above right, practical support from the visitors – to stop the trucks from using this new road.



The signs say "DANGER DON'T TOUCH STRUCTURES" and "CAUTION TREE SIT ON LINE"



These platforms high up off the ground – are connected to cables staked into the road. Remove those cables and down would come the tree sits.

We called out to the people up in them, chatting, giving them our best wishes. They waved, and thanked us, their voices coming down. They are up so high. They have put their lives on the lines that go down to the ground.



And look at those logs. this is what it's about. The timber. These'll go for chipping. It is claimed that "Steve Whitely admitted recently that 90% of the coupe would go to woodchip ..."



and so the road is being pushed further into the heartland – they are criminals who do this, who control the govt, the forestry, the machines, the companies ...



the bruised buttresses, the disrespect for these great organisms leaves this visitor unable to show her customary smile. It is just a forest industry gone mad, like a wounded dog.



You can write



or

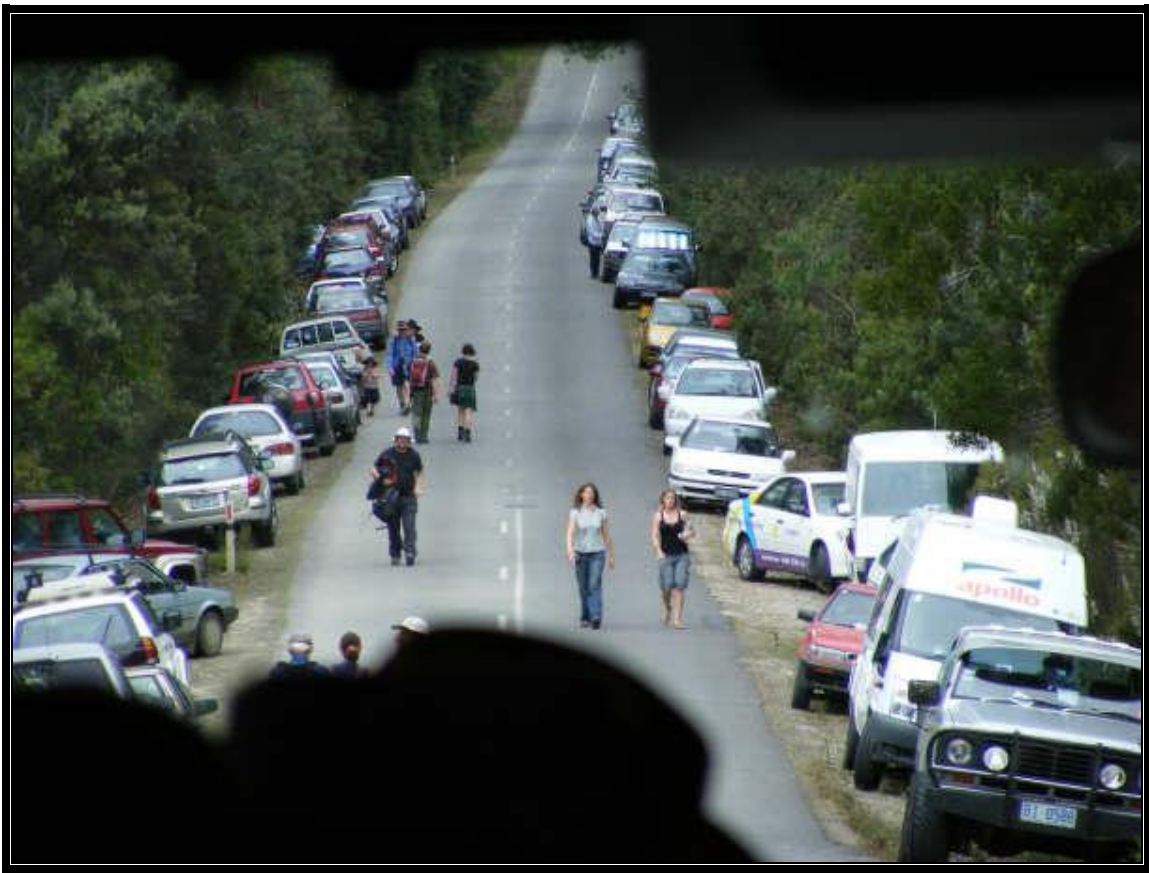
you can sketch.



It was time to go, to get back on the bus, to wave goodbye,



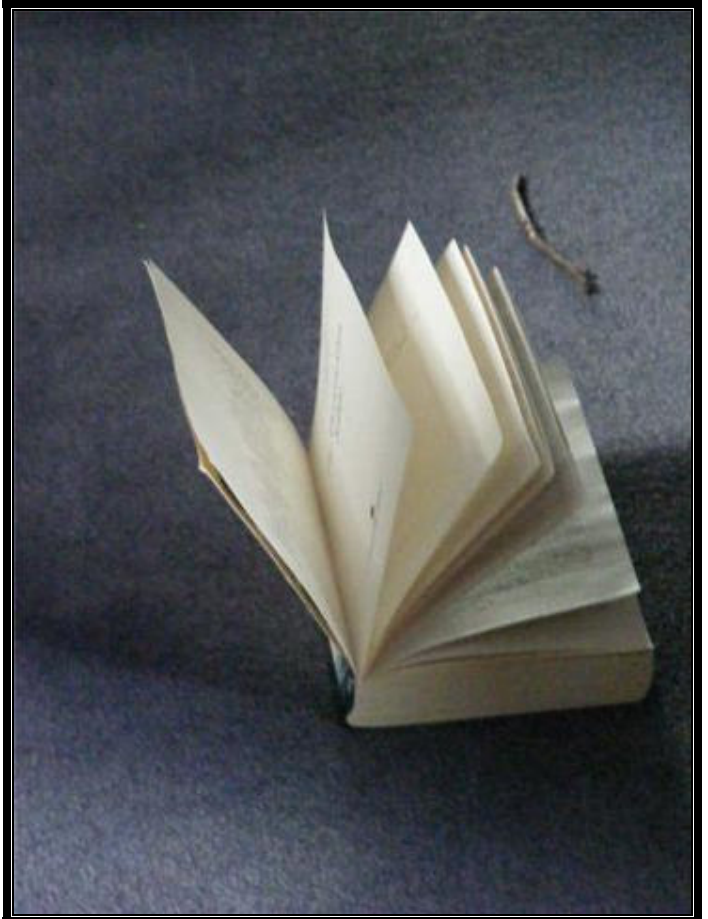
leaving some behind, staying on with the many other visitors down there.



We had a lot to think about on the long ride back to Launceston.



Socks took a nap,



**books fell asleep on the floor,
and finally, we were back.**



It was maybe 6 o'clock at night, we piled out of the coach, these two weren't going home, they were bound for Bishopsbourne, had to keep moving, so had a quick cuppa before the next leg of their long day.

**We won't forget the Upper Florentine,
we'll be back there, to support and help.**