The Better Earth

A report on Ecology Action, a brash, activist, radical group fighting for a better environment

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS

BERKELEY, Calif.

THE house at 3029 Benvenue is out of an earlier, quieter time. High-pitched roof; brown shingles; large, airy rooms; bright flowers in the yard. It is the kind of house that sends real-estate developers scurrying for their adding machines, their heads whirling with estimates on how many cinder-block apartments they could cram onto the lot. Near the door, drawn in black script on white cardboard, is this sign: "If you came by car to Benvenue, in the future we would appreciate it very much if you would come by some alternate locomotion — walking, bicycle or public transportation. If coming by car is unavoidable, please remember, as a courtesy to neighbors who would like us to minimize noise and fumes, to park on College (near Woolsey is generally easy) and to walk around to the house. Enjoy the walk!"

This is the headquarters of Ecology Action, one of dozens of groups now fighting the battle for a better environment in the San Francisco Bay area. What makes Ecology Action different is its style—brash, activist, radical. If the Sierra Club is the N.A.A.C.P. of environmental groups, Ecology Action is a cross between SNCC—when it was still nonviolent—and the Yippies. Its activists generally share neither the bitterness nor the violence of some New Leftists; they'd sooner say, "Enjoy the walk," than scream, "Up against the wall." Ecology Action was started by Cliff Humphrey, a student of archeology, and some friends two years ago, long before even the sophisticated denizens of Berkeley (which has been called "one big social laboratory") knew what "ecology" meant—the study of man's relationship to his environment. "When Cliff first started talking ecology," says his wife, Mary, in a voice still reminiscent of her Boston Irish heritage, "they thought he was an idiot."

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But today, Ecology Actionists find themselves riding a tidal wave of interest in the environment, a wave that threatens to drown them even as it hurtles them toward prominence. Each day's mail—it is carted from the Post Office by bike—contains a flood of requests for information, literature or speakers. Humphrey likes to talk about Ecology Action as "a movement rather than an organization," and local groups—there are more than 100, and new ones form weekly — are virtually autonomous. But they invariably look to the founding fathers for guidance, and the pressures are enormous.

The house on Benvenue provides office space as well as living quarters for the Humphreys and about 10 full-time volunteers. Many of them are conscientious objectors who — with the approval of their draft boards after the state decided that the project served the national interest — are performing their two years of alternate service.

The center of activity in the house is the basement. After getting past the sign at the door, the visitor is confronted with a large poster of a noble, if somewhat apprehensive, Indian. The first Americans have become the culture heroes of the ecology movement. As Mary explained, "the Indians lived in harmony with this country and they had a reverence for the things they depended on." There were petitions to sign—against smog and a new bridge over the Bay, for the "valid claims" of the Indians on Alcatraz—and a cannister for contributions to the "Planet Earth Defense Fund." A hand-printed sign warned: "We are already five years into the biosphere self-destruct era."

CLIFF and I went upstairs to talk. He is 32 but looks older, with a rough complexion and longish, sandy hair. He was dressed in a beige knit shirt, adorned with dirt spots and a little hole, and brown slacks; on his belt he wore a leather holster that carried a notebook. After junior-college training in engineering and three years in the Army he worked, he hesitates to admit, checking freeway construction as an inspector for the State Division of Highways. He went back to the University of California here to study archeology, and in his first course wrote a paper on the Cheyenne Indians. "That was the switch, right there," he explained in his rapid, excitable way. "A lot of things fell into place. I realized the importance of ecology—and the relation of the Plains Indians to their environment." The era of confrontation politics was starting in the Bay area, and Humphrey, although never a leader, was "in the streets" for many of the antiwar, antiuniversity demonstrations. A combination of these political activities and his academic interests led to the formation of Ecology Action.

The basic point, Humphrey said, "is that the biosphere, the life-support system for the earth, is finite and fragile. Once you understand that, the ethics of the movement follow. Through the fifties and sixties, the basic premise of our society was that growth was good—bigger and better everything! But now that premise is changing, it's being replaced by an idea more simple and more universal: the ability of the planet to support life can't be diminished. You can have complete

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Car Burial

Students at San Jose State College, in a protest against carbon monoxide pollution, bury a 1970 Ford Maverick. They collected $2,500 to buy the car, then pushed and towed it 14 miles to the burial site (because driving it would have produced exhaust fumes). Below, Cliff Humphrey, left, founder of Ecology Action, a group that has become "a sort of moral touchstone" for the movement to improve the environment around San Francisco, works with two associates at converting a car engine to run on propane gas, which is "cleaner" than gasoline.

Convert

Jim Hunt, right, a conscientious objector, works as a volunteer at the Berkeley headquarters of Ecology Action. Behind him is a sign listing some of the measures advocated by the group for fighting pollution.

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The better earth

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freedom as long as you don't destroy the common life-support system.

"Everywhere I speak I say we have a vested interest in our own destruction," Humphrey went on. "When the stock market goes up it is a signal device warning us of the imminent destruction of some part of the environment. Capitalism is predicated on money and growth, and when you're only interested to maximize profits, you maximize pollution. We need a system that takes maximum care of the earth."

Despite such statements, Humphrey is hardly a doctrinaire Marxist or a knee-jerk America-hater. He is simply an ecologist, and ecologists tend to ignore political barriers; their enemy is man himself.

"You can't really blame the stock market," Humphrey continued. "Our culture evolved in almost total ignorance of ecological absolutes. The New Left rhetoric is so simplistic. There was no conspiracy to get us into this mess. People in the establishment never had a choice. Henry Ford never realized when he started the assembly line that in 1970 people in Los Angeles would be dying from emphysema caused by his cars. But injecting our new understanding into an old value system will cause a lot of tragedy. Take a guy who owns a hardware store. He's probably honest as the day is long—he'd run after you with your change. But his idea is to maximize his profit. How do you tell him that if the best interests of the people were considered, he should probably sell as little as possible?"

This is one of the great debates in the ecology movement: Growth vs. the Good Life, Quantity vs. Quality. Most Americans, it seems, still believe that technology can eradicate the problems it has caused. As Dr. Lee S. DuBridge, President Nixon's science adviser, told a conference in Los Angeles recently: "I strongly reject the idea that we have to destroy our technological civilization, deflate and decrease the standard of living, to improve the quality of life. There may be a few who would like to return to the days of the cave man, but most of us believe that men live healthier, more pleasant lives than they did 10,000 years ago, or even 100 years ago."

Cliff Humphrey thinks DuBridge is not only wrong, but irrelevant. What he and many ecologists believe is that society must undergo a "cultural transformation," a move away from the ideals of growth, consumption and progress. "At this moment, Western society is having a cumulative impact on the planet," he explained. "If we continue this way we'll run the life-support system down to zero. Survival can't be voted into existence, it has to be lived."

FOR the Humphreys, ecological soundness begins at home. The residents of Benvenue live on a budget of about $1,500 a month, including $500 for mortgage payments. The $4,000 down-payment on the house, like almost all their income, came from donations, which are seldom enough. "We spend zero for salaries," Humphrey said. "If we have to fix a bike, or someone needs a new pair of pants, we do it, but no salaries."

The household is now down to two gasoline-powered cars, one truck—which runs on propane gas—and eight bikes. They have to allow more time for travel than they would with a more conventional fleet, but there are advantages. "The pace has gotten so fast around here there is a great lack of privacy," Cliff said. "Now most of the time the family is together is when we're traveling around on some public transportation system." Mary has four children, but she quickly points out that three are by a previous marriage and don't live with them. "Cliff's not guilty, he has only one natural-born son," she says, as if one were about to question his ecological credentials.

The house buys food in bulk when it can—rice, sugar and flour are available—both to save money and to avoid the containers that hold prepackaged foods. Plastics, in particular, are shunned because they're virtually indestructible. Residents of the house take along their own shopping bags or knapsacks to carry their purchases; when they have to accept paper bags they usually return them to the store. Several Ecology Actionists startled a grocer the other day when they bought some potato chips for a picnic, emptied the contents into their own bags and returned the wrappers on the spot. Though the returnable glass bottle is about as rare these days as a beach without oil, the house finally found a dairy that will deliver milk in reusable containers (waxed paper cartons are almost as hardy as plastic). All cans are crushed and saved in two boxes—one for tin-plated steel, one for aluminum—and eventually sold for recycling. Paper is also divided into categories—newsprint, magazines and "mixed"—then resold. All glass that cannot be returned is broken for easy storage, then sold.

The organic garbage is buried in the backyard with lawn cuttings to form a compost heap that will eventually decay and enrich the soil. The yard is not big enough for a garden, however, and the group is looking for some land outside town on which to grow their own vegetables—without pesticides, of course. The group members also bake their own bread, which is cheaper and healthier than the store-bought kind, but they are not maniacal about health foods (witness the potato chips).

The use of drugs is a personal decision. Cliff says he has tried marijuana and decided "it does nothing for me," but others feel that such drugs as mescaline, widely known as a "good high," improved their sensitivity to nature and the "unity of all living things."

Considerable energy is spent conserving other kinds of resources. Most of the Ecology Actionists' clothes are candidates for the rag bag—Mary wears a uniform of a red shirt, denim skirt and hiking boots, all spotted with white paint—and everything is repaired until it is totally unusable. The toilet tank is filled with bricks; less water is allowed in, and thus wasted, with each flush. Residents are also urged not to bathe every day, and some cynics feel this precept helps account for ecology's popularity among the young.

Old pieces of machinery are saved. One resident recently made a new bike from used parts, but the amateur mechanics of Benvenue tried to fix a car with a second-hand clutch plate recently and realized only after four hours' work that they had the wrong size. Driving is considered a rather sinful act, and when someone does take a car out he usually runs a long list of errands to avoid wasteful trips. When the temperature drops, residents put on sweaters instead of turning up the heat.

The office is another bas-

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tion of economy. The mail boxes are old tin cans. Envelopes are opened carefully, then reused—with the legend: "Save trees, reuse envelopes." "It won't save a hell of a lot of trees," Cliff concedes, "but it is a conspicuous act of conscience." Much of the organization's literature is printed on paper donated by other groups; when I was there, a stack of old computer paper about three feet high was standing in the hall, awaiting reuse. Sometimes second-hand paper already has a message on one side, and that can cause problems. A batch of ecological tracts showed up at a local high school recently with a Black Panther harangue on the back, and a teacher was almost fired.

A growing number of people around Berkeley practice some of these tricks, but few are as devoted as the Ecology Actionists. Benvenue has become a sort of moral touchstone for the movement. "Everytime I go visit the Humphreys," said one girl in obvious discomfort, "they make me feel like a pig."

Despite the economy measures, money is always scarce, and the group is beginning to look for foundation support. "We're exploring what jobs we can do," Humphrey added. "We might go paint a house together, or learn to convert vehicles to propane, but we won't do it unless we have to. We'd rather stay small and a little on the hungry side."

In addition to the Humphreys, the residents include one other married couple. The rest are young men, most of whom would like to see the sexual imbalance corrected. "It's a little too much like the Boy Scouts," one complained.

Each volunteer is developing a specialty—recycling materials, fund-raising, speech-making—but the group seems to take its character from Humphrey. In line with his theory that survival has to be lived, Ecology Action has staged a series of demonstrations — a sort of guerrilla theater — to dramatize the crisis.

One of the Humphreys' early extravaganzas was the public destruction last June of their 1958 Rambler station wagon — which, they quickly note, had a new transmission. "I saw myself talking about ecology and urging people to drive less, and here I had this car," Cliff recalled with obvious relish. "It was so great! We had a minister from some church in Berkeley read something from Isaiah about not worshiping the works of our hands. Then I ceremoniously raised the hood, removed the air filter and smashed the carburetor with a sledge hammer." Mary added, rather sheepishly: "We thought other people would give up their cars, too, but no one did."

The car-smashing was followed in September by Smog-Free-Locomotion Day, a demonstration of fumeless alternatives to the automobile. Hundreds of people paraded through Berkeley on bikes, pogo sticks, stilts, roller skates, shopping carts, skate boards, baby carriages, golf carts and feet. A coffin on wheels, containing an internal combustion engine, led the line of march.

ONE of the big issues here has been the gradual filling-in of San Francisco Bay. A bill was introduced in the State Legislature to stop the practice, and ecologists of all stripes joined the fray. One Sunday, Ecology Actionists loaded 20 canvas money bags with mud—"unfilling the Bay" —and delivered them to companies with Bay-front real estate who want to continue the filling. The story won front-page headlines.

"Those executives had to face not just a bag of mud, but a bag of mud a million people knew about," Humphrey exulted. "If we're going to get the culture changed, each of us can't just have private knowledge of the problem. Everyone has to know that everyone else knows— that they're being watched— it has to be a public thing." The bill passed.

Humphrey also worries that people are not adequately prepared for the next earthquake, and he is trying to warn them. Ecology Actionists invaded a breakfast given by Mayor Joseph Alioto commemorating the last San Francisco earthquake and handed out little black crosses. The group also staged a march along the Hayward Fault, an earthquake line running through Berkeley, and marked the route with purple crepe paper. It ran, Humphrey recalled, through a hotel, a number of residence halls, the California School for the Blind and Deaf, the university football stadium and the Berkeley City Hall.

Ken Cantor
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In October, the group proclaimed Damn DDT Day in San Francisco. An Ecology Action volunteer, Kathy Radke, dressed as the Grim Reaper, carried a scythe in one hand and her three-month-old son in the other as she walked through the financial district at lunchtime. She was accompanied by Malvina Reynolds, a folk singer, and several people who handed out leaflets detailing the evils of the pesticides. "People pretended not to notice," Kathy remembered recently, "but I caught them looking out of the corners of their eyes."

Ecology Action's antics have spawned imitators. At San Jose State College, for instance, students recently contributed $2,500 to buy a new yellow Maverick, which they buried at the climax of a week-long "Survival Faire." Some students complained that the burial was "ecologically unsound" because the car was not "biodegradable" —it would not return to its natural components. Black and *chicano* (Mexican-American) students argued that the money could be better spent helping blacks and *chicanos*. In the end, a vote was taken and the car was buried after the students, at the *chicanos'* insistence, put a box of grapes in the back seat as a show of support for striking farm workers.

Future demonstrations could get more disruptive. One idea is a "traffic seminar," in which a large number of people would drive to San Francisco early one morning and occupy all the parking places. The ensuing traffic jam, it is felt, would dramatize the need for more rapid-transit facilities.

Now that ecology has become so popular—the Sierra Club gets at least six job applications a day, and the editor of a music magazine was heard to say recently: "Someday ecology might be as important as rock 'n' roll" —one crucial job is to provide information on what people can do in their own lives. Ecology in Action has developed the concept of a "life house," essentially an information center for a neighborhood. The operators of the "life house" would urge their neighbors to demand returnable containers at the supermarket and tell them how to save refuse and sell it for recycling, to find soaps that do not contain phosphates, to garden without pesticides, form car pools, obtain free trees and plant them, get birth-control information and generally reduce their consumption. Several are functioning in Berkeley and nearby communities. As part of their information program, a contingent of Ecology Actionists are staging a six-week march this spring through California's San Joaquin Valley, stopping in each city to hold a fair or a meeting for local residents.

Life on the ecology front these days is not always peaceful. The field is getting crowded, and some groups are on "power trips," as the local jargon puts it. Humphrey concedes that organizations "tend to horde money and good organizers," but each faction is gradually working out its own role. For example, the Sierra Club, which fought so many conservation battles alone for so long, is now concentrating on legal actions and has more than 50 suits in the courts, including half a dozen against Cabinet officers. "If the Sierra Club didn't exist we would have to be much more structured," Humphrey admits, "and we would have to get into some of the things they're doing. This way we have freedom to do what we want to do."

There are at least three major criticisms of Ecology Action's approach. One is that too many people are too enamored of the "throw-away society" to make many changes in their lives. Humphrey tacitly acknowledged this when he talked about high school students. "They're so much less rigid, they're open to new ideas," he said. "They don't have any vested interests yet. They're not employed and they're not into buying cars."

The second criticism is that a "cultural transformation" and small personal acts might make people feel good, but won't have any significant impact on the chemical companies, the auto manufacturers, the timber companies and other huge polluters of the environment. Humphrey and like-minded ecologists answer that these personal acts help build up a constituency for larger political acts. They point to the passage of the "Save the Bay" bill last spring and the defeat of the timber bill in Congress recently as two examples of the growing political support for legislation that preserves the environment. Moreover, Humphrey feels that if enough people use their power as consumers, they can affect corporate decisions. "There is no way they can make us consume," he insists. But he also admits that there is a gap between what Ecology Action can achieve now and what needs to be done; he foresees the group's becoming more political and hopes to recruit some graduate students doing basic research on environmental problems.

Gregory Voelm
"At first I thought recycling all that stuff was stupid, but when you do it you feel you're fitting into something."

The third criticism extends to all environmentalists. Isn't the new interest in ecology diverting energy and resources from the difficult and frustrating problems of the inner city? And hasn't President Nixon been able to "co-opt" the movement by his rhetorical, if not material, identification with it?

AS to the first question, Humphrey and most other ecologists insist that the "environment" must include Watts as well as the redwoods. "Anyone who doesn't still address himself to the old issues—housing, medicine, poverty—is not being honest," he said. "It would be a bad scene if money were siphoned off from a housing program to pay for a park somewhere so that middle-class people could have recreation." But many in the movement also share the urgency of Stephanie Mills, the editor of a new magazine on ecology called Earth Times: "It would be the ultimate cop-out to give all our money to the Black Panthers and then have them all die in 20 years because they couldn't drink the water." One thing that continues to bother people, however, is that any slowdown of the "growth economy" would inevitably be most disastrous to those on the bottom. Ecologists are in the uncomfortable position of telling poor people that affluence and material comfort are not good for them.

As for Nixon's "co-opting" of the movement, few activists take him seriously. "There is a fantastic gap between what men like Nixon and Henry Ford are saying and what they're doing," Humphrey said. "In any case, the President is talking about cleaning up some smoke and dirty water, but that's not what we're concerned with. We're concerned with a whole way of life."

ALL this does not fully explain the tremendous new interest in environmental issues. To some extent it's a fad, especially among politicians. "A lot of them are the same guys who wore Davy Crockett hats when they first came out," said Melissa Shorrock, a recent Russell Sage graduate who is editing the proceedings of an ecology conference. But to many people, it is a very serious matter. One reason for their seriousness is that environmental problems affect everyone. Some are moved toward involvement by a new piece of information or a personal experience. Kathy Radke, who, with her husband, Ted, operates a "life house" in their hometown, Martinez, described her own conversion: "I was pregnant at the time and I read about DDT and mothers' milk. I was planning to nurse the baby, and it really upset me. The dosage in mothers' milk is greater than in cows' milk!" Ken Cantor, a Ph.D. in biology who works at the Ecology Center, a combination book store and information clearing house in Berkeley, said: "The air pollution around here has been increasing radically from year to year. You're bombarded every day with the fact that you can't see across the Bay anymore. And once one thing like that gets people upset, they start looking at other things, and their concern broadens."

Peggy Datz, who fled a teaching job in Detroit and now also works at the Ecology Center, thinks the moon shot last summer helped

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stimulate interest. "I don't think a lot of people understood the concept of a finite life-support system before," she said. "You could see very clearly what the resources necessary for life were—they had them on their backs. You couldn't imagine a *deus ex machina* who would always be there." Others talk about seeing the earth photographed from the moon and getting a new sense of its terrible fragility.

Vietnam also helped in several ways. "We got a lot of people who were totally frustrated by the old Peace and Freedom, S.D.S. kind of activity," Humphrey explained. "It's sad in a way, but we wouldn't have gotten such a start if so many people hadn't worried about the war for so many years and found themselves totally unable to get it stopped. There was a potential there for a new thrust. There really is only a limited attention span on any one issue, and all of a sudden here was another way to get it on, to make your concern known."

For others, Vietnam had nurtured a whole new political viewpoint. Steve Cotton, a Harvard law student on leave to work on the Environmental Teach-In April 22, explained: "Many people saw Vietnam as a tragic mistake in American foreign policy, but the more radical kids are saying that it was a natural outgrowth of a system that doesn't care about people, just about profits, about its own expansion and nothing else. There has been a lot of thinking about the system, where it's going and what the alternatives are. Some of it is heavily ideological, but a lot is just a vague sense of unease, of disquiet, that the whole thing is rushing pell-mell in the wrong direction. Environment as the kids conceive it is an expression of that. They're not saying this is a sanitation job, that if we spend enough money we'll scrub it all clean. They don't buy Nixon's rhetoric that this is a mistake or an oversight. The state of the environment is just another symptom of society's corruption, it's what the system is all about."

Jim Hunt, who graduated from Bates College in Maine last June and is now performing his alternate service at Benvenue, agrees with Cotton. For Hunt, Vietnam was a "steppingstone to ecology," an experience that not only taught him "the incredible amount of energy wasted by the system," but the potential power of grass-roots sentiment. Once he came to California, however, Hunt found that ecology was not just another issue to make speeches and hold rallies about. "It had a profound effect on my life style," said the youth, a native of New Britain, Conn., who edited the newspaper at Bates. "I began to see ways I could purify my life. When I came here there was nothing in my middle-class background I was particularly against, but I began to see how a lot of things in my background could be very destructive—the love of gadgets, concern with speed and convenience. I had been troubled by some of these things, but I never really knew why, or that an alternative existed."

In other words, for some youths ecology is not only a political but a cultural concept, a new "way of life," as Humphrey puts it, a way of fitting all one's dissatisfactions and aspirations into a coherent structure. Like many similar movements, it also provides a community and a sense of purpose for young people who look at their future with an apprehension bordering on terror. The act of giving up an automobile, or even burying the garbage, imparts a certain sense of accomplishment, even righteousness. One young man who found a home at Benvenue is Gregory Voelm, who graduated last spring from Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and is also working out his conscientious-objector obligation. Soft-spoken yet fiercely articulate, he described what it was like to graduate from college in June, 1969:

"We were the first protest graduating class. . . . I was frightened of what lay before us. We had demonstrated and marched and screamed trying to change things, but it had never been real. Then all of a sudden we had to be part of that mess. . . .Everywhere I went, all I saw was plastic and McDonald's hamburger stands. I had a feeling of an overwhelmingly hostile environment. I looked for adult models of how you could be happy, and it didn't look like you could. It was very freaky. I had the feeling that after graduation you dropped off the end of the world. Some of my friends went to Canada or Mexico, and others went to communes out in the country. Few of us considered beginning a career—it was just too much to handle. There was a great feeling of meaninglessness, a search for something to grab hold of, some unifying thing, and I found it. Ecology is a good metaphor; it gives a unity to experience.

"At first I thought recycling all that stuff was stupid, but when you do it you feel you are fitting into something, you're taking a positive step toward relating to your environment, and it feels good. What goes under the name of ecology is the answer to alienation. We're alienated from nature and alienated from our ability to relate to each other, to love. But to break down that alienation between the individual and his environment is really a radical thing. When you destroy part of the environment, you have to realize you're destroying part of yourself."

In some cases, the concept of ecology takes over a person's whole life. For several years, Keith Lampe was an activist against the war, counseling draft resistance; then he helped Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman form the Yippies. After the Chicago convention—he carried a tennis racket all week on the theory that the police "would think anyone who played tennis had money and connections"—he moved West with his wife, Judy, and their small daughter, looking for new causes. Allen Ginsberg first interested Lampe in ecology, and several months later his friend Gary Snyder, another poet, dragged him to a conference held by the Sierra Club. "That really put me over the hump," recalled Lampe, who was wearing a bunch of plastic string beads around his neck and a little pigtail. "I realized that ecology would be my thing for a while."

Last spring, Lampe, who is in his late 30's, started an ecology newsletter called Earth Read-Out, which he distributes to interested people and underground newspapers. But recently even that has not been satisfying. "I'm leaving for Colorado soon to look for some land," he said, pacing up and down a kitchen that has a magnificent view of San Francisco Bay. "I have to get out of the typewriter thing and into reality. We take this population-food squeeze very seriously, and we're going to go out and grow more food than we can consume. My wife has a trust fund, and we're in a position where we can afford to buy some land, so that's what we think we ought to do." The conversation rambled, but every once in a while Lampe would look up and say: "It's amazing I could do that! Incredible! I'm going to be a farmer?"

"The great thing about ecology as a cause," writes Art Hoppe, the columnist for The San Francisco Chronicle, "is that everybody's guilty." And for people caught up in the cause, it means a lot of hard decisions. The Lampes, for example, decided to have a legal abortion recently. "Having only one child is to ecology what unilateral withdrawal used to be to Vietnam," he said with a laugh. "Having only two children is like favoring a negotiated settlement." (Indeed, it's reached the point in some circles where mothers are made to feel like criminals. "Jesse Unruh said that environment is the motherhood issue of 1970," remarked Ken Cantor during a discussion at the Ecology Center. "I guess he'll have to revise that; motherhood isn't very popular anymore." Peggy Datz replied, "Apple pie is still all right—as long as there are no cyclamates in it.")

Peggy Datz
"Ecology is really a new religion. I went camping in the Sierras last summer, and . . . it did fantastic things for my head. I had a really mystical feeling . . ."

Keith Lampe's decision to leave the city for rural life is not unusual. Thousands of young people across the West have fled urban centers in recent years and set up new communities in remote areas of Oregon, New Mexico, Colorado and California. Their decisions flow from a current that is running very deep in American youth. It is a search for simplicity, for privacy, for meaningful work, for basic pleasures, for harmony with nature, for roots, for wholeness. In a world of piecemeal communities, they want personal communion; in a world of machines, they want magic; in a world of frozen foods and TV sets, they want to bake their own bread and make their own music; in a world where there is never enough time, they want to take time; in a world of computers and assembly lines, they want a place and a job that is their own; instead of concrete, they want trees; instead of money, they want joy; instead of status, they want peace. In a world of fragments, they want to be put back together.

Their search has shown itself in the furor over People's Park here in Berkeley—perhaps the first time many youths were able to create something entirely by themselves. It has shown itself in the phenomenal popularity of "The Whole Earth Catalogue"—the best-selling book in both Berkeley and Cambridge—which contains innumerable suggestions on how to live off the land. And it has shown itself in the entire ecology movement, which in its highest sense is a search for the spiritual values buried by the advent of rationality and technology. "It is really a new religion," Peggy Datz said. "I went camping in the Sierras last summer and we were three days from the nearest road. It did fantastic things for my head. I had a really mystical feeling about being part of a total living community."

Yet as ecologists are groping for a new spirituality, their world is shadowed by their keen perception of impending doom. Everyone has his own scenario for how the world will end—hunger, suffocation, floods, ice. They are usually able to brush the knowledge from their minds, but sometimes it comes rushing back in a black, fearful wave. "I went to a party the other night, and I was watching people dance," said Ken Cantor. "All of a sudden I wondered what would be here in 80 years. I am beginning to cope with the idea of my own death, but this really hit me. Maybe no one will be dancing. Maybe no one will be here at all." ■

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