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ZANE RITT | PHOTOGRAPHER

Ant, an Earth First! member, demonstrates the lockbox, in which protesters chain their arms into steel tubes encased in concrete to form human blockades.

Earth First! event celebrates group's 25th anniversary

*The organization protests environmental issues
 through the use of 'nonviolent direct action tactics'*

BY MATTHEW HAULK
 DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

The Earth First! Round River Rendezvous Roadshow rolled up to the EMU Friday to celebrate Earth Day and the 25th anniversary of the Earth First! movement.

Earth First! is a radical environmental-protection movement pioneered by Arizona desert activists in the 1980s. The movement is famous for direct-action protests and has recently been listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government.

Members of the sometimes-controversial environmental organization began the evening with a historical slide show of Earth First! activism that transitioned into an off-the-cuff discussion about environmentalism, activist tactics and the future of Earth First!. The night finished with live music and dancing.

The Roadshow was designed as, among other things, "a show and tell of nonviolent direct action tactics and the wild beings that motivate us to take these actions," according to an Earth First! press release.

Ant, a representative of the movement, told the Emerald that Earth First! members are willing to put their bodies between the forest and the bulldozers.

"What makes (Earth First! members) really unique is that they will do civil disobedience or direct action, where they put their bodies on the line and either sit in trees or blockade the road so that the timber companies and the forest service can't get to the timber," Ant said.

These tactics are intended to increase public awareness of environmental issues and stymie timber companies with unexpected delays and sabotage, Ant said. Some Earth

First! members go as far as engaging in property destruction tactics, referred to as "monkey wrenching."

"Monkey wrenching is basically just property destruction or putting cogs into machinery, whether it's ... just making it so a bulldozer can't move or tree spiking, where people put giant pins in the trees so they can't be cut down," Ant said. "Each different person has a different belief on how far their actions can go. I believe in non-violent direct action, and Earth First! as a movement is non-violent."

Several University students and graduate students attended the event, but the bulk of the audience was composed of Eugene community members.

"On the micro-scale it seems like you're never winning any battle," said Kris Maenz, a Eugene resident and longtime activist. "But in the grand scheme of things, it really makes a difference. ..."

"Every tactic is a great tactic. The only way for this to happen is with everything from letter writing and being a lawyer to monkey wrenching," she added. "You can put the Earth first and change your social consciousness."

Participants also discussed the problems facing Earth First!. Government interference and members who put their egos above the movement's goals are two problems that hinder the movement, Ant said.

"There are two (problems) that are about the same. One is the government putting the terrorist label on us," he said. "I definitely don't believe that we are terrorists. I believe that I am a citizen that is really trying to save what's left of the environment."